

1998

Monday, January 19th - Acts 6: 1, 2

The need in the Church was neither that numerical growth be curtailed, nor that food distribution be terminated, nor that the apostles exert themselves even more greatly to distribute the food themselves. The need was for a new echelon of leadership to be filled by men other than the apostles. The serving, or diaconal, ministry was a good, legitimate, and necessary one, but it was a lesser one than the ministry of the Word and prayer. The apostles rightly saw this and resisted any impulse to let their highest ministry suffer due to their attempts to fulfill a lesser work. It was not desirable—literally, best (avresto,n)—for them to neglect their ministering of heavenly manna in order to serve earthly fare. However, what was not best for them or for the Church, had they let their ministering of the Word suffer, would be best all around if those called, equipped, and commissioned thereto were set to the task. Therefore, the apostles resist the temptation to sacrifice the excellent for the good, the result being that both the good and excellent were ministered to the Church.

Tuesday, January 20th - Acts 6: 1-3

That the apostles set the guidelines for the new office of deacon tells us that the deacons were to serve under the supervision of the apostles. The guidelines set stress character more than practical ability. Deacons are to be Church members in good standing, full of wisdom, and of the Holy Spirit. They must be tried and true men of prudence and capability, submitting themselves to apostolic oversight. Thus we learn here and elsewhere (1 Tim. 3:8-13) that deacons are not mere drones responsible for maintaining the physical plant of the Church, but are spiritual men called to a spiritual office which encompasses the fulfilling of practical needs.

Wednesday, January 21st - Acts 6: 4

The excellent ministry which the apostles refuse to let suffer is that of prayer and of the ministry of the Word of God. Such was the ministry to which they were called and for which they were equipped by God. It is instructive for us to note that most, if not all, of the apostles were men gifted in areas of practical endeavor. Peter, James, and John, for example, were fishermen whose competence in that vocation only increased due to their knowing, trusting, and obeying Jesus (Lk. 5:1-11). Yet they had received a higher calling from the Lord, and to that calling they remained unswervingly faithful. Churches and their pastors do well to respect such priority in their own assemblies. Most teaching elders find their abilities expanding in many ways as they grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. Woefully, too many pastors and people unwittingly conspire to let the spiritual ministry of prayer and the Word suffer due to the pastor's diversion into a plethora of seemingly good and necessary deeds which he can do, but should not do.

Thursday, January 22nd - Acts 6: 5

The election of the seven deacons is left to the congregation. The saints are expected to be able to discern the presence of such godly servants in their midst. Accordingly, seven men are chosen, all having Greek names, and thus all having very likely an extra measure of affinity for the Hellenistic widows who had previously been neglected. This should not be seen as an overreaction to the complaint, but rather as the typically abundant supply of the Lord to the needs of His people.

Friday, January 23rd - Acts 6: 5

We know little, if anything, about most of these first seven deacons. There is some evidence that not all of them remained as faithful in their course as they were upon their entering it. Irenaeus, for example, wrote about 180 A.D. that Nicolas was the father of the Nicolaitans condemned in Rev. 2: 6-15. However, we are

certain about two of these deacons: Stephen and Philip, whose spiritual exploits are recorded in chapters 7, 8. Stephen heads the list as one manifesting an extraordinary measure of faith and being full of the Holy Spirit. We shall find that he who was most promising passes from the earthly scene soonest. Our Lord seems to use hardest His best instruments, but He does so most fruitfully. We shall see the blood of Stephen serving to plant seeds of faith in Saul of Tarsus, the death of the greatest deacon serving in the begetting of new life in the greatest apostle.

Saturday, January 24th - Acts 6: 6

The deacons are ordained to their office and commissioned for their work by the apostles. The laying on of the apostle's hands did not convey the Holy Spirit, as some maintain, for v. 3 tells us that these deacons already were full of wisdom and of the Spirit. The laying on of hands during ordination is not so much a matter of power being conveyed through the hands of the ordaining body (though apostles did convey potencies via such laying on of hands, cf., 2 Tim. 1:6). It is more a matter of delegation of authority and public owning of the gifts God has given His Church in the persons of those being ordained. By prayer, the Lord is thanked, and His guiding grace and sustaining power are invoked on behalf of those set apart for spiritual leadership which is bound to fail without such divine upholding.

Sunday, January 25th - Acts 6: 7

The result of the Church having successfully dealt with the challenge of numerical growth was that such growth continued. The deacons, having been elected, commissioned, and set about their mercy ministry, provided a service which did not impede but enhanced the ministry of the Word. This verse gives notice of increased quantity of believers, but also makes mention of the quality of some of the newest converts. The Jewish priests in great numbers were not only hearing the spreading gospel, but were by it being effectually called by God to exercise saving faith in Jesus. The priests, who had as a class been most forward in opposing Jesus and His apostles, were now flocking into the Church as grateful and obedient disciples. A faithful ministry of the Word and prayer can be used of God to convert opponents of the gospel into its servants, and enemies of the faithful into their beloved brethren.

Monday, January 26th - Acts 6: 8

Stephen was ordained to serve tables (vv. 2, 3), but he was not confined to that single task. He who was full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (v.5) was empowered by divine grace to perform extraordinary signs and wonders of greatest magnitude among the people. This is the first notice given in Acts of a miracle being performed by anyone other than an apostle. Stephen was an extraordinary trophy of redeeming grace in every way. He will also be privileged to lead the way as a disciple in suffering, becoming the first martyr of the Church. But we shall see that the murderous anger of the wicked can neither overcome nor silence this gracious servant of the Lord. Though he is dead, his faithful words, recorded in Scripture, ring out to the Church in all ages.

Tuesday, January 27th - Acts 6: 9, 10

Once again opposition to Christ, His gospel, and His servants arises from without the Church. As the gospel was subduing opposition in Jerusalem (v.7), opponents from the provinces renewed the assault against the Church. It is ironic that a synagogue of so-called freedmen—whether emancipated slaves of Romans, and thus proselytes, or of Jewish masters—should lead the charge against Christ, the only one who could truly set men free (Jn. 8:36). These men concentrate their attack on Stephen, whose gracious and miraculous service was setting men free from their sin and suffering. The attack begins with disputing, but does not end there. Yet Stephen, who had already distinguished himself in his administering the healing balm of the gospel, shows himself expert at wielding the sword of the Spirit when necessary. Satan seems never to lack men willing to attack the servants of Christ. However, let the wicked forge and use whatever weapons they choose, none shall prevail against those made more than conquerors in Christ. Read Is. 54:11-17 in this connection.

Wednesday, January 28th - Acts 6: 11, 12

The so-called freedmen show themselves to be yet in bondage to sin. They, having been bested by the superior wisdom and Spirit of God manifested through Stephen, do not submit to the divine grace and glory ministered through him, but blind themselves to the light and resort to a renewed attack with dirty tactics. They employ false witnesses to bring false charges against Stephen, thus showing by their violation of the ninth commandment, that they were but hypocritical worshippers of God and disciples of Moses. Their own guilt they seek to project onto Stephen, but guilt can never be removed in that way, nor will it adhere to one whose guilt had truly been removed by the Lamb of God.

Thursday, January 29th - Acts 6:12-14

The deacon, Stephen, is dragged before the Sanhedrin which had previously threatened and beaten the apostles. False witnesses are brought in to support false charges against him. The trial thus rapidly becomes a repeat of the trial of Jesus (Mt. 26:59-68). But where the Son of God endured His trial with silent submission, Stephen will speak at his trial with ministerial testimony which will cut his hearers to the quick. This difference was due to Christ's bearing imputed sin, Stephen bearing imputed righteousness. The former was thus led as a silent lamb to slaughter, by whose sacrifice the latter is enabled to make a magnificent defense.

Friday, January 30th - Acts 6: 13,14

The false charges were not fabricated lies, but perversions of the truth. The report that Jesus would destroy the temple was, no doubt, a perversion of what our Lord had said in Jn. 2:19-22, where He spoke of His enemies destroying the temple of His body, which He raised up from death as He promised to do. The alternations to the Law and the customs of Moses referred to Christ as fulfilling the Law and, as Himself being the substance of the ceremonial system, doing away with that system. The charges were true so far as they touched on changes to the system of the Old Covenant, but they were false in their implication that the New Covenant was antagonistic to the Old and inferior to it. How sinfully sad that men will with malicious force cling to shadows when the substance is at hand.

Saturday, January 31st - Acts 6: 15

Though Stephen had been arraigned before the Sanhedrin as a blasphemer, even when the jaundiced eyes of his judges peered at him through the perspective of these charges and of their own hatred of Jesus, whom he served, they could see nothing but a glorious majesty in him. The term translated *angel* (avggelo,n) can mean either a celestial being or a messenger. The face of Stephen shone with the purity of the former; his lips would perform the service of the latter as he spoke forth the glorious gospel.

Sunday, February 1st - Acts 7: 1-4

This seventh chapter contains Stephen's magnificent defense and his glorious martyrdom. His defense is drawn entirely from the Old Testament—the Law from which he was accused of committing apostasy. Stephen demonstrates from the Law how the very changes with which he was charged as a violator of the Law, were in fact the fulfillment of the Law. He, like his Lord, had not come to destroy the Law, but to declare and live in its perfect fulfillment in Christ.

Monday, February 2nd - Acts 7: 1-4

The high priest, most likely Caiaphas (Mt. 26:57ff; Acts 4:6), asked Stephen whether the things said about him were so. Clearly he was presumed guilty unless and until he could prove otherwise. The godly deacon begins his defense at what may seem a point far removed in time and distance from his indictment on that day. However, as Stephen was charged with contravening Moses, he rightly began with that which was

prior to Moses and the Law and which put both into proper perspective, namely, God's gracious calling of Abraham. The Law was but a portion of God's administration of the Covenant of grace. The gracious promise of salvation came prior to the law, and the provision of salvation in fulfillment of that promise came through Christ.

Tuesday, February 3rd - Acts 7: 2-4

Stephen was accused of altering mosaic customs. Thus, in his defense, the wise and gracious deacon begins with Abraham, the father of the Jews, to show how it was God who wrought changes to customs. Though Abraham lived in the comfort and material wealth of Mesopotamia, his life really began with the change imposed upon him by God's grace. The Lord told Abraham to depart from all that was familiar and natural to him to go to a place which he would know only when God showed it to him. Thus, the father of faith left all personal comforts and social conventions to go on pilgrimage in obedience to the gracious direction of God. Likewise, the call to trust in Christ as Lord and Savior cuts all ties with the natural man and with carnal relationships, but life really begins with that change.

Wednesday, February 4th - Acts 7: 5

The opponents of Stephen cleaved to the venerable traditions of Moses and to the substantial reality of the temple, thinking it absurd as well as blasphemous that they should be told to transfer their trust from those things and put it in a crucified Man. Accordingly, Stephen demonstrates from redemptive history how the gifts of God can often look meager and inferior at first sight. Abraham left home and family to be led by God to the promised land. Upon the patriarch's arrival in that land, he was given no actual possession of it, but was obliged to live as a sojourner in Canaan. Amidst this divine provision, so disappointing to the flesh, God added to His promise that Abraham should have descendants—a promise which, due to Abraham's great age and Sarah's barrenness, seemed more a mockery than a magnificent reward. However, Abraham never complained over these seemingly defective promises and provisions of God. The reason was that he took God at His Word, and grew strong in and by His faith, trusting that the true fulfillment of the promise was infinitely more glorious than anything of this earth (cf., Rom. 4:13-21 and Heb. 11:8-16). Faith sees through the humble wrapping to the glorious reality of the promises of God.

Thursday, February 5th - Acts 7: 6, 7

Further apparent defect is added to the divine promise and provision. As wonderful as it was that Abraham should have offspring, he learns from God that they would dwell for a long time in worse condition than that of sojourners. They were to be enslaved and mistreated in Egypt for four hundred years. Only after their long bondage would God return them to the promised land. By this God showed Himself to be one who brought life out of death, liberty out of bondage. Why would it be incredible to think that He who did this typically with His covenant people should do it substantially through His Son?

Friday, February 6th - Acts 7: 8

In this verse, Stephen makes two points. First, he reminds the Jews how circumcision, in which they trusted and boasted, was in order and time given after the gracious calling of Abraham by God, and after the divine imputing to the patriarch of righteousness due to his faith. Grace precedes law, as Paul argues in Rom. 4:1-17. The second point is made in the mention of Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve patriarchs, namely, that what God promises, incredible as it may seem, He does provide, even if it is eternal life through Christ crucified.

Saturday, February 7th - Acts 7: 9-15

In these verses, Stephen recounts the history of Joseph and his brothers. Within this history several important points are contained which have direct bearing upon the Jews' opposition to Stephen and his Lord, Jesus. The history of Joseph shows the penchant God's own people had to reject a man of divine choosing who would serve ultimately to deliver them. Later, Stephen will remind his hearers that Moses

was similarly rejected by God's people (v.35). Both Joseph and Moses were initially rejected, but eventually the people came to see them as their saving helpers, against whom they had designed evil, but through whom God brought them good. Similarly, Jesus was largely rejected at His first coming, but at His second coming, every knee shall bow to Him.

Sunday, February 8th - Acts 7: 9-15

The sinful and malicious unworthiness of the Jews is well demonstrated in the treatment which their fathers, the brothers of Joseph, dished out to their innocent brother, who, by God's gracious choosing, would be instrumental in their salvation. The goodness and graciousness of God shines brightly through Joseph, whom God preserved from the murderous intention of his brothers and made him to be their preserver. Calvin remarks that Joseph, "...nourishes and cherishes the life of men who had not hesitated to take life from him." (*NT Commentaries*. vol. 6, p. 181). Even so, Jesus gives eternal life to those whose sins caused His death.

Monday, February 9th - Acts 7: 16

Although Joseph and his brothers lived and died in Egypt, their burial in Canaan indicates their trust in the promise of God and a lively hope of eternal life, for Canaan was but a token of the real divine promise. They had in due course become so heavenly minded that they gave strict instructions that their mortal remains not be left to rot in Egypt—a foreign land, and eventually a land of Israel's bondage and misery—but that they be buried in the promised land of Canaan (Gen. 49:28-33; 50:12-14, 24-26; Josh. 24:32). So ought we to demonstrate our supreme care for the heavenly promise and provision of God in Christ (Col. 3:1-4).

Tuesday, February 10th - Acts 7: 16

Some say that Stephen makes several mistaken assertions in this verse. First, he claims that all of the patriarchs were buried in Canaan, when the Old Testament specifically mentions only that Jacob (Gen. 49:28-32; 50:12-14) and Joseph (Josh. 24:32) were so buried. Then, Stephen says that Abraham purchased the tomb from the sons of Hamor in Shechem, when, in fact, Jacob bought the land from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father (Gen. 33:19), while Abraham bought his tomb and field from Ephron the Hittite near Hebron (Gen. 23:1-20). Before we conclude that Stephen was mistaken, we do well to recall that he was a man full of wisdom and of the Holy Spirit, and here spoke under the influence of divine inspiration. Thus, if he says all of Jacob's sons were buried in Canaan, we may believe it, and the matter of who purchased which ground merely appears to be a compression of Abraham's purchase, where Jacob and his sons are buried, and Jacob's purchase, where Joseph is buried. The main point remains that none of the patriarchs are buried in Egypt's house of bondage, nor should we believe their souls to be dwelling anywhere but amidst those of just men made perfect.

Wednesday, February 11th - Acts 7: 17-19

Though it was initially through Egypt that the Jews were saved from famine, eventually the people of God became oppressed slaves in that land. Another change was called for, lest the Jews should be exterminated and the promises of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob prove to be in vain. Where Abraham's life in Ur portrays the momentary pleasures of the world for the natural man, the Jews' life in Egypt portrays the essential bondage and misery the world delivers eventually to all men. God's redeeming grace delivers from both the delusive happiness and the deadly pain of the world.

Thursday, February 12th - Acts 7: 17-19

With the blessing of a remarkably increasing population, the Jews also suffered the growing afflictions of slavery in Egypt. In this life there are thorns in every rose bush. The thorns in Egypt were lethal, as v. 19 alludes to Pharaoh's edict to destroy all male babies at the time Moses was born. While Satan does his worst, God with patient wisdom prepares His best, which, in the case of Moses, was a matter of bringing life out of death, thus foreshadowing the true exodus through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Friday, February 13th - Acts 7: 6

Moses began life under a decree of death. The most loving and caring of human hands—those of his parents—could do no more than preserve him for three months, after which, out of regard for their own lives, they set him out to die. Yet, his parents both sheltered and exposed him in faith (Heb. 11:23), trusting that Moses was more lovely to God than he was even to themselves, and that the care of the Lord would surround the helpless infant more securely than their own impotent arms, protecting him from the waters of the Nile and the wild creatures and climate of the world. In this, their trust was not misplaced.

Saturday, February 14th - Acts 7: 20-22

Though Pharaoh, and Satan behind him, would destroy God's redeemer, the Lord manifests the glory of His wisdom, love, and power by His providential care for Moses. Not only does the infant survive his exposure on the Nile, he is adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and receives education and nurture which promoted the development of that intellectual and practical power whereby he would be fit, by God's grace, triumphantly to lead Israel out of Pharaoh's enslaving and murderous grasp. God sinlessly presses the sins of His greatest enemies into the service of His people.

Sunday, February 15th - Acts 7: 22, 23

Moses was prepared and refined by the Egyptians with a view to his service for the glory of that empire. For nearly forty years the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter drew strength from the nation which beat down the covenant people. Then, it entered the mind of Moses to visit and view the Hebrews. What he saw was a beaten and burdened people (Gen. 2:11). Yet, by faith he saw more, namely, that they were his brethren and the people of God with whom he chose to endure ill-treatment rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin (Heb. 11:25). Moses saw in those suffering slaves the reproach of Christ, which was a greater treasure than all riches of Egypt (Heb. 11:26). Thus, like Paul, he did not hesitate to commit himself to the upward call of God in Christ, counting his four decades of Egyptian life as rubbish to be left behind (Phil. 3:7,8).

Monday, February 16th - Acts 7: 22-25

Why did Moses not visit his brethren for nearly forty years? It is unlikely that he thought himself an Egyptian, since he bore the mark of Hebrew circumcision on his body. Apparently his heart was not circumcised for nearly four decades, and thus thoughts of God and His people lay sleeping within him until aroused by the Lord's effectual calling. Then, in a flash, the arm of Moses was wielded strongly to defend his brethren and to destroy their oppressors. Yet the hearts of his brethren for forty more years would remain uncomprehending that divine deliverance was at hand in the person of Moses. Thus the Jews of old showed themselves badly mistaken about the ways, timing, and servant of the Lord, just as the Jews in Stephen's day were doing with respect to Jesus.

Tuesday, February 17th - Acts 7: 25-29

Not only did Pharaoh seek to destroy the agent of the Jew's deliverance, but the Jews themselves did all they could to reject the gift of God and to frustrate the purposes of His grace. Moses would destroy Israel's

enemies, but serve to bring and maintain peace amongst the people of God. Yet, for him to do this, the Jews had to submit to him as their ruler and judge under God. This they would not do. Thus they rejected their redemption by refusing to accept the man who, by the calling and power of God, offered it, the way men have always rejected salvation by their refusal to accept the Savior. For this ignorant and ungrateful rejection, the Jews were obliged to wait forty more years before the divine offer for deliverance would be renewed.

Wednesday, February 18th - Acts 7: 26-29

The Jew's enemies were not only the Egyptians, but also themselves. Thus, when Moses presented himself to them in a somewhat public and official capacity (v.26), after he had struck down the former enemy, he finds them contending amongst themselves, they being driven by the latter foe. Indeed, it is the latter foe which proves most formidable, for we see that Egyptians die more readily at the hands of Moses than do the pride and insolence of the Jews die at his words of rebuke. While it is true that only one Hebrew defied and insulted Moses, the inference that the insult was delivered in public with no public outcry against it shows how corporately ungrateful the Jews were for their deliverer. Thus, Moses fled, and with him went God's hand of deliverance until such time as the Jews were more humbled and hungry for redemption. How often do we turn back the ready and helping hand of God, then complain of His slowness to rescue us?

Thursday, February 19th - Acts 7: 29, 30

As God used the remarkable providence of Moses' first forty years in the courts of Egypt to educate him in the ways of the world, so God used the second forty year period in the life of Moses to train him in the lessons of humility and patient trust in his Lord. For forty years Moses was, as it were, a man without a people. He had been rejected by the Jews and could not return to Pharaoh's court. It seemed that all bridges had been burned, and all opportunities for him faithfully and fruitfully to serve the Lord had been put to death. Yet in Midian, God continued to train Moses by giving him opportunities to be faithful in little things, such as his standing up against the shepherds who drove Jethro's daughters from the well (Ex. 2:16,17). Such service resulted in Moses taking a wife, producing children, and becoming son-in-law of the wise and godly Jethro, who, being immeasurably less exalted than Pharaoh, proved to be a better teacher for Moses. God makes His servants grow and prosper even in their times of waiting in desert places.

Friday, February 20th - Acts 7: 29,30

The faith of Moses would have been mightily tested by many things during his sojourn in Midian. Not only was the locale a test—he, having been banished from Egypt and from Israel in Egypt—but his new, humble employment of his shepherding Jethro's sheep would seem an incalculable demotion from his ruling either Egypt or Israel. Finally, the duration of the sojourn would no doubt prove the sorest part of the test. Moses was obliged to spend the prime period of his earthly life tending sheep. He was an old man of eighty—nearly as good as dead—when the Lord finally appeared to him in the burning bush. Thus, he whose life began under a decree of death, was commissioned for his true life's work when he was approaching death by old age. Our God delights to work through mortified instruments, so that the life He brings out of such death may be clearly seen to result from divine grace and power (2 Cor. 4:7-12; 12:7-10).

Saturday, February 21st - Acts 7: 30

The land of Midian was poor and barren compared with the fertile land of Egypt and the splendor of Pharaoh's court. Yet it was in one of the most wild and desolate regions of Midian that the Lord appeared to Moses as he was shepherding his father-in-law's flock. The glory of God is not enhanced but is obscured by the pomp of worldly shows. It was not in Pharaoh's court, neither was it from the height of Israel's leadership that Moses beheld the glory of God; rather, it was amidst the long-endured, seeming curse of banishment that Moses received the supreme blessing of hearing God's voice and seeing at least the traces of His glory. The deaths, the trials, and the afflictions into which the Lord leads His servants are found to

be places of most intimate and fortifying fellowship with God. Let us learn from this never to fear the spiritual deaths and desert experiences into which our Lord leads us. (Ps. 23:4).

Sunday, February 22nd - Acts 7: 30,31

Moses—an old man grown accustomed to shepherd life in Midian—was not a naturally likely candidate to deliver Israel from Egypt. Israel—enslaved and in bondage in Egypt—seemed likely to be consumed by her oppression. Yet neither this dry bush of a man nor that dry bush of a people were consumed by the flames of their adverse circumstances. The reason is that when the Lord indwells and empowers His people, they become more than conquerors in and through the worst afflictions (Rom. 8:35-37).

Monday, February 23rd - Acts 7: 30-32

Moses fled from Egypt in fear (Ex. 2:14,15). Forty years later, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, at the sound of God's voice, he was filled with that fear of the Lord which banished all fear of men. Nor was it the miraculous and marvelous sight of the burning bush which filled Moses with reverence. The Word of God struck him down as one dead, so that he refused to use or trust his powers of physical perception. It was, in fact, the living Word of God, the pre-incarnate Christ, who addressed Moses, for v.32 makes clear that the so-called angel (v.30) was in fact divine. It is an awesome thing to be addressed by the glorious second Person of the divine Trinity, as we learn from such examples as this and that recorded in Rev. 1:12-18.

Tuesday, February 24th - Acts 7: 31, 32

Moses ventured to look more closely at the burning bush. Yet when, by the Word of God, he realized that he was approaching the Lord, he dared not look. The closer we come to our God, and the more clearly He manifests His presence to us, the more we are filled with such reverence as makes us know that as we are, we may not—dare not—approach this God. The glory of God would be a terror to us, were it not mediated to us through His grace.

Wednesday, February 25th - Acts 7: 32,33

By Stephen's citing these verses from Exodus wherein God addressed Moses, he indicates to his Jewish accusers several vital things. First, with the divine announcement, *I am the God of your fathers...*, it is evident that although what God was intending to do for Israel through Moses was a new thing, He was the same God who had pledged His covenant and promised this deliverance centuries before He performed it. Then, with the divine command for Moses to remove his sandals, lest he touch holy ground with articles of human invention, Stephen reminds his hearers that it is the presence of God which hallows a place, not anything inherent in the place, even though that place be the temple in Jerusalem. Therefore did the tomb of Christ shine more brightly with glory on the day of His resurrection than did the temple, the rent veil of which testified that men needed no longer approach God through an elaborate, locally concentrated priesthood and sacrificial system—shadows of the substance of God's grace and glory.

Thursday, February 26th - Acts 7: 34

Moses closed his eyes in the presence of God, but the Lord indicates to His servant that His divine powers of perceiving the suffering of His people had been working perfectly all along. Our God is never without keenest awareness of the plight of His people. Nor is He a mere spectator of our sufferings. When, by the exercise of His wise patience, His preparatory work has been accomplished in His people, He comes to save through servants of His sovereign choosing. Moses was that servant of old; Jesus, one greater than Moses, was God's chosen One for the true redemption which the exodus foreshadowed (Mt. 3:17; 17:5).

Friday, February 27th - Acts 7: 34, 35

We perceive the costliness of divine service when we read that God ordered Moses to return to Egypt. In that land, Moses had been born under a decree of death, and he had left that land under sentence of death. We also see the grace of God in His sending Moses into the jaws of death for the sake of the Jews, who forty years earlier had spurned him and the divine deliverance he promised. Finally, we note the power of God in the way the Lord rendered Pharaoh's threats vain, led Israel out of Egypt, and destroyed Egypt's first-born and Pharaoh's army. As the Jewish fathers had initially rejected this Moses who was sent by God, so Stephen implicitly pleads with his Jewish accusers to repent of their rejection of the Christ.

Saturday, February 28th - Acts 7: 35-38

Stephen reminds the Jews of that which they accepted regarding Moses: that he was sent by God; that their fathers were unworthy and undeserving of his delivering ministry; and that by the grace and power of God Moses served as prophet (vv. 37, 38), priest (v. 35, *deliverer*), and king (v.35, *ruler*). He further reminds them that Moses himself predicted the coming of another prophet (v.37), who is Christ. Accordingly, Stephen demonstrates how his preaching Christ was contrary neither to Moses nor to the welfare of the covenant people. Christ is the fulfillment of the law, prophets, and priesthood. His deliverance is not from an oppressing nation, but from an oppressing spiritual empire of evil. He who rejects Jesus, rejects God and all good.

Sunday, March 1st - Acts 7: 35-38

The Jews who accused Stephen claimed to be followers of Moses. The faithful deacon, however, declares that because of their rejection of Christ, whom Moses pre-figured and whose coming he prophesied, they were demonstrating as much contempt for the dead Moses as the Jewish fathers had while he was living and serving to release them from their bondage in Egypt. Though Moses had been, at that time, long dead, still he spoke through the Scripture he wrote, and spoke to the Jews' conviction and Stephen's vindication. Indeed, Moses and the prophets all speak to vindicate those in any age or circumstance who trust and obey Jesus.

Monday, March 2nd - Acts 7: 39

Not only did the Jewish fathers repudiate Moses when he came to deliver them from Egypt, they continued to reject and resist him even after he had led them out of Egypt. Their blind perversity led them to construe the blessed redemption and liberty of the Lord to be a supreme curse to be hated and refused. Like dogs hungering to return to their vomit, the ancient Jews hungered to return to their bondage and misery in Egypt, rather than to trust and follow Moses, the servant of the Lord, to the blessed promised land. Such ungrateful and suicidal sin should be mortified, not imitated and nurtured, as was being done with the Jews contemporary with Stephen.

Tuesday, March 3rd - Acts 7: 39-41

Stephen proceeds to point out, not from his own imagining, but from the Scriptural record, how the Jews' rejection of Moses, the servant of the Lord, entailed a rejection of the Lord Himself. The cited incident of the golden calf further recounts the Jews' monumental lack of trust, gratitude, and understanding of and sympathy with the way of the Lord. They show themselves plunged into darkest ignorance, superstition, and stupidity. Caring nothing about Moses, construing his absence in the worst light, they determine to return to Egypt, from which they had cried to God for deliverance. For their guide and power to such a godless and miserable goal, they erected a representation of God which was useless to themselves and insulting to God. Their sheer stupidity in thinking that a lifeless image of a dumb beast could be their god and guide is matched only by their reckless audacity in their declaring that such an idol, which sprang from their darkened imaginings and was fashioned by their own wretched hands, accurately represented the God who had so powerfully delivered them from the maw of Pharaoh.

Wednesday, March 4th - Acts 7: 42,43

God judicially turns away from those who persist in turning away from Him to the worship of idols. For those so rejecting the one true God, the result is no improvement, though they embrace numerous so-called gods. The true and living God need not be augmented by false gods, and when the Lord's people have endeavored so to augment their God, it has been to their own peril and loss. Stephen had been accused of detracting from God by claiming that Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 6:11), but he shows from redemptive history recorded in God's Word how it had been the Jews who repeatedly made less of God by their trying to add to his worship idolatrous elements. Accordingly, the Jews went from the frying pan of Egypt into the fire of Babylon. The final step for those rejecting Jesus while embracing idols is hell!

Thursday, March 5th - Acts 7: 44

The Jews did not wander into idolatry, superstition, and resultant divine chastisement because God had neglected to provide for them true and right direction. Amidst an unworthy and ungrateful people, the true faith with its ordinances was instituted by God for all who had eyes of faith to see and hearts of godly devotion to obey. Men must close their hearts to the heavenly provision of God—and even close their senses to the visible and audible means of His grace—in order to devote themselves to false worship.

Friday, March 6th - Acts 7: 44,45

The point Stephen appears to make in these verses is that the true means of God's grace proved effectual over a long course of history which was replete with challenges against the divine ordinances. The substance of God's redeeming and preserving power lay behind the shadows of ceremonial provision. There was no need for the Jews to abandon or seek to augment with exotic religious rites, or with the work of their own hands, that which the Lord had provided. However, the exercise of faith was required for one to apprehend the substance through the shadows, and such exercise of faith was rare in Jewish history, even more rare in Stephen's day.

Saturday, March 7th - Acts 7: 46,47

Stephen is leading up to a consideration of the temple, against which he stood accused of speaking (Acts 6:13,14). In these verses he admits that which the Jews maintained, namely, that the temple resulted from God's grace being operative through the godly aspiration of David and the godly endeavor of Solomon. Men should have due respect for the temple which God directed and enabled His people to build. But greater respect—even fullest reverence—is due to the God for whom the temple was built, and who caused His name to dwell therein. The latter, the Jews largely failed to give, for the eyes of their flesh latched only onto the stones of the house. They lacked faith to perceive and adore the Lord of that house.

Sunday, March 8th - Acts 7: 47-50

Neither did God, for whom the temple was built, nor Solomon, the instrumental builder of the house of God, indicate that the temple was intrinsically holy and capacious enough to contain and manifest the Lord. Not only does God declare His immeasurable greatness and transcendent glory in the verses from Isaiah which Stephen quotes (Is. 66:1,2), but Solomon himself declared as much in his prayer of dedication for the temple: *Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built.* (1 Ki. 8:27). The Jews' faithless carnality may be seen by their belief that the greatness of God was measured by the physical dimensions and splendor of the temple. They failed to realize that God condescended to have His name dwell in the temple, and condescended infinitely more to dwell in Christ (Col. 2:9), whose bodily temple they had destroyed, only for God to raise it up in three days. In such divine condescension, the greatness and glory of God do not diminish, but shine forth in greatest magnitude.

Monday, March 9th - Acts 7: 51

As Nathan had convicted David of his sin, telling the king of Israel, *Thou are the man*, so here Stephen draws, from the evidence he had cited, material not only for his defense but also for a warranted offensive

against his accusers, telling them that they, the sons, are men as guilty as were their fathers. They were the men guilty of corrupting God's Law, polluting God's temple, dishonoring God, and disgracing themselves by their clinging to the ceremonial shadows and rejecting the redeeming substance of salvation. Indeed, they sinned worse than their fathers, for it is less heinous to abuse shadows, as the fathers had done, than to abuse Christ, the substance, as Stephen's accusers had done. One greater than Moses had come to His own, and His own did not receive Him, but crucified Him instead. Thus, the charge they hurled at Stephen returns with compounded force upon their own heads.

Tuesday, March 10th - Acts 7: 51

Stephen began his defense by addressing the members of the Sanhedrin as *brethren and fathers* (7:2). Now he refers to them more contemptuously, calling them *you men*. What accounts for the change? The answer is that this deacon, full of wisdom, power, grace, and the Holy Spirit of God, perceived and so charges his accusers as men resisting the Holy Spirit. To such who demonstrate their sin against the Holy Spirit, not respect, but only reprobation is due.

Wednesday, March 11th - Acts 7: 51,52

The Jews at hand were not only doing just as their unbelieving, murderous fathers had done, they were doing worse. They, like their fathers, persistently resisted the Holy Spirit. Yet, whereas the fathers murdered the prophets, who were servants of God, these Jews had killed the holy Son of God. Though the Jews desired to think their proceedings against Jesus were legitimate and His execution just, Stephen rightly designates their actions as betrayal and murder. If a man bringing this charge against them served to cut them to the quick (v.54), how will they stand in the last day before the divine Judge whom they betrayed and murdered?

Thursday, March 12th - Acts 7: 51-53

It is not those possessing the law, but those gratefully performing it who demonstrate themselves to be true Jews, having circumcised hearts (Rom. 2:26-29). Stephen's accusers show themselves possessing uncircumcised ears, when they exercise carnal resistance rather than spiritual perception; they show themselves uncircumcised in heart by their refusal rightly to respond to the Word of God declared to them. They nurtured their carnality, not only by their ignoring the message of the prophets, but also in their attempts to silence the tongues of the prophets by killing them. Worst of all, they sought to destroy the Word of God incarnate. They not only failed to keep the law, they tried to kill the divine Lawgiver. Is Stephen being extreme and harsh in these charges? He who was full of the Holy Spirit (v.55) could not be anything other than true in his judgment.

Friday, March 13th - Acts 7: 54

Here we learn that the truth of God, faithfully proclaimed, penetrates the hardest and darkest of hearts. Yet, though they were convicted, these Jews resisted conversion. No confession of sin issues from their lips; rather, they close their mouths and gnash their teeth in rage. Still more violently do they close their evil hearts, covering them with a new outbreak of sin in their attack against Stephen. They show no repentance, only enraged retaliation against the man who had penetrated their pious guises and shown them a true glimpse of their own monstrous hearts and murderous hands.

Saturday, March 14th - Acts 7: 55

In this verse we see that the source of Stephen's masterful rehearsal of redemptive history and of his devastating charges against his accusers was the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit of God enabled Stephen to convict his enemies and silence them in judgment (Is. 54:17), and further enabled the faithful deacon to keep his affections anchored in heaven, where he saw the glory of God and the Jesus whom he proclaimed standing at God's right hand. Thusly is the martyr consoled by the vision which vindicates his gospel

message. Jesus is, in fact, as Stephen declared Him to be, ascended to the place of sovereign power and authority at the glorious throne of God. Not only so, but something of Stephen's reward may be perceived through the posture of the Lord Jesus. The deacon who stood for Christ finds the glorious Son of God standing for him. When all men stand against us because of our stand for Christ, let us remember this vision we see through Stephen's eyes: that the Christ who stood for us on earth while we were yet sinners will stand for us at the throne of glory, now that we are His servants and beloved brethren.

Sunday, March 15th - Acts 7: 55,56

The Jews are made to see their sin, and gnash their teeth in rage. The servant of Christ sees his glorified Savior, and opens his mouth to testify of it. In his final words to his accusers, Stephen declares that the only true Messiah is Jesus, who stands in heaven at God's right hand. His designation, *the Son of Man*, is the last New Testament reference to the messianic title. It is as though the Jews, who, with their cries to crucify Jesus (Mt. 27:22,25), would have sealed their own doom at the cross, here have their doom sealed by God, due to their rejection of both His Son, their Messiah, and the further gracious divine provision of Stephen's gospel proclamation concerning Christ. The Jews will kill Stephen. In their doing so they will send the saint to heaven and themselves to hell.

Monday, March 16th - Acts 7: 57,58

The demonic fury of these Jews, who composed the highest court in Judah, is evident from their fury, which is without any consideration or control. They who had gnashed their teeth (v.54), now cry out; they who heard the truth of God, now cover their ears as if that truth were their greatest enemy which must be shut out of their minds and hearts. They rush upon Stephen, urged on by satanic impulse, and, without proper trial, verdict, or sentencing, they impose a capital execution. What they had feared to do without Roman permission and instrumentality in the case of Jesus, they do not hesitate to do with Stephen. Therefore, they compound their guilt of their having murdered Jesus (v.52), treating the servant of the Lord as they had treated the Son of God.

Tuesday, March 17th - Acts 7: 55-60

Death is imposed upon a faithful believer and fruitful member of the first diaconate of the Church. Yet, the death of Stephen is by no means a tragic defeat and setback for the Church. The martyr himself testifies to his enjoying privilege rather than enduring pain. He sees not furious enemies and fearful death, but sees instead the heavens opened to him, the glory of God, and the Son of God standing in the place of honor, authority, and power. This account of the death of the first Christian martyr shows how death has been destroyed for believers by the death and resurrection of Christ. The words of Jesus proved true for Stephen and shall prove true for all such martyrs. For Jesus declared, *I am the resurrection, and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies.* (Jn. 11:26).

Wednesday, March 18th - Acts 7: 58-60

There is in these verses more evidence of the believer's victory over death. Stephen testifies to his security in Jesus when he asks with confident expectation for his Redeemer to receive his spirit. The full triumph of grace in the spirit of the man so commending the care of his immortal soul to Jesus is manifested in his loving prayer for his enemies. The fact that, for the faithful the sting of death has been removed, is evident in Scripture recording Stephen's death as his falling asleep. The death of Christ has transformed the monster death into but a little sleep, from which the soul who has walked in grace shall quickly awaken to reign with Christ in glory.

Thursday, March 19th - Acts 7:58-60

Stephen took a faithful stand for Jesus, but because he was killed we may wonder whether it was a fearful and futile stand. There is no hint of fear in the man who sees his Lord for whom he stands standing to

receive him. There is also glorious fruit in this martyr's death. Saul, who saw how Stephen faced death, had seeds of truth planted in his heart, disconcerting him and preparing him for that Damascus road encounter with Stephen's Lord which forever changed the church's persecutor into her greatest apostle. That apostle could later write: *To live is Christ, to die is gain.* (Phil. 1:21), and, also, *In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.* (Rom. 8:37), for he had witnessed such victory over death in the death of Stephen.

Friday, March 20th - Acts 7: 58-60

The enemies of Christ and of Christ's servants do their worst. Through it all, God demonstrates His best. From the blood of a deacon issues the new life of the greatest apostle of the Church. Paul carried on the work of Stephen to perfection, as the apostle lived, prayed, preached, and wrote for the blessing of believers in all ages. No wonder the deaths of the Lord's servants are precious in His sight!

Saturday, March 21st - Acts 8: 1-3

It is not enough that the wicked should murder Jesus (Acts 7:52) and stone to death the Lord's servant, Stephen. They, having tasted innocent blood, hunger to destroy more believers. One man in particular, Saul, is roused to special heights of threats and murder (Acts 9:1). He who stood by the robes of those witnessing Stephen's martyrdom, is no longer an approving spectator of the persecution of the people of Christ, but he leads the charge against them. The wicked are never satisfied with the death of one godly soul. They are emboldened by their murderous success to throw off all restraint and show their essentially destructive natures. Thus was wicked Haman not content that Mordecai alone should die, but that all of the Jews should be destroyed along with him (Esther 3:5,6). So it is with the wicked in every age. Christians are ever surrounded by many deadly foes. Yet greater is He who is in us than all of them put together.

Sunday, March 22nd - Acts 8: 1-3

The persecution of the early Church was both extensive and intensive. The intensity is noted by the words, *great persecution*. The extensive nature is seen in the scattering of believers and in the search and destroy missions of Saul. The Church which had been filled with vibrant new life and thousands of new members on and shortly after Pentecost, therefore, due to this persecution, seemed destined for inescapable destruction. Yet, as we shall see, Satan's worst attacks cannot destroy but ultimately serve to further the testimony of Christ in the world. Our God does not so much enable us to avoid or escape persecutions (2 Tim. 3:12), as He enables us to stand through them and be better enabled to serve Him as a result.

Monday, March 23rd - Acts 8: 1-4

Despite the extensive and intensive persecutions unleashed against believers, the redeemed remained faithful to their Lord. Those who were scattered preached the gospel wherever they went. Those who remained in Jerusalem stood fast in the evil day. The apostles carried on their ministry of the Word and prayer, so much so that after Saul was converted, they were still in Jerusalem to be consulted by him (Gal.

1:18,19; 2:1,2). Also, we are told that devout men lovingly and respectfully buried Stephen and lamented loudly over him. Such lamentation for an executed man was forbidden by the Jewish Mishnah (Sanhedrin VI:6), and could have cost those so mourning their lives. Yet Christ fills His people with both tenderest sympathy and fearless strength. Therefore, these saints stand for Christ, and serve and love in Christ as those fearless of death in the face of death.

Tuesday, March 24th - Acts 8: 1-4

The most harsh and disastrous attacks which Satan can inspire against the Church, serve, by the sinless ordaining of God, to promote her growth. The persecuted believers scattered, but not as defeated cowards to save their lives. For if they were such cowards, they hardly would have preached the Word which had so heated things up in Jerusalem. Even those who may initially have fled for their lives found that their lives were not worth living if they sought to hide their lights under bushels. Hence, we see how the God who brings life out of death uses even the defeats of His people to spread the triumphs of His redeeming grace abroad.

Wednesday, March 25th - Acts 8: 4,5

For the rest of this chapter, the focus is upon Philip, another of the seven original deacons. Persecution did not destroy the witness to Christ in Jerusalem, where the apostles stayed to minister, but it did succeed in spreading seeds of the gospel abroad, resulting in spiritual fruit throughout the world. Philip went to Samaria and there preached Christ. The Samaritans were an admixture of Jew and Gentile and were despised by the Jews. They lived in the area which had belonged to the ten northern tribes of Israel before the best and greatest part of those tribes were carried into Assyrian captivity. The Samaritans resulted from the dregs of the Jews, who were not carried off to Assyria, inter-marrying with pagans imported to repopulate the land. Philip did not hesitate to go to the land of these despised half-breeds any more than did Jesus hesitate to pass through their country to bring forgiveness and new life to some sorely shattered souls (Jn. 4). Thus did the Savior, through His servants, continue to seek and save the lost.

Thursday, March 26th - Acts 8: 5-8

Philip, like his fellow deacon, Stephen (Acts 6:8), was gifted by God to preach and to perform signs and wonders. The order of importance between the Word and the wonders is given in v.6, where the preaching of the Word takes priority. Indeed, the Word is the substance to which the signs point. Thus, whereas faithful preaching of the Word may not instantaneously drive out demons and heal broken bodies, it nevertheless does accomplish the same things eventually. Who would not rejoice greatly over such powerful good news which liberates poor souls from demonic oppression and restores broken hearts, lives, relationships, as well as bodies? Yet, the Jews had sought to drive away such faithful messengers as Philip and the

precious and potent gospel he carried. How deep was their darkness, who preferred to administer death to others and to live in death themselves!

Friday, March 27th - Acts 8: 6-8

The Jews rejected Jesus, His gospel, and His servants. Multitudes of the Samaritans accepted the good news and were blessed accordingly. What the Jews rejected brought great rejoicing to the Samaritans. Indeed, it was the enraged rejection of the gospel by the Jews which precipitated its spread to Samaria, and, afterward, to the Gentile world. There are always merciful and expansive divine designs behind the seeming defeats and disasters suffered by the Church.

Saturday, March 28th - Acts 8: 9-12

The believing Samaritans were liberated not only from unclean spirits and paralysis, but also from the crippling darkness of superstition. For some time prior to Philip's coming, they had been dazzled and deluded by Simon's sorcery. We see from the way the people regarded Simon, saying that he was the great power of God, how inclined men are to confuse counterfeit tricks with genuine theology. Through Philip's preaching, the liberating truth of Christ dawned upon the Samaritans, and in its magnificent shining all imitation lights faded. Simon pretended to be and was, by the credulous crowd, called great (hence, Simon Magus); the Christ whom Philip proclaimed truly is great. Simon could entertain—but only Jesus could cleanse from sin, and only His gospel could edify.

Sunday, March 29th - Acts 8: 9-12

In contrast to Simon's astonishing magic arts, Philip issued the proclamation of the whole counsel of God. The saving power of God is wrought differently than is the enslaving power of evil. As Pharaoh's magicians could imitate some of the miracles of Moses, but not all, so here we find that although Simon could imitate some of the miraculous deeds of Philip, he could not produce the liberating and transforming doctrine which Philip preached. Accordingly, we find Philip employing against Simon's works of magic, not miraculous works so much as the Word of God which alone sets men free.

Monday, March 30th - Acts 8: 12

The expansive nature of the gospel is noted in this verse. The good news claims many Samaritans for the kingdom of God, and notice is also given that both men and women were baptized into Christ. In the old economy, only males received circumcision—the sign and seal of the covenant of grace. We see how Christ's redemption transcends all human distinctions, such as those of nationality and gender. What unites us in Christ is far more substantial than anything which may distinguish us from one another (Gal. 3:28).

Tuesday, March 31st – Acts 8: 12

The mercy and power of God is evident from the fact that so many of the deceived Samaritans heard and heeded Philip’s preaching above the clamoring spectacles of Simon. Furthermore, we learn that the deceiver himself, Simon, believed and was baptized. He who claimed to be great (v.9) and reveled in the designation, *the Great Power of God*, is compelled to acknowledge his empty boast and counterfeit deeds when the true Sun of Righteousness rises, revealing all pretended light to be but darkness.

Wednesday, April 1st - Acts 8: 13

In what sense are we to understand that Simon believed? The question is raised by what we are told about him in vv. 18-24. Was Simon a complete hypocrite, not believing in any sense, but simply professing to do so? This possibility seems unlikely, for Philip would surely have detected an absolute fraud. Was Simon’s faith true, saving faith? This possibility appears unlikely, too, for those having saving faith cannot perish (v.20). It seems most likely that Simon had a sincere, but inadequate faith. He possessed what may be called historical, or temporary faith, which, over time proves to be counterfeit (cf., the parable of the sower and four soils, Mt. 13:1-23). His inadequate faith may also be termed miraculous faith, in that he believed in miracles rather than purely in Christ. We find hints of this defect in our verse, where we are told that Simon focused on the signs and wonders of salvation, not upon the substance of salvation—the Savior Himself. Simon was constantly amazed. However, Christ did not die simply to amaze men, but to save and sanctify them. Amazement is far different than sanctifying edification.

Thursday, April 2nd - Acts 8: 13

We see from Simon’s professed belief, his ready acceptance into the Church, and his subsequent sinful actions, that tares spring up with wheat in the Church. Simon’s faulty faith is shown to be initially undetected (and perhaps undetectable) by Philip. We are told that Simon continued with Philip, indicating a rather intimate discipleship relationship. Of course, Judas had the same sort of relationship with Jesus, though Jesus clearly knew Judas’ heart (Jn. 6:64) and suffered that traitor’s company to fulfill Scripture (Jn. 17:12). However, servants of the Lord, while they may be at times quite discerning, are not omniscient. Thus we must accept those professing faith in Jesus, knowing that some may be fraudulent in their profession, and withhold neither our love nor our training ministry even from those we may suspect. False professors will be found out in due course (1 Cor. 11:19; 1 Jn. 2:18,19), and when they are, they will be the worse off for their contemptuous abuse of our love and ministry. We will not be any the worse for our having given such loving ministry.

Friday, April 3rd - Acts 8: 13

False professors never fool God, and only succeed in fooling true believers for a time. Yet they delude themselves first, foremost, and for the longest time. We all do well, therefore, to examine ourselves so that we may be assured that our faith is not counterfeit. Genuine faith trusts the Lord, though He slay one's most cherished possessions, persons, and powers. Counterfeit faith cleaves not to the person of Christ, but to His servants and to His powers (Mt. 7:21-23).

Saturday, April 4th - Acts 8: 14-17

Not only does something appear amiss in Simon's faith, but something also was lacking in the Christian experience of the Samaritans. Though they had believed in Christ (v.12) they had not received the Holy Spirit. How are we to understand this apparent defect, and what are we to make of it? Here we have a challenging situation reported in a challenging passage of Scripture. Of one thing we may be certain: the challenges of God's Word and works, as we face them with assurance that our God will give us understanding and will sanctify us further through them, prove to be blessed prompts to our discovery of and living in hidden spiritual treasures.

Sunday, April 5th - Acts 8: 14-17

When Luke writes that the Samaritans had not received the Holy Spirit, he does not imply that the Samaritans had believed apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. No one can exercise faith in Christ without having first been regenerated by the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:3-7). Rather, we are to understand that the Samaritans were as the apostles themselves had been when they followed Jesus prior to Pentecost. They were wrought upon by the Holy Spirit so as to receive and rest upon Christ, but they lacked the indwelling fullness of the Spirit. But why this lack in the Samaritans? Was there a fault with the way in which they had believed? Was there deficiency in Philip's preaching? Was there some other reason to account for this problem? Sometimes believers experience apparent difficulty in their Christian experience for which there may be initially more questions than answers. But God has answers for His children in both His works and His Word.

Monday, April 6th - Acts 8: 14-17

Did the Samaritans not receive the indwelling fullness of the Holy Spirit when they believed in Jesus because their faith was in some way defective? That their faith was not the problem is evident when we read that they received no exhortation or further instruction from the apostles, Peter and John, before they received the Holy Spirit. Was the problem, then, that Philip's teaching was inadequate? Again, the apostles add nothing to the deacon's teaching. We should therefore conclude that God had sovereignly withheld the gift of the Spirit from these first believers amongst the Samaritans. The Lord so withheld the Spirit not because the

Samaritans were less deserving or in need of it, nor did He withhold it to impoverish them and confine them to a second class experience of Christ, reserving the full, first class experience for the Jews. What the Samaritans initially suffer by the ordaining hand of God, would ultimately serve for their enrichment and the enrichment of the whole Church. Divine delays and denials ever serve to promote, never to punish, the Lord's people.

Tuesday, April 7th - Acts 8: 14-17

We must now seek to understand why God withheld the Spirit from the Samaritans and what greater good, if any, resulted from His having done so. That the indwelling fullness of the Holy Spirit is to be considered a normal part of conversion is clear from the words, *not yet*, in v.16. Those words tell us that the believing Samaritans were supposed to receive the Spirit, and that they would eventually receive Him. The extraordinary delay occasioned the coming of the two leading apostles, Peter and John. By their coming from Jerusalem, praying for and touching the Samaritan believers, the Holy Spirit was received by the Samaritan believers. A most practical uniting of Jew and Samaritan in Christ was achieved when the indwelling Spirit prompted Peter and John, who were Jews, to go to Samaria, a land despised by Jews, and touch and pray for those whom they had earlier sought to destroy (Lk. 9:51-56). By that touch, the Samaritans were received into full Christian fellowship, a reception confirmed by God granting phenomenal evidence of their receiving the Holy Spirit. The conclusion to be drawn by Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles (such as most of us are) is that we are bound together in the Church not by our personal interests or feelings, not by our common race or nationality, but by our common faith in Christ and His indwelling us by His Holy Spirit. This exceptional delay in God's granting the Spirit to the Samaritans shows this as powerfully as possible. The negations and delays of our God lead to highest affirmations.

Wednesday, April 8th - Acts 8: 18, 19

Simon's true character as a tare amongst the wheat shows in his reaction to God's giving of the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans through the apostles' laying on of hands. So uninterested is Simon in having himself the Holy Spirit that he makes no mention of such personal appropriation of the Spirit. So uninterested in Christ is he that he makes no mention of Him or of His redeeming work. So ignorant and contemptuous is he of the free grace of God, and so obsessed is he with the sensational manifestations of power that Simon offers to buy from the apostles the power to confer the Spirit upon others by the laying on of his hands. Thus Simon reveals his total fascination with the gifts of God's power, his intention to have and use them to enhance his own reputation among men, and his complete lack of faith in and love for the divine Giver of such gifts. He further reveals his woeful underestimation of the true nature and value of the gifts of God when he offers to purchase with money that which is of infinite value. From his actions, Simon reveals his impoverished and perverted heart, and his name lives on, in the term, simony, not as a trophy of divine

grace, but as a stigma applied to any who would buy power and authority in the Church.

Thursday, April 9th - Acts 8: 20-23

Peter rejects the offer Simon made along with the offerer himself. The rejection of both the offending man and the money he would put to offensive use is a strong one. Simon is, in fact, threatened with perdition. Peter, as an apostle, threatens this rejection not only as a private believer, but on behalf of the Church of which he was part of the foundation (Eph. 2:20), and on behalf of God, who graciously had called, commissioned, and equipped the apostle. A stronger refusal from a higher source can hardly be imagined. What Simon merely thought and attempted to do landed him in jeopardy of hell.

Friday, April 10th - Acts 8: 20-23

Peter not only rejects the offer and the offerer, he goes on to reveal the corrupt character, and hence absolute spiritual impoverishment of Simon. He thus, under special divine inspiration, deals with Simon as earlier he had done with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). With the words, *you have no part or portion in this matter*, Peter virtually excommunicates Simon from the Church. He does so because Simon's sin had manifested a heart not in a right relationship with God. Positively, the apostle declares Simon's sinful endeavor to issue from a root of bitterness, which poisoned all the man thought, spoke, and did. Simon is also declared to be in the fetters of iniquity. Such a sinful soul is clearly seen to be spiritually impoverished, and thus unable to procure anything except its own well-deserved damnation.

Saturday, April 11th - Acts 8: 20-23

Simon would presumptuously buy himself power in the Church. Peter makes clear, in no uncertain terms, how impossible that would be. How could a man, so spiritually bankrupt, whose life and possessions were in bondage to sin and forfeited to hell, buy anything? Such a one was manifestly in need of being himself purchased from sin, death, and hell. Thus Peter graciously offers something precious and vitally necessary to Simon, namely, the forgiving mercy of God. Simon is told no longer to think presumptuously that he was secure and needed only enhance himself by his procurements. He is told to repent and humbly seek the free forgiveness of the Lord. It is wonderful that God freely does for poor sinners what no amount of their might or money could do.

Sunday, April 12th - Acts 8: 24

Does this response by Simon represent repentance or remorse? Is he saying that in addition to his own repentant prayers he commends himself to the prayers of the Church, or is he refusing responsibility for his own soul, seeking to lay such responsibility upon those who rejected his offer? Scripture does not tell us. We are

left not merely to wonder, but to look to ourselves, making our own calling and election certain (2 Pet. 1:2-11).

Monday, April 13th - Acts 8: 25

What one deacon, Philip, began in Samaria, was joined by two apostles, Peter and John. The gospel, which all three proclaimed, had bridged their own personal differences (recall, Peter and John were not always in close, mutual sympathy, cf., Jn. 21:20-22). It had also bridged the differences between these believing Jews and the Samaritans who believed. It would bridge greater differences yet, even between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:11-22). A seeming defect in the Samaritans' Christian experience had brought these apostles into Samaria, where the Lord wrought unbreakable bonds of fellowship between the apostles and the Samaritans. Accordingly, the apostles returned to Jerusalem, improving their journey by doing what Philip had done upon his entrance into Samaria--they preached the gospel to the Samaritans, planting seeds for the growth of more brethren in Christ.

Tuesday, April 14th - Acts 8: 26

While the apostles returned to Jerusalem, fruitfully employing their trip through Samaria, Philip was told by an angel of the Lord to leave Samaria as well. But the deacon's route differed from that of the apostles. Philip was ordered to go beyond Jerusalem, southwest to Gaza. He was sent in the direction of Gentile territory. Gaza had been part of Philistia, and in Philip's day was a Roman province of Syria. The road to Gaza, we are told, was a desert road. At times our Lord sends His servants on what appear to be dangerous and futile missions. But those who act according to divine direction will find the deserts they may have to traverse eventually blossoming like a rose.

Wednesday, April 15th - Acts 8: 26

We may tell ourselves that if an angel spoke to us today, even telling us to enter a course of apparently unpromising prospects, we would obey. But the fact is that angels do not so direct us today. Are we therefore deprived and impoverished? No! We have something better than an angel, namely, the Word and Spirit of God in all fullness and perfection. The Word enlightens and the Spirit empowers servants of Christ still to go down desert roads to reap a harvest of souls.

Thursday, April 16th - Acts 8: 26-28

Philip was told to leave Samaria, where he was employed in fruitful spiritual service, and to go down a desert road toward a Gentile region. No explanation was given to this deacon, but he rightly reckoned the bare commands of God to be pregnant with gracious blessing. Therefore, Philip arose and went as he was instructed. What he encountered in the way the Lord had directed him was a Gentile, but a most remarkable one. The Ethiopian was a prominent official in the

court of his queen. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was reading Isaiah. Hardly a more prominent man better prepared to receive the gospel could be found.

Friday, April 17th - Acts 8: 26-28

As the Ethiopian eunuch went to Jerusalem to worship at the temple, he headed in the right direction, but at Jerusalem he did not arrive at a saving knowledge of the truth. That was because the temple was, at best, a shadow of the substance of salvation, and now that the substance had come in Christ, it was increasingly but an empty shell. Yet, the apostles were in Jerusalem. It is remarkable that this Ethiopian seeker of truth did not encounter them there. In the sovereign will of God this man was led to meet a servant of Christ on a desert road. The encounter would change the man for glorious good and forever. Some the Lord calls in a crowd; some He calls from a crowd. The Spirit blows where He will, and it is exciting for us to see and participate in the results.

Saturday, April 18th - Acts 8: 29-31

An angel set Philip on the way of the desert road. In that way he not only encountered the Ethiopian eunuch, but he was prompted by the Holy Spirit to join the Ethiopian in his chariot. Though the Lord employs an angel to set His redeemed servant on the way of His choosing, once Philip is in that way, he finds himself directed and empowered by the Lord Himself. Our intimacy with the Lord increases as we walk in His way.

Sunday, April 19th - Acts 8: 29-31

Philip shows unreserved obedience when he runs to join the Ethiopian. Such a rapid-paced approach would have been considered undignified, especially by a royal official. However, we learn that this Ethiopian was a humble man who hungered for the truth in whatever form or fashion it came. By the Lord's merciful ordaining and through the prompt obedience of Philip, the eunuch's being filled with the knowledge of the truth would be delayed no longer. When irresistible divine grace is issued, it comes upon its objects quickly and effectively.

Monday, April 20th - Acts 8: 30, 31

The Ethiopian official could have been put off by several aspects of Philip's approach. First, Philip was but a common man, while the Ethiopian was a royal official. Then, Philip's running was not only undignified, but, given that he approached this official on a desert road, it could likely have occurred to the Ethiopian that the runner came either to beg from him or to rob him. Yet, the official took no offense. For the first words from Philip made the matter clear to the

Ethiopian. Philip asked, "Then, indeed (a=ra, ge) do you know (ginw,skeij) what you are reading?" With this question, Philip implied that the Ethiopian did not understand what he read. The humble and candid answer the Ethiopian gave

indicates that he admitted his perplexity and need for a guide. The fact that this stranger would inquire about the reading of Scripture which perplexed the Ethiopian to the point where he prayed to God for help, rightly indicated to the Ethiopian that the stranger was the guide divinely sent in answer to his prayer. Accordingly, he invited Philip to join him. Answers to our prayers may come in surprising forms, but if we are not put off by their form, they will serve for our good.

Tuesday, April 21st - Acts 8: 30, 31

The Ethiopian may rightly have suspected that Philip was sent by God to guide him into an understanding of the Scripture he was pondering. Accordingly, he invited Philip to join him in his chariot. What the Ethiopian could not have known at that point was the eternal, glorious, and blessed magnitude of that into which his newly arrived guide would lead him (1 Cor. 2:7-10). Philip would not only instruct this man in the Word of God, he would introduce him to the living God of that Word, whom to know is eternal life (Jn. 17:3).

Wednesday, April 22nd - Acts 8: 32-34

Man's greatest need is for redemption from his sin. Yet, when men read in God's Word of Christ's costly, loving redemption, they are confused, as though they were reading a mystery. Sin so dulls our souls that even when we are not trying actively to suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18), we but feebly grasp the most obvious and fundamental teachings of Scripture. Thus, the Ethiopian puzzles over who did the suffering recorded in Isaiah's prophecy, he being likely as puzzled over the significance of the suffering as well. Thanks be to God not only that redemption has been accomplished, but also that we have God's Word and His Spirit and His testifying and teaching servants to lead us out of the labyrinth of our sinful darkness, into the marvelous light of the Lord.

Thursday, April 23rd - Acts 8: 32-35

We note the gracious, manifold provision and procedure of God in this passage. Regarding procedure, we see that the Lord's ordinary work of regenerating and converting sinners is not carried on by angels, such as the one who had earlier prompted Philip to go to the Ethiopian. The Lord, instead, uses His redeemed servants to publish the glad tidings of salvation in Christ. Regarding the manifold divine provision, we perceive how necessary the Scriptures are in the process of regenerating souls. God, by His Holy Spirit, inspired the writing of the Scriptures (2 Peter 1:20,21), and by His providence the Scriptures have been compiled, published, and spread abroad. Yet, the Lord, while working through the light of His Word and the power of His Spirit, does not exclude His redeemed servants, such as Philip, but grants to them the privilege of preaching and teaching the Word, to the benefit of those so receiving such teaching. We suffer if we neglect any aspect of such manifold divine provision, and we are richly blessed when we partake of it all.

Friday, April 24th - Acts 8: 32-35

The Ethiopian was reading a profound prophecy of Christ. Yet he did not understand the meaning and import of the passage. Philip does not set aside the prophet to proclaim the gospel, but he begins with the passage in question. Then, by his setting it in the enlightening context of the whole counsel of God, he drew from Scripture the person and work of the Savior. In this method, the teaching deacon followed the way of his Master. For Jesus led the disciples on the Emmaus road out of their darkness when He began with Moses and all the prophets and explained the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Lk. 24:27). Christ is in all the Scriptures. Each and every verse and passage testifies of Christ (Jn. 5:39), and all together present the fullness of the Savior and His saving work.

Saturday, April 25th - Acts 8: 36

The teaching of Philip must have included instruction in the Word and about the sacraments, for the eunuch's immediate response to Philip's teaching is a request to be baptized. Indeed, the writer to the Hebrews lists the fundamental and elementary things of the gospel to be repentance and faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (Heb. 6:1,2). When anyone has partaken of the substance of salvation in Christ, neither should he nor anyone else needlessly delay baptism, the sign and seal of the cleansing work of Jesus. While baptism is not necessary for salvation, neither should that which was instituted by Christ as a sacrament perpetually to be celebrated in His Church (Mt. 28: 19,20) be despised or neglected.

Sunday, April 26th - Acts 8: 36, 37

The only thing preventing anyone from being baptized would be his failure to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. According to most modern translations, which omit v.37, such faith on the part of the Ethiopian is implicit. The King James translation includes v.37, thus making the eunuch's profession of faith explicit. There is no preponderance of scholarly evidence for or against v.37, thus it is best to leave it in, as received. The essential truth is that only faith in Christ crucified justifies and thus essentially cleanses a man from all sin. Baptism serves as the outward rite of such a blessed inward reality.

Monday, April 27th - Acts 8: 36-38

This Ethiopian had been emasculated to serve an earthly monarch. He tended a treasury which was not his own. He had visited Jerusalem and the Old Testament shadows of that place, and had departed as spiritually impoverished as he had come. All of that changed for him on the lonely desert road wherein he was met by a single servant of Christ. The Ethiopian received in Christ no shadows, but full, liberating light. In Christ he was cleansed and emancipated from the dominion of sin; he was empowered with the Word and Spirit of God; he was made a citizen of the commonwealth of the kingdom of God, and a son of the Lord's family of faith; he was enriched with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, and ennobled by his new allegiance to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Similar dramatic cleansing and sweeping changes take place for all who believe and are baptized in Christ.

Tuesday, April 28th - Acts 8: 39, 40

The deacon, having faithfully and fruitfully performed his Lord's service, is snatched away by the Holy Spirit. The text implies a sudden, perhaps miraculous departure (cf., Lk. 24:31). Calvin suggests that the Spirit ordered the sudden departure of Philip to cut off any occasion for the eunuch to offer financial reward to the deacon for his services. Thus would the eunuch be left with the strong and correct impression that the gospel was free, and that all grateful praise for it is due to God alone. Whatever the reason, the eunuch is not impoverished by Philip's leaving, for the deacon had been instrumental in leading the Ethiopian into an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance in Christ (1 Pet. 1: 3,4). Also, we note from the eunuch's joy that fruit of the Holy Spirit, whose indwelling, empowering, and sanctifying presence remained with the Ethiopian after Philip's departure. Meanwhile, Philip is re-assigned to other fields of fruitful service. Whether the Holy Spirit gathers or disperses Christian workers, rich blessings abound in and through the believers whom He indwells.

Wednesday, April 29th - Acts 8: 40

By the prompting and power of the Holy Spirit, Philip found himself at Azotus, a city known to the Jews as Ashdod. In ancient Canaan, Ashdod had been inhabited by the Anakim, some of whom Joshua was unable to destroy (Josh. 11:22). The city became part of Philistia. There, amidst Israel's ancient and long-standing enemies, Philip preached the gospel of the Prince of peace. He continued to preach in all the cities through which he passed, until he reached Caesarea, wherein was the residence of the Roman Procurator. Therefore, a chapter which began with the godless persecuting the Church, concludes with an account of how the servants of Christ were not vanquished, but served with triumphant fruitfulness among Samaritans and Gentiles, calling on all men in all places to receive and rest upon Jesus Christ, the only Savior and sovereign Lord.

Thursday, April 30th - Acts 9: 1, 2

The Word of God returns our attention to Jerusalem, where persecution of the Church had begun, and where the Jews' thirst for the blood of the innocent servants of Christ only increased after they had murdered Stephen. We find that the flames of religious bigotry had been fanned to a most consuming fire in Saul. The Pharisee who had earlier witnessed Stephen's martyrdom, has been stirred himself to lead the persecution of the saints. The believers who were scattered by this persecution had been scattering gospel seeds wherever they went. But what would become of those who had driven most of the Christians out of Jerusalem? In this chapter we have the remarkable account of the conversion of Saul, whereby the major persecutor of the Church became her greatest apostle and champion. Here we learn that the irresistible grace of God in Christ can transform our greatest foes into our most loving and diligently serving brethren.

Friday, May 1st - Acts 9: 1, 2

The Word of God emphasizes the great importance of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus by recording three accounts of it. Here, in Acts 9, is the first and fullest account. Then, at Paul's defense in Jerusalem (Acts 22) we are given another account. The third account is given by Paul when he appeared before Agrippa (Acts 26). The story of such a religiously and educationally refined man as Saul—who so zealously opposed Christianity—being converted to Christ, so richly manifests the triumphs of divine grace over the hardest and most arrogantly sinful heart that it bears telling many times. The importance of Saul's conversion lies not only in its justifying his apostleship (which it does), nor in the fact that most Gentiles owe their salvation to his instrumentality (which also is true), but especially in the fact that nothing in the Bible, except the resurrection of Jesus, better demonstrates the almighty, life transforming power of God than this absolutely committed enemy of Christ being converted into Christ's greatest champion.

Saturday, May 2nd - Acts 9: 1, 2

The account of Saul's conversion begins by informing us of the strength of his animosity against those committed to Christ. His very heart pounded with hatred, and his very life's breath issued murderous threats against the Lord's servants. However, Saul's zealous hatred was without knowledge (Rom. 10:2; Phil 3:6). He sincerely thought he was opposing religious pretenders, and had not the slightest notion that he opposed the Lord and His anointed (Ps. 2:1-3). Saul was a man endowed with the highest and purest passion. Yet, his was essentially the passion of the natural man. He conceived that he was doing his good, necessary, and religious duty. After he was brought out of darkness and walked in the light of Christ, he saw (and he testified to us) how wrong he was. Paul wrote, no doubt from personal experience, when he charged with sin the good man in Rom. 2:1-6 and the religious man in Rom. 3: 9-20. Sincere and principled sinners think they are least in need of salvation, and are, accordingly, the hardest and most resolute in their resistance to saving grace. Thanks be to God that His saving grace is irresistible.

Sunday, May 3rd - Acts 9: 1, 2

Saul conceived of himself as one acting under divine authority. Thus he submitted himself to the high priest, doing no more than his bidding. But the high priest had already shown himself to be against Jesus (the true and only effectual High Priest) and against the disciples of Jesus. Saul was in a religious system and a way of life which was diametrically opposed to the way which leads to eternal life. He heartily embraced the way which sought to destroy Jesus, His disciples, and His very memory. He who fancied himself protected by the shield of divine authority, and free of the guilt of enslaving sin, who sought to bind those he deemed to be pernicious wretches, arresting them and arraigning them before murderous judges in Jerusalem, was about to learn that he was the guilty wretch, enslaved by sin, engrossed in disobedience to God, covered with guilt which only the blood of the Holy Son of God could wash away. Saul, the Pharisee, was himself about to be unbound from the shackles of his own sin.

Monday, May 4th - Acts 9: 1-4

Into the murderous rage and hell-bent zeal of Saul, the irresistible and amazing grace of God came to change the proud Pharisee's life and eternal destiny. Saul, who sought to arrest the disciples of the Lord, was himself arrested by the Lord. As Saul rode with the sincere but mistaken confidence of false religion, traveling to Damascus under the bright noon sun (Acts 22:6), he was confronted by a light brighter than the sun and a glory of that perfect holiness which penetrated the delusion of his religious perfection. The heavenly light made him see for the first time in his life how defiled was his self-righteousness, which he had fancied to be impeccable. The light of Christ blinded Saul's natural eyes, with which he had so badly misconstrued life; the voice of Christ began to open the eyes of Saul's heart with convicting power.

Tuesday, May 5th - Acts 9: 4

Saul falls to the ground before the majesty of Christ. He who wrongly thought that he stood in a right relationship with God and who was determined to reduce the true people of the Lord to imprisonment and death, is now himself dashed to the ground as one whose religious pride had been reduced to dust. This proud Pharisee is not only here arrested and subdued, he is crucified and made a new man (Gal. 2:20). This new creature in Christ—broken and regenerated at the height of his folly and sinful fury—would later write of how he came to see that his natural endowments and attainments were but rubbish in view of the surpassing riches of Christ (Phil. 3:4-14).

Wednesday, May 6th - Acts 9: 1, 2, 4

Saul threatened the disciples of the Lord with arrest and murder. Jesus makes clear in His first words to Saul that it was He whom the Pharisee was persecuting. What a convicting shock for Saul, a religious zealot, to find that though he were armed with authority from the Jewish high priest, his mission was not one of godly service but of sinful persecution against the true High Priest who had offered His life to redeem His people. What a consolation for threatened believers to know that their sufferings are in the refuge of Christ's loving presence and powerful protection. Persecutors may threaten the disciples of the Lord, but in doing so they touch the pupil of the eyes of Christ (Ps. 17:8).

Thursday, May 7th - Acts 9: 4

Saul is called by name and is called to account by the Lord. The Pharisee does not deny or seek to evade his guilt in committing the sin with which he is charged. In the light of Christ's holy judgment, no man can hide who he truly is and what he has truly done.

Friday, May 8th - Acts 9: 4-6

Saul no doubt sincerely believed that he had righteous cause and godly authority to persecute the disciples of Jesus. This belief was predicated upon the supposition that Jesus Himself had been a fraud who had not really been resurrected (Mt. 28:11-15). However, in the all-searching light of the holy majesty, authority, and sovereignty of the resurrected Christ, Saul is stunned into silence. He can give no answer as to why he

had been persecuting the Lord's disciples. Nor, in the final judgment, when all people stand in the glorious presence of Christ, will any soul be able to justify why he has ignored, neglected, or abused the Lord and His ordinances.

Saturday, May 9th - Acts 9: 4, 5

Saul cannot answer the question put to him by the risen Christ. Instead, the arrested and subdued Pharisee answers with a question of his own. Jesus responds by telling Saul that what had previously been inconceivable to the Pharisee was in fact true: he had been persecuting Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Son of God. No guilt could be more enormous than that of one's seeking to destroy the living source of God's holy justice and loving salvation. With this answer, Saul's mouth was stopped, and he fully expected to be justly condemned. Yet, contrary to all expectation, Saul's life is given new direction. Henceforth, he shall be a new man, a member of the commonwealth of the saints, an obedient servant of Christ. Here Saul was crucified and resurrected as Paul.

Sunday, May 10th - Acts 9: 6-9

No longer did murderous zeal send Saul down a road of his choosing. Instead, the simple directions of the Lord Jesus became his guide. He was sent by Jesus into the same city for which he had himself aimed, but the purpose for which Saul would enter Damascus was infinitely different from what had been his original intention. Thus when we note that Jesus gave Saul's life new direction, we should understand that it was Saul's heart which made the change, rather than the mere circumstances of his life.

Monday, May 11th - Acts 9: 6-9

Saul the Pharisee thought he stood on solid ground. To him, his natural endowments and attainments were impeccable. The appearance of Jesus, the perfect God/man, reduced Saul to the dust. But it was the grace of Christ which raised Paul up, as a new man on a new mission. He whom the Pharisee previously thought to be a dead criminal, fondly represented by pestiferous followers, now is obeyed meekly by Paul. The natural eyes, which Saul had perverted to the use of blotting out Christ and exalting himself, he now found to be blind. Yet, in his natural darkness he saw and contemplated new light, new life, and a new Lord.

Tuesday, May 12th - Acts 9: 7

If we compare this verse with what Paul later says in 22:9, it may appear that there is confusion, if not contradiction, between the two accounts. The reconciliation is as follows: The men with Paul saw the brilliant light (22:9), but did not perceive the person of Christ (9:7). They heard (avkou,ntej) the voice of Jesus (9:7), but did not hear with understanding (ouv k h;kousan) what was said (22:9). We should never expect to find the rich complexities of God's Word rightly reduced to bewildering contradictions.

Wednesday, May 13th - Acts 9: 8, 9

Saul was struck to the ground by the awesome majesty and glorious righteousness of Christ. The petty natural endowments and attainments, as well as the perverse writs of so-called authority possessed by the proud Pharisee all melted into insignificance before the sovereign Lord. But at the Lord's bidding for Saul to rise (v.6), he stood up as a new man, His eyes were opened, but he saw nothing of his old world. Indeed, the last sight he had in his old life was of Christ; and the first and everlasting sight he would have in his new life was of Christ, from Christ, and through Christ (v.12; Phil. 3:7-14). His mouth was closed to food, but opened to God in prayer (v.11). What now seemed to be his physical defects and deprivations were in truth faculties of communion with God and with the spiritual realities of His kingdom.

Thursday, May 14th - Acts 9: 10

We learn that Jesus sent Saul to Damascus there to be met and ministered to by Ananias. Here we may wonder why our Lord Jesus, who had so quickly, powerfully, and lastingly changed Saul through the brief encounter on the Damascus road, should send him away from Himself. Was Saul being punished, as he was so pitifully led into the city, there to await the ministry of a mere man? Should not Jesus, having so effectively arrested Saul's attention, kept the subdued Pharisee in His presence to teach him, as God taught Moses for forty days on Mount Sinai? But for those who are in Christ and obey His Word, even when they are sent from Christ, they are strengthened in and by Him. Saul's new nature was exercised immediately in the school of discipleship. The proud Pharisee had sat under the teaching of the great Gamaliel, but under such august teaching he had failed to come to the knowledge of the truth in Jesus, the only knowledge of lasting worth. Now, the new man, Paul, would learn that by his humble obedience to a most simple command of Christ, and by his humbly submitting to sit and be taught at the feet of a common disciple of Jesus, he would be made possessor of things of infinite worth.

Friday, May 15th - Acts 9: 10-12

We see in these verses how the Lord works on both ends of a reconciled relationship. Not only does Jesus send Saul to Damascus as a humbled, receptive man, but the risen Savior also directs Ananias to find Saul and minister to him. The saving redemption of Christ reconciles men to God. It also reconciles men who had been mutual enemies to each other in mutual love.

Saturday, May 16th - Acts 9: 11

As a devout Pharisee, Saul had spent much of his life prior to his Damascus road encounter with Christ in what he thought was prayer. We may gather, however, that like the Pharisee, whose prayer Jesus contrasted with that of the publican (Lk. 18:9-14), Saul had prayed to himself rather than to God. Now that he was converted, he spoke directly to God in Christ for the first time in his life. Prayerful communion with God is one of the first evidences of regeneration. Sin closes not only our hearts, but our mouths to God. Our world, so full of men sinfully alienated from God, is full of the noise and clatter of people talking about all sorts of things. Yet, apart from the regenerating grace of the Lord, our world would be, as far as communication with God is concerned, what C. S. Lewis in one of his space trilogy books portrayed it to be—a silent planet.

Sunday, May 17th - Acts 9: 13, 14

By this response from Ananias, we gather that he was—like all vigilant saints should be—not ignorant of the tactics of his enemy (2 Cor. 2:11). He possessed detailed knowledge of the persecuting career of Saul in Jerusalem, and he knew why and with what warrant Saul had come to Damascus. Thus, this divine commission given to Ananias is similar to that which the Lord had given to Jonah, namely, to go to the enemies of the Church and minister to them. Yet, where Jonah was sent to pronounce divine judgment, Ananias was being sent to provide a blessing. We can therefore understand the initial reluctance of Ananias, for he no doubt thought Saul less a threat to the Church blind than seeing. However, here Ananias demonstrates his own blindness to the interposing and transforming power of God in the life of Saul. When the Lord further opens this disciple's eyes by His Word (vv.15,16), we find him going without hesitation or reservation to perform his God-given mission.

Monday, May 18th - Acts 9: 15, 16

Ananias could safely go to Saul, for the Lord had chosen the Pharisee by sovereign election, had redeemed him by the atonement of the cross, and had converted him by his regenerating power. In fact, Ananias was not being directed to go to Saul, the proud and threatening Pharisee, but to a man made new by and in Christ. Saul was chosen and converted by the grace and power of the Lord, as are all believers (Eph. 2:1-7). He was further chosen to be the conduit of mighty and extensive blessing in the Church from his day to the end of time. Ananias was to minister to one who would in turn minister to countless others by his preaching, prayers, and inspired writings.

Tuesday, May 19th - Acts 9: 15, 16

The Lord designates Paul to be His chosen vessel (skeu/oj). As such, he would instrumentally contain, carry, and distribute abroad the precious name of Christ and His gospel. He would carry the precious and transforming treasure to more extensive places than anyone before him. He would bring light to the Gentiles, declare the Prince of peace and King of kings before the rulers of the earth, all the while maintaining a zealous and loving care for the conversion of his fellow Jews (Rom. 10:10). All of this, Paul did through his missionary journeys, his preaching—even his imprisonments—and his writing (Rom. 1:15,16; Phil. 1:12-14).

Wednesday, May 20th - Acts 9: 15, 16

He who had persecuted Christ would hereafter be himself persecuted for Christ. As we noted with Stephen and with Jesus, God seems to treat His best instruments in the worst way. Yet, the trials Paul would bear would serve not for his destruction, but rather as refining lessons ordained for his good by his heavenly Master. Ananias was to do his God-assigned part in going to Saul to open his eyes. The regaining of his sight would not empower him as an enemy of the Church and opponent of Christ. Instead, Paul would be shown by the Lord the crosses he must bear (Lk. 9:23), the afflictions he must endure (2 Cor. 11: 23-33), and the tribulations through which he must pass to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Especially would Paul come to see the power and privilege which were his amidst such furnaces of affliction, enabling him to be more than a conqueror through the name of Christ for whom he would so greatly suffer (Rom. 8:35-39).

Thursday, May 21st - Acts 9: 17-20

As Saul obeyed the Lord and went to Damascus, so Ananias obeyed the Lord and went to Saul. At the bidding of Christ who redeemed these men from their sin and was raised for their justification (Rom. 4:25), these two erstwhile enemies of God and of each other are reconciled as brothers. Saul, who would have arrested and imprisoned Ananias prior to Christ's interposing, now with patient humility and gratitude submits to the faithful and fraternal ministry of Ananias. The results of that ministry are immediate and manifold: 1) these enemies embrace as brothers, 2) Paul is filled with the Holy Spirit, 3) Paul regains his sight, 4) is baptized, 5) then breaks his fast, 6) enjoyed fellowship with the disciples at Damascus, and 7) began what would be his extraordinarily fruitful career of proclaiming Jesus. The man once determined to destroy the name of Christ now begins to exult in and exalt that name, carrying it to the world.

Friday, May 22nd - Acts 9: 17

We may understand from how Ananias addressed him in this verse that Saul had not only been subdued by the Lord on the Damascus road, but that the proud Pharisee also had been regenerated and converted to Jesus. Our supposition of this rests upon Ananias addressing Saul as brother. So radically does the regenerating power of God in Christ transform men's hearts and reconcile their relationships, that we find Ananias using this fraternal address with all loving sincerity. No longer is Saul feared as a persecuting enemy, but rather he is embraced as a beloved member of the family of God. All enmity between people is reconciled when they are in Christ. Nor do we find that the Lord's disciples hold a grudge against their erstwhile persecutors. The repentant sinner is welcomed by the Lord's people as if he had never sinned against them; for in like manner has that repentant one been received by the Lord.

Saturday, May 23rd - Acts 9: 17, 18

Ananias says not that his mission was to lead Saul to faith in Jesus, but rather to serve as an instrument of divine healing and an agent whereby Saul would be filled with the Holy Spirit. A mere touch by the hand of

Ananias is recorded; there is no evidence of ceremony of any kind, including prayer. The word of this common disciple of Jesus—because that word was the faithful declaration of the words of Jesus—had authority and consequent power to effect the promised healing. Saul immediately regained his sight, and thus beheld the face of his first friend in Christ, a man whom he would have sought to persecute had Jesus not intervened. With his new eyes Saul saw what his ears and new heart had before apprehended, a beloved brother in Jesus.

Sunday, May 24th - Acts 9: 17, 18

If, at the word of Ananias, Saul regained his sight, then we must suppose that Saul likewise received the filling of the Holy Spirit at the word of this humble disciple. Those of charismatic persuasion do well to note that this filling was not accompanied by Saul speaking in tongues. Rather, we are told that something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he once more could see. No doubt the scales were applied to Saul's eyes by Jesus. As our Lord, by applying clay to the eyes of the man born blind (Jn. 9) initially made his blindness worse, so here Jesus covered for a time those eyes which were spiritually blind, only to remove the scales from the eyes after He removed the veil from Saul's heart. Thus, with his new heart and new eyes, Saul saw Ananias as his beloved brother. Saul also saw his own need for baptism, which signified the cleansing of his sinful guilt and shame by the blood of Jesus.

Monday, May 25th - Acts 9: 18, 19

Though Saul had been fasting, he rightly placed baptism as a priority before his eating physical food. It had been three days since Saul had seen or eaten (v.9). He was living much like a dead man during those three days, for his old nature had been slain by Christ. Now he receives sight, but it is new sight; he eats, but he derives his true nourishment from the living Word of God. As a new man Saul finds himself possessing new appetites, new powers of perception, new friends, a new status before God, and new direction for his life. For him, as for all who are in Christ, the old had passed away, and all things had become new, for he had become a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17).

Tuesday, May 26th - Acts 9: 19, 20

Saul's whole world had changed in Christ. He not only was blessed by the ministry of Ananias, and enjoyed consequent fraternal fellowship with him, but he enjoyed fellowship with the other disciples at Damascus. They whom he would have persecuted welcomed this new brother into their family of faith, while he gratefully and humbly partook of their loving embrace. Saul had sought and received a commission from the high priest to arrest and bring to Jerusalem any disciples of Jesus he found at Damascus (vv.1,2). That wicked commission had been over-ruled by Jesus sending the converted Pharisee into Damascus (v.6), there to join the Church and evangelize, thus making more disciples of Jesus. Surely we have such commission from our saving High Priest, to whom has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18-20).

Wednesday, May 27th - Acts 9: 19-22

Well might the world wonder at the conversion of one who, at the height of his fury and malicious determination against Jesus and His disciples, was so rapidly and radically transformed into a herald of Jesus, proclaiming the divinity of His person and the redeeming efficacy of His work. Nor was this change in Saul but a passing phase. We read of him growing in the grace, knowledge, and strength of the Lord. Saul's sinful zeal to destroy Christ had been completely and permanently changed into a holy, loving zeal to know Christ and to make Him known. Such zeal should be ours, as well.

Thursday, May 28th - Acts 9: 22

This verse reads as though Saul's time in the school of discipleship was short and full of rapid advance. However, when we read Gal. 1:15-18 we are led to understand that he stayed and studied in Damascus for

three years, followed by an additional fourteen years of study after a brief visit to Jerusalem. Growth in grace and knowledge takes place only as we take time and pains consistently to work out our salvation with most reverent regard for our Lord and Savior.

Friday, May 29th - Acts 9: 23-25

Saul not only made new friends in Christ, he also acquired new enemies. The Jews at Damascus were not content to be confounded by the force of the truth which Saul declared about Jesus. Accordingly, they who could not withstand the truth sought to silence this new herald of the truth. We perceive how wicked and hell-deserving sin essentially is when we see how Saul's opponents plotted nothing less than to kill him. He who declared to them the way of eternal life in Christ is therefore considered worthy not only of opposition, but also of death. We further notice how the wicked persevere in their malicious opposition to the effective servants of the Lord. Saul's enemies watched the city gates perpetually, looking for him in hopes of trailing him out on the Damascus road there to kill him. Let us learn from this never to be surprised when we experience vicious and persistent opposition against our testimony for Christ. But let us not fear our enemies. We should reckon that as He who gave new life to Saul on the Damascus road would not let the wicked kill him on that road, so, too, our way is secured by our sovereign Lord and good Shepherd (Ps. 23).

Saturday, May 30th - Acts 9: 23-25

Paul himself later refers to the incident recorded in these verses. In 2 Cor. 11: 23-33, where the apostle records how much he suffered for the name of Jesus (Acts 9:16), we learn that Saul's enemies in Damascus were not only the Jews, but also the civil authorities (2 Cor. 11:32,33). Hence, early in his Christian walk, Saul suffered from combined civil and religious persecution, as his Lord had suffered. Jews and Romans, or, in the case of Saul, Jews and the Damascene ethnarch under the Syrian king, Aretas, would usually be at odds with one another. Yet, against Christ and His servants they unite and cooperate. Indeed, all who are not for Christ eventually rise up together against Him and His servants. Yet, greater is He who is for and in us than the devil, who orchestrates men and nations against the Lord and His anointed.

Sunday, May 31st - Acts 9: 26

While Saul escaped from his enemies in Damascus, he was not immediately welcomed by those who were his brethren and should have been his friends in Jerusalem. It is understandable that the disciples in Jerusalem should have had their suspicions of Saul. Yet, although the account here in Acts reads as though little time had passed between Saul's conversion and his visit to Jerusalem, a reading of Gal. 1:15-18 alerts us to the fact that Saul had been converted for three years before he went to Jerusalem. Hence, the initial aloofness of the disciples there appears to have been based more on prejudice than prudence. Whether it was through the fury of his enemies or the failures of his brethren, Saul was trained by the Lord early to bear the cross, whereby he grew in communion with his crucified and risen Lord. If the Master suffered from both His enemies' malice and His friends' faults, His servants should expect to encounter a similar course of treatment.

Monday, June 1st - Acts 9: 26-27

By the majority of disciples in the church at Jerusalem, Saul was shunned as one who was a counterfeit believer. Prejudice more than prudence had so blinded this majority to the reality of Saul's conversion. Yet not all were so blinded. The body of Christ is not ruled by majorities, but by the truth of God in Christ. Thus, the situation required but one brother who had grace to see and tell the truth of what he knew of Saul. Barnabas was that one man, that key of access to the church in Jerusalem for Saul. The disciple whose name meant *son of encouragement* therefore served for both the encouragement of Saul and the edification of the Church by his introducing to her leaders the one who would be Christ's greatest apostle. One man equipped with the grace and truth of the Lord can and should speak and act so as to persuade hosts of believers whose minds and hearts are for a time blinded to the truth.

Tuesday, June 2nd - Acts 9: 28

The results of the reconciling efforts of Barnabas are reported in this verse. Saul was accepted by the brethren in Jerusalem. Far from this making him complacent, however, Saul continued declaring Christ boldly, as though he were a solo singer of the good news instead of a member of the choir. As he had, with singular distinction, sought to destroy the testimony of Christ prior to his conversion, so now, as a new creature in Christ, Saul with preeminent zeal works to broadcast the name of Jesus. Thus, he carried on the proclamation of Jesus in Jerusalem as he had done in Damascus. Such consistency in telling others of Christ is a hallmark of true faith and discipleship.

Wednesday, June 3rd - Acts 9: 29

From this verse we learn that more enemies and more threats of suffering arise for the man who was converted from being the enemy to being the friend of Jesus. The Hellenists referred to in this verse were Jews who lived amongst nations outside the territory of Israel. Saul himself was one such foreign Jew. As Stephen had earlier contended with such Jews (6:9ff), so now Saul contends with them. Not only do they refuse to be persuaded by Saul's declaration of the truth, but they determine to return death for doctrine. We must never underestimate the depth of hatred which the ungodly harbor against the Lord, His Word, and His servants.

Thursday, June 4th - Acts 9: 30

Behold how conversion to Christ changes men's alliances. Prior to his conversion, the disciples of the Lord had a dreadful enemy in Saul. Even after his conversion, those disciples harbored residual fear of Saul (v.26), and could well have thought themselves better off without him. Yet when they became convinced of the genuineness of his conversion, and when Saul's erstwhile friends became his foes due to his conversion to Christ and endeavors to reconcile them to God in Christ, these disciples embrace Saul as brethren lovingly concerned for his welfare. As the brethren in Damascus had helped Saul escape death threats (vv.23-25), so the brethren in Jerusalem helped him safely return to his home in Tarsus in Asia Minor.

Friday, June 5th - Acts 9: 30

Here the account in God's Word bids farewell to Saul for a time. We do not know how long he remained in Tarsus. Perhaps, according to Gal. 2:1 he was there for fourteen years. From those quiet years we shall find him emerging full of grace and power, mightily to champion the Savior's cause. May we similarly improve the quiet times of retreat granted to us by our Lord.

Saturday, June 6th - Acts 9: 31

The conversion of Saul turned his threats against the Church into faithful and fruitful labors for the Church. In this verse we learn that the Lord was not only at work in and through Saul, but also in and through other members of the body of Christ. Though Saul suffered death threats, the rest of the disciples enjoyed peace. They did not use that peace for personal ease and pleasure, but devoted themselves to growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Thusly were the saints edified. Furthermore, as the spiritual quality of their lives grew, so did the quantity of their membership. The source of this remarkable fruitfulness was their undisturbed and reverential devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, with consequent fortification in the Holy Spirit. Were our devotion more to Christ than to our comforts, we should enjoy more of both Christ and our highest comforts in Him.

Sunday, June 7th - Acts 9: 32-36

We last saw Peter heading back to Jerusalem from Samaria (8:25). Luke records for us two significant occasions in which Peter ministered in Samaria. Perhaps to his surprise and certainly to his delight, Peter found believers in the two places noted on this return trip--Lydda (v.32), and Joppa (v.36). We may surmise that saints in those two Samaritan cities were the fruit of the preaching of those scattered by the persecution (8:4), not least of whom was Philip (8:5,40). What these more common servants of Jesus had planted, the apostle Peter would water with a ministry of word and deed. If our movements are in accordance with our Lord's directions, we shall be similarly blessed with fellowship and used to bless our brethren in those places where our Lord leads us.

Monday, June 8th - Acts 9: 32, 33

Saints are not immune from suffering. Among the saints in Lydda was one in particular need. We are informed that Aeneas lay paralyzed for eight years. That he was a member of the assembly of believers appears evident from the way he is introduced in connection with the saints mentioned in v.32. The general connection between sin and physical malady is made clear from the biblical teaching with respect to Adam's fall and the resultant divine curse upon the earth. In terms of the personal connection between sin and suffering, the disciples of Jesus (including Peter) had inquired of their Master in the case of the man blind from birth (Jn. 9:1,2). In answer to that inquiry, Jesus opened a new perspective on suffering, telling us that it could serve for the manifestation of the gracious and glorious works of God (Jn. 9:3). It is from this new perspective in Christ that Peter approaches the suffering Aeneas, and it is from this perspective that we should likewise approach all suffering. Man's extremity is God's opportunity.

Tuesday, June 9th - Acts 9: 33, 34

Physical maladies are not only woeful in themselves, but they also typify the deeper spiritual malady of sin. For example, leprosy typifies the corruption of sin, while paralysis portrays the impeding, debilitating power of sin. Peter had witnessed Jesus healing paralyzed bodies. There was the man at Bethesda, looking for healing in a pool, to whom Jesus said, "Arise, take up your pallet, and walk." (Jn. 5:1-9). Then there was the man carried by his friends and lowered to Jesus through a hole in the roof of the house where He was teaching (Mk. 2:1-12). There Jesus addressed first the greater problem of sin, then the lesser problem of the man's bodily paralysis. Peter himself had been instrumental in curing a lame man prior to this encounter with Aeneas (Acts 2:1-8). These instances do not present us with a warrant to believe that Jesus in this life will heal all people of their physical paralysis. They rather point us to the wonderful truth that whereas all of the few people in the world who suffer paralysis may not be healed, all who are paralyzed by sin (and that includes us all), are by their faith in Jesus set free from their bondage and empowered to walk in newness of life. It is only when the lesser gift of physical healing is administered with holy and wise discretion that the greater gift of liberation from sin is not obscured, but remains the primary focus.

Wednesday, June 10th - Acts 9: 34

Aeneas is called by name. The Lord's grace and power are not promiscuously scattered, but are lovingly directed to His elect individuals. Peter speaks first in the indicative, telling what Jesus was doing, namely, at that very time healing the broken, immobilized body of Aeneas. Then Peter speaks in the imperative, telling the newly healed and empowered man what to do. He was first to arise, assuming the upright posture that befits a whole and empowered man. Then he was told to make his bed, that is to say, put it away to be used henceforth not as a permanent prison, but as a provision for his periodic rest. We find, in Rom. 6:1-13, such spiritual indicatives and imperatives speaking to and vanquishing our paralysis by sin.

Thursday, June 11th - Acts 9: 34, 35

We may rightly note the true aim of this miracle by our noting its effect. The miraculous healing applied to one man does not beget a clamor from others to have their own miraculous, physical cures. Rather, we read

that all who lived at Lydda and in the neighboring city of Sharon were prompted by divine, sovereign grace to hear the Lord addressing them, telling them to arise from their being dead in trespasses and sins and walk in new life and power. Their new walk was characterized as one leading ever away from the debilitating power of sin and toward the righteous life, holy power, and loving grace of the Lord Jesus.

Friday, June 12th - Acts 9: 36, 37

As Peter found saints in Lydda suffering, so he found saints suffering in Joppa. In Lydda the church suffered by the immobilized life of one of her members; in Joppa the church was deprived of one of her most beloved and lovingly useful servants due to death having claimed her. The loss in Joppa seemed irretrievable. It also presents us with a more overtly universal prospect than what was in Lydda. For whereas only some people suffer from paralysis of body, we all shall be obliged to face the last enemy, death. Yet, as we shall see, in Christ even this last enemy is made a servant for God's glory and man's good. We are told in Ps. 116:15 that the deaths of the Lord's people are precious in His sight. We should also learn from this incident with Tabitha how productive such dying becomes. By her going into death and being called out of it by Christ through His apostle, she would not only return to continue blessing her brethren, but she would be used to bring many in Joppa out of death into new life in Christ (v.42).

Saturday, June 13th - Acts 9: 36-38

We may note ordinary and extraordinary happenings in these verses. First, Tabitha's body was washed in accordance with the purification of the dead ritual prescribed by the Jewish Mishnah (Shabbath xxiii:5). Such washing was ordinary. Then she was placed, not as we would expect, in a tomb, but rather in an upper room. Finally, the brethren sent for Peter, telling him to hasten his coming to them. Did these saints expect the apostle to raise this woman from the dead? We should at least note that unlike Mary and Martha, who expected nothing from Jesus once their brother Lazarus had died (Jn. 11:21, 32, 37), these disciples show themselves prepared to believe that nothing hoped for in the name of the Lord is impossible.

Sunday, June 14th - Acts 9: 36-39

The pure, faithful, and loving character of Tabitha is drawn for us by the reference in vv.36,39 to her abounding good deeds. She used her powers of perception and production not to enrich herself, but to see and make practical provision for those in greatest need around her. As Mary did what she could to prepare the body of Jesus for burial (Mk. 14:8), so Tabitha did what she could to prepare the bodies of poor widows for living. Nor did her service spring from mere sentiment. She is designated a disciple, and thus we should clearly perceive that her deaconal service issued from her faith in and following of the Lord through the teaching of His Word and power of His Spirit. She was not naturally graceful, as her names, Tabitha and Dorcas (both meaning gazelle), suggest; she was made graceful by the Lord. Yet, here once again, as with Stephen, we observe that the choicest servants of Christ appear to be hardest used by Him. It is, however, through such hard and costly use that she became most fruitful.

Monday, June 15th - Acts 9: 39, 40

Peter went to Joppa at the insistent request of Tabitha's brethren. Did he know he would be instrumental in raising her from the dead? The apostle knew from his Old Testament studies that the Lord had used His servants before to do just that (cf., Elijah in I Ki. 17:17-24; and Elisha in 2 Ki. 4:18-37). Peter had also witnessed Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11:34-44). Yet, Peter's going simply to comfort and encourage these bereaved brethren would have justified the trip. It is often in the course of our taking small initial steps in our loving duty for the saints that we find ourselves led to do things of greater significance.

Tuesday, June 16th - Acts 9: 39, 40

If we compare the actions of Peter in these verses with the actions of Jesus when He raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead (Mk. 5:22-24, 35-43), we cannot help but conclude that Peter not only had been

privileged to see his Lord work that miracle, but also was in training to do something like it himself afterward. No doubt by divine intimation, Peter knew that time had come with the death of Tabitha. We never know when what we see our Lord doing we shall be called upon to do ourselves. Let us therefore be attentive students in Christ's school of discipleship. Jesus would not have us merely to be spectators, but servants, carrying out His will.

Wednesday, June 17th - Acts 9: 40

The first thing Peter did was to reduce the spectators, just as Jesus had done at the home of Jairus' daughter (Mk. 5:37,40). Then, unlike Jesus who proceeded directly to address the dead child, Peter prayed, as Elijah and Elisha had done (1 Ki. 17:20ff; 2 Ki. 4:33). Neither were those prophets sources nor was the apostle a source of life, and thus they had to make prayerful appeal to the Lord, who was Himself that life source (Jn. 11:25; 14:6). Very likely, since v.39 draws our attention to how the Lord had blessed His people through the merciful ministry of Tabitha, Peter cried in prayer to God, the source of mercy and life, asking Him to continue His merciful ministrations by restoring life to His now dead disciple. Such a prayer involved great faith, though it was all on Peter's part, none on Tabitha's part. True faith ever has as its focus both the glory of God and the good of His people, and ultimately, God alone knows when and how these twin goals will be best served.

Thursday, June 18th - Acts 9: 40

Peter first prays to God, then speaks to a corpse, calling upon the soul of Tabitha to return. We are reminded of Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, where the prophet spoke to the bones, then to the Spirit of God, resulting in life for the dead (Ez. 37). When we are in vital communion with the living God, we shall find ourselves attempting and being instrumental in the accomplishment of things impossible to men.

Friday, June 19th - Acts 9: 40, 41

These verses record in touching and vivid detail the working out of the Lord's amazing answer to the prayer of Peter. At the summons of Peter, the lifeless eyelids of Tabitha are lifted as her animating soul returned to her body in obedience to the apostle's summons. Nor was there any defect in her resuscitation. Her eyes regained full power of perception, as she focused them upon Peter. She then sat up, her whole body moving in obedience to the blessed command of life. Then, most touchingly, we are told that Peter extended his hand to assist her in her complete obedience to the call to arise. The apostle's hand was no doubt offered as a matter of tender consideration, more so than as an augmenting force to a gradually recovering body. Next, Peter employs his voice to call in the saints, in particular those widows who had most directly benefited from Tabitha's ministry and had most keenly felt her loss. The apostle presented Tabitha to them. They had presented her to him a dead body enshrouded in tokens and memories of her blessing service. But now he presented her to them as one who, by the mercy and power of God, had new physical life added to her new spiritual life--a life further dedicated to service for the glory of God of good of His people.

Saturday, June 20th - Acts 9: 40, 41

This incident with Tabitha does not give us a formula which mechanically and automatically works to restore physical life to dead saints. That such matters as the life and death of believers is in the hands of the Lord is evident by Peter's prayer to God. Nor do we find recorded in Scripture any case of the dead being raised except at the hands of Jesus and His prophets and apostles. Yet we should be most heartened to know that we may and should pray to the Lord to do things impossible to man if those things serve for His glory and the good of His people. Our Lord knows better than we when and how such twin goals will be best served. As the restored life of Tabitha served Christ and His Church, so did the death of Stephen. The administration of God's blessing may differ, but the essence is ever the same.

Sunday, June 21st - Acts 9: 42, 43

Whereas the life of Tabitha had blessed the saints, her death and miraculously being raised from the dead served to bring many out of their spiritual death and into new life in Christ. In her life, Tabitha made clothes for widows; through her death and new life she was instrumental in clothing many in robes of Christ's imperishable righteousness. Furthermore, her dying had occasioned Peter's coming to Joppa, where he stayed to nurture the new believers, and to be himself prepared for the next step in his ministry, namely from his ministry to Samaritans to his ministry to Gentiles.

This ninth chapter of Acts began with Saul's death threats against the Church. We have seen how Jesus transformed Saul into a champion of the faith. Now this chapter concludes by showing Christ triumphantly exercising His power over death (Rev. 1:18) by restoring to life one of His deceased disciples. Well might we all who are in Christ triumphantly address our last enemy with the words: "O death, where is your victory?"

Monday, June 22nd - Acts 10: 1, 2

The Book of Acts is not a collection of inspirational stories, nor is it primarily doctrinal and exhortative, as are the epistles. Acts records for us what the ascended Christ continued to do by the Holy Spirit and through His apostles. The theme verse of the book may be found in Acts 1:8, where Christ told His apostles that they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry the gospel to Jerusalem, and to all Judea, and to Samaria, and to all the world. From Acts 2-7, we learned how the gospel spread through Jerusalem and all Judea. In Acts 8, 9, we were told how Christ was preached in Samaria. From Acts 10 onwards, we are told how the gospel spread to the nations of the earth.

The reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in Christ is the major theme of Acts 10. Our Lord Jesus, having by His atoning death bridged the infinite gap between sinful man and the holy God, through the application of His redemption to Jew and Gentile bridges the gap which sin tore between man and his fellow man (Eph. 2:11-22). Jesus makes strangers and aliens into sons of God and members of one another. Nothing creates and sustains deepest, most loving and satisfying intimacy between people as does their mutual redemption in Christ.

Tuesday, June 23rd - Acts 10: 1, 2

These verses introduce Cornelius to us. We are told very briefly something about his location, his vocation, and his nationality. Cornelius was a Roman army officer, a commander of one hundred soldiers. He was part of a larger command--a cohort--composed of Italians and garrisoned at Caesarea. Thus, he was far from his native Italy in service of conquering for and keeping order in the Roman Empire. Though the centurions mentioned in Scripture are consistently commended (Mt. 8:5-13; 27:54), there would be no natural affinity between them and the Jews, whose nation the Roman soldiers occupied. Cornelius, however, was an exceptional army officer. He was personally pious, and his reverence for God extended through his household, manifesting itself in his making charitable contributions. He was a man of prayer. Though in all outward appointments this Gentile differed from Peter and other Jewish believers, essentially he had much in common with them, namely, the operations of divine grace in his life.

We may wonder how Cornelius became such a God-fearing man. Could Philip's ministry in Caesarea (Acts 8:40) have influenced him? Could the Jews, amongst whom he lived have impressed him? Whatever were the instrumental streams touching him, the grace of the Lord was the ultimate source of his godliness. Yet, Cornelius was not an Israelite and so was excluded from full participation in the life of the people of God. This defect, God would change. The work which divine goodness began would be completed by the arm of divine strength exerted through the apostle, Peter. The work would be done in a way to leave no doubt that God was the efficient cause of it.

Wednesday, June 24th - Acts 10: 3, 4

Divine grace upon grace is showered upon Cornelius. One day, at about 3:00 P.M., when he was least likely to be suspected of dreaming in his sleep or of any sort of confusion due to drink, this centurion was at prayer (v.30) and enabled to perceive an angel who had come to him from God. Such angelic visitations and ministrations for believers abound (Heb. 1:13, 14), but it is a rare privilege when the Lord enables a man to perceive them. That the angel called Cornelius by name makes clear that the centurion was the specified object of the angelic mission. Cornelius, we are told, responded with wonder and awe, yet, above all, with humble inquiry into what his orders might be. The army officer is commended, rather than commanded by the angel. We must understand that Cornelius was not commended for any natural goodness or self-effort, but rather as one who had with sincere gratitude responded to the divine grace which he had tasted and for which he hungered all the more. Cornelius returned thankful prayers and service as a memorial for the divine grace he had received. Our Lord is the only giver of all good gifts, and He takes note of our thankful returns or lack thereof.

Thursday, June 25th - Acts 10: 5, 6

In order that the completion of Cornelius' communion with God and with his fellow believers in Christ would be clearly seen to be a work of divine grace, and in no way the result of human worthiness or effort, the angel does not instruct the centurion to go to the apostle, but rather tells Cornelius to remain at home and send for Peter to come to him. Peter, we may recall, had previously been summoned to Samaria to pray for the converted Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8: 14,15). He had also been summoned to Joppa, there to be instrumental in raising Tabitha from the dead, and, from that, ushering many in Joppa from their death in sin into new life in Christ (Acts 9:42,43). Now Peter was to receive a summons to take the final and greatest step of gospel outreach, bringing Christ to Gentiles. In his ministry, therefore, the apostle was following the pattern of his Lord, who graciously sought and saved the lost.

Friday, June 26th - Acts 10: 5, 6

As in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26ff), so here we may wonder why the angel does not directly impart the gospel to Cornelius. However, we must note that in the economy of God, the angels--for all of their holy power and splendor--are not fit heralds of the gospel. To those who have themselves been redeemed by Christ is reserved the high privilege of testifying to others regarding the Redeemer. This arrangement fosters at the outset communion in love and gratitude between both herald and hearer of the gospel. Therefore, it must be Peter and no angel who tells Cornelius of Christ.

Saturday, June 27th - Acts 10: 7, 8

Cornelius displays the highest regard for the angelic instructions. Not only does he obey immediately, but also he sends a faithful soldier with the servants, so as not to entrust this vital mission to any but the best men. The timing and manner of our obedience to the oracles of God contained in Scripture should be no less exemplary. How we obey shows the degree of esteem we place upon what and whom we obey.

Sunday, June 28th - Acts 10: 9-16

Cornelius was at prayer when he received his angelic visitation (v.30). Peter, likewise was at prayer when he received his heavenly vision and instruction from the Lord. We shall always see things more deeply, clearly, and truly when we close our eyes and open our hearts and mouths to God in prayer.

Monday, June 29th - Acts 10: 9, 10

While Peter was at prayer, his physical appetite was stimulated and his spiritual perception heightened. He was in body, soul, and spirit prepared to receive the instruction and blessing of the Lord. While Peter would

serve as an instrument of divine blessing of the Gentiles, he would himself be blessed through his vision and his subsequent service. As Saul had scales removed from his eyes at the coming of Ananias (Acts 9:18), so Peter was about to have blindness and insensitivity removed from his mind and heart.

Tuesday, June 30th - Acts 10: 10-13

As Peter's physical hunger grew, he neither sought nor received physical food. Instead, he received a heavenly vision wherein a great sheet lowered a vast array of animals. Luke tells us that all kinds of animals were in the sheet, but for a Jew like Peter the significant difference between them was that some were clean and the rest were unclean according to the Old Testament ceremonial law (Lev. 11). More remarkable than what he saw was what Peter heard. A voice told him to bestir himself, kill and eat what he saw. The word translated, *kill*, has the connotation of sacrificial offering (qu/son). Thus, in effect, Peter is told to make a peace offering of these animals--both clean and unclean. In the peace offering, the priest received a portion, the worshipper received a portion, and a portion was burned on the Lord's altar (Lev. 3; 7:11-34). Yet the astonishing thing was that all of the animals shown--both clean and unclean--were to be so sacrificed. Was Peter, then, to violate God's holy law? Not when Christ had perfectly fulfilled that law. There is more liberty in Christ than we at first realize. Not only our foods, but also our fellowship should be more, not less, inclusive.

Wednesday, July 1st - Acts 10: 10-14

Peter declines the command of God. As he had done with Jesus at Caesarea Philippi, telling the Lord not to go to the cross (Mt. 16:21,22), so here in the face of the heavenly vision and voice Peter declares that he knows best. Poor Peter would not have the holy Son of God serve as a sacrifice; neither would he have unclean animals so serve. The man's hesitation appears quite reasonable, but not spiritual. Why should the perfect God/man be executed? And God's own Word forbids His people eating unclean animals. Yet it is precisely by the sacrifice of Jesus, who knew no sin, yet by the gracious divine arrangement was made to be sin (2 Cor. 5:21), that sinners can present themselves as holy sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1).

Thursday, July 2nd - Acts 10: 13-15

The heavenly voice told Peter to do something at which the apostle balked, thinking that he was taking his stand on godly principle. Therefore, the heavenly voice spoke again, instructing Peter and thus removing his scruple. Peter was not commended for his professed adherence to the details of the ceremonial law, but was rather informed that God had done something to render that ceremonial law to be no longer in effect. God had cleansed all of the animals shown in the vision. In fact, it never had been the case that some of those animals were inherently unclean and hence unfit for human consumption. Rather, the distinction was made by God for didactic purposes--to teach His people to respect the line between the holy and the profane. With the coming of Christ, such shadowy tutors were no longer necessary--a fact of which Jesus had spoken when He declared all foods clean by saying that nothing going into man's mouth could defile him, but rather what comes out (Mk. 7:14-23). Physical food can neither help nor hurt the soul. Only spiritual potencies of good or evil can do that.

Friday, July 3rd - Acts 10: 13-15

That the cleansing of all foods is intended by this vision is clear from the instruction of the heavenly voice, as well as from the voice of Jesus while He was on earth (Mk.7:19). Thus, we must not think that scruples over what foods should or should not be eaten ever represent true godliness. The Lord Jesus did not die to make foods clean. He died to make men clean, and to the pure, all things are pure (Rom. 14:20; Tit. 1:15).

Saturday, July 4th - Acts 10: 13-15

That the heavenly vision pointed to something higher than physical food is evident in the fact that Peter never did arise, kill, and eat the visionary animals. The apostle was being taught that he should not consider

any man or nation to be unholy or unclean on the sole basis of their not being Jews. Peter, in v.28, indicates that he made this connection between the sign and the thing sacrificed. Thus would the apostle begin to treat all men with a new respect, viewing no man or society as being beyond the pale of redemption in Christ. With how much greater respect should we treat our brethren, whom we are to accept as ones having actually been cleansed and made holy by God in Christ.

Sunday, July 5th - Acts 10: 16

The certainty of the lesson being taught to Peter was emphasized by its being repeated. A single warrant from God suffices to command our respect and obedience. However, our God is gracious and patient, instructing His children--the best of whom are slow to learn--with line upon line, precept upon precept. By what Jesus had said in Acts 1:8 and in Mt. 28:19,20 about His apostles carrying the gospel to all nations, Peter should have expected to be sent, eventually, to share Christ with Gentiles. Yet our Lord graciously condescends to the apostle's weakness hereby preparing him to act in fulfillment of the final stage of the great commission.

Monday, July 6th - Acts 10: 10-16

It is fascinating and instructive for us to consider the fact that our Lord prepared Peter to go to the Gentiles through a vision of food presented to the apostle when his physical appetite was stimulated. Though the highest ends for which the gospel would go to the ends of the world were for God's glory and for the blessing of the Lord's elect in all nations, the vision implies that Peter himself would be personally satisfied thereby. Indeed, by this we should learn that our most filling meals come through our feeding upon the holy fellowship which we enjoy with those who have been reconciled with God and with us in Christ. Far from evangelistic service exhausting us, it fills and invigorates us. To this phenomenon Jesus testified when He, being hungry and thirsty, brought salvation to the Samaritan woman at the well, and told His disciples that such fulfilling of the will of God was His true food (Jn. 4:34).

Tuesday, July 7th - Acts 10: 17, 18

Peter had seen a vision and heard a voice speak clearly and repeatedly to him--all from heaven. Yet, he was initially confused, rather than clarified, in his thinking. Things would come clear to the apostle, however, a step at a time. The hand of the Lord's providence in the sending of the servants of Cornelius and having them arrive exactly as Peter pondered the heavenly communication served to shed more light on the matter. Our understanding of the Word and the ways of God is a process which requires time and patience on our part. We may think it to have been simpler had the Lord plainly spoken to Peter, telling the apostle of the divine plans and purposes for Cornelius and the Gentiles. Yet even the plain speaking of our Lord is not easily or immediately understood by His disciples (Jn. 16:28-32). However confusing they may be initially, the Word and works of God always eventually manifest the wisdom, love, and power of the Lord.

Wednesday, July 8th - Acts 10: 19, 20

Although the heavenly vision and voice had perplexed him, Peter did not allow frustration to discourage him. Instead, we read of him pondering the heavenly communication. By such commendable meditation the apostle sets for us an example which we should follow. Let us never cease giving careful and reverent consideration to any Scripture or act of divine providence which may perplex us. God rewards such asking, seeking, and knocking to know His will, as we see from the Holy Spirit here speaking to Peter, telling him to go with the men whom the same Spirit had drawn to the apostle.

Thursday, July 9th - Acts 10: 19, 20

Peter did not dismiss the heavenly vision as a confusing provocation. Nor did he go downstairs to tell it to his friends and seek their advice regarding it. Instead, he remained by himself in prayer, seeking to know from God what God had begun to show him. Therefore, the Spirit of God precedes Peter's friends in

announcing the arrival of the men sent by Cornelius. The Spirit does more than merely announce that men are seeking Peter; He instructs Peter to go to the men and to go with the men without misgivings. Here the Lord removes further from the heart of Peter his Jewish prejudices against Gentiles. For God Himself had sent these men to Peter, and such divine initiative coupled with direct words of divine command for Peter to go with them, served to remove all doubt and reservation from the apostle's heart and mind. When we seek our understanding from God, and not men, we shall receive more than we ever ask or think to enlighten our understanding and empower our actions.

Friday, July 10th - Acts 10: 19-21

Peter, having sought understanding from God regarding the vision, receives sufficient light to take the next step of obedience. He goes down to the inquiring men. Since the apostle had been told that God Himself had superintended their coming, Peter rightly reckoned that his understanding would further clarify if he asked them the reason for their coming. The Lord enables us to know when to ask, and which men to ask, so that we may receive not deeper confusion but clearer understanding of the divine will and our duty.

Saturday, July 11th - Acts 10: 22, 23a

The servants of Cornelius speak highly of their master. What they relate concerning him are not marks of natural endowment and attainment so much as marks of divine grace. That Gentiles would characterize a man as being God-fearing could be viewed with suspicion. However, when they add that Cornelius was well spoken of by the Jews, Peter is assured that the centurion had reverence for the true and living God rather than some false god. Finally, the fact that Cornelius had been instructed by an angel to send for Peter is mentioned, along with the expectation that the apostle would have a message for Cornelius. The expectation of a message was not mentioned in vv.4-6, but we learn in Acts 11:13,14 that Cornelius had, in fact, been told to expect such a message. Nor was Peter told, in his vision, anything about visiting Gentiles or giving them a message. But he who was an apostle (i.e., one sent with a message) knew what message he would deliver, namely, the only message worth having or giving, salvation in Christ.

Sunday, July 12th - Acts 10: 23

From v.3 we know that Cornelius had his angelic visitation at 3:00 P.M. From the fact that Joppa was about 35 miles from Caesarea and the fact that the servants of Cornelius arrived in Joppa just after Peter's noon prayers (v.9), we may gather that the servants made their trip of 10-12 hours in two parts. Mostly likely they set off in the late afternoon, traveled the 10 miles to Apollonia, and there spent the night, rising very early to arrive in Joppa the next day by noon. Clearly these servants wasted no time reaching Peter, but the considerate apostle insisted that they recuperate before their return to Caesarea. He who had been so rash and impetuous, now displays how well he had learned the lesson Jesus taught about the spirit being willing, but the flesh being weak. We can only surmise how much more Peter learned of Cornelius from the time he spent with the centurion's servants, and how much those servants learned about Peter's heavenly Master and mission.

Monday, July 13th - Acts 10: 10: 23

Peter alone was summoned, but Peter did not go alone to Caesarea. A deputation from the Church in Joppa accompanied the apostle who had so blessed them by his stay amongst them (Acts 9:36-43). In Acts 11:12 we learn that Peter was accompanied by six brethren from Joppa. Saints should generally endeavor to serve the Lord in fellowship with other saints. As Jesus Himself sought the fellowship of three of His disciples during His prayer in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37), so Christ's apostle welcomes the fellowship of those six on his mission. In the providence of God, those six would serve as witnesses, confirming what Peter did and what God did through Peter.

Tuesday, July 14th - Acts 10: 24

The preparatory grace of God in Cornelius is evident in this verse. The centurion, with submissive humility and with spiritual hunger and expectation, is found waiting for Peter's arrival. Nor does Cornelius wait alone. In obedience to the angel's instruction (as we learn from Acts 11:13,14), the centurion was waiting with his household for Peter and his message of salvation. The good tidings of salvation are designed by God to be shared. The inheritance we have in Christ does not diminish as those possessing it increase in number. Indeed, the glory of God is magnified and the blessing we have in Him is multiplied as others join us in partaking of such heavenly inheritance.

Wednesday, July 15th - Acts 10: 25, 26

That Cornelius sent for Peter, and, with his relatives and friends, humbly awaited the apostle's arrival, indicates a preparatory work of divine grace in Cornelius and his household. That the grace was preparatory rather than consummatory of salvation is evident from the fact that Cornelius endeavors to worship Peter. The apostle gently corrects the centurion's superstitious action. While Christ would have us honor others in His body (Phil. 2:3,4), He would not have us venerate them. Thus, Peter rightly declines to receive that worship which belonged alone to God, and which, when offered to Jesus, the holy Son of God, He Himself never disclaimed (Mt. 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9,17; Jn. 9:38; 20:28).

Thursday, July 16th - Acts 10: 27

As, on the day of Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus had gathered, awaiting the promised Holy Spirit, so, in the house of Cornelius, Peter found many Gentiles assembled, awaiting a message of salvation (Acts 11:14). Whether Jew or Gentile, those hungering for the blessing of salvation and the fullness of the Holy Spirit will always be satisfied (Mt. 5:6). Those wanting the Lord must learn to wait. Those who wait on the Lord shall never want.

Friday, July 17th - Acts 10: 28

Peter reminds his Gentile hearers of something of which, by their treatment at the hands of Jews, they were well aware. Jews avoided any more association with Gentiles than was absolutely necessary. It was not that such association was against God's law. The term translated *unlawful* (avqe,miton) has the connotation of one's violating custom more than promulgated law (no,moj). It is right to violate wrong customs. Jesus did so when He spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:9). Peter declares that he had learned the lesson that Christ transcends cultures, customs, and unwarranted social taboos.

Saturday, July 18th - Acts 10: 28, 29

Peter said that God had shown him not to consider any person as being beyond the pale of salvation. What had been shown Peter in the vision (vv.11-15) was that God had cleansed all foods. Yet, Peter rightly knew that there was greater import to the vision. The apostle's eyes were further opened by the Holy Spirit telling Peter to go with the servants of Cornelius (vv.19,20). Thus Peter informed his audience that it was the teaching of God more than their summons which had resulted in his being amongst them. But Peter then asked them the reason for their having summoned him. Could the apostle not have known that he was sent to give these Gentiles answers--THE answer, namely, salvation in Christ--and not to ask them questions? Perhaps Peter did not at this point completely understand the vision. He does not declare his full understanding until v. 34. Perhaps the apostle meant to ascertain the expectations of his audience. Notwithstanding the fact that Christ breaks down divisive prejudices between people, our call remains one to feed the hungry, not to cast pearls before swine. Jesus Himself often asked His hearers what they sought from Him, knowing that He would give them Himself and all things with Himself (Mt. 9:27-29; 16:13-15; 20:29-34).

Sunday, July 19th - Acts 10: 30a

It took Cornelius' servants less than 21 hours to reach Peter in Joppa (cf., vv.3,9). It took Peter and his company several days to return to Cornelius. Though Peter came to Cornelius without misgivings (vv.20, 29), he did not seem to be as urgent in his mission to give the gospel as were Cornelius and his household to receive it. Lack of misgivings is not the same as eagerness or zeal. When the Lord's mercy showers forth, the fields ripen to harvest sooner than the laborers realize. Let us not be slow in our sharing our testimony to Christ with a needy world.

Monday, July 20th - Acts 10: 30-33

Cornelius relates almost verbatim the account given in vv. 3-6. He simply adds a notice of the splendor of the angel who visited him. From Acts 11:14 we may suppose that Cornelius was told more by the angel than is recorded in either vv.3-6 or in vv.30-32. In v.33 of our passage Cornelius rightly deduces that they all were gathered together by God and stood before God, and that he and his family and friends were to hear and heed all that Peter had been commanded by the Lord. The Gentile centurion professes nothing less than a hunger for the Word of God through Christ's apostle. Such hunger indicated the stimulation of divine grace, and what God had so begun to do in these Gentiles, He would complete through His servant, Peter, and by His Holy Spirit.

Tuesday, July 21st - Acts 10: 34, 35

In view of the spiritual hunger manifested by these Gentiles--a hunger for the holy Word of God--Peter recognized and understood fully the import of his own earlier hunger and vision. God had prepared these Gentiles to be cleansed by their reception of salvation in Christ. Peter could not and would not withhold from them the effectual means of such cleansing. Thus, with spiritual scales taken from the eyes of Peter's heart, as something like scales had been removed from the newly converted Saul, the Apostle Peter prepared to deliver what he had been commanded by the Lord. That command had been given Peter not in his vision, but in Mt. 28:19,20 and Acts 1:8. The extensiveness of the Lord's commands is always greater than we at first see, but our Lord patiently opens our eyes to see more truly the vastness of His grace.

Wednesday, July 22nd - Acts 10: 36

Cornelius and those gathered with him were expecting to hear a message of salvation (11:13,14)--a message which God had commanded Peter to deliver (v.33). Yet nowhere in this episode are we told that God gave Peter specific instructions regarding a message. The Lord did not need to do so. He had commanded Peter to preach the gospel (Mt. 28:19,20; Acts 1:8), and had commissioned him as an apostle to proclaim the good news. Therefore, when Cornelius asked for a message, Peter delivered the only message worth sharing. The apostle opened his mouth and spoke of reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Peter knew that the most faithful and fruitful way to give an account for the hope within him (1 Pet.3:15) was to speak not of his own feelings, but of the facts of redemption through Jesus.

Thursday, July 23rd - Acts 10: 36

Luke usually writes in very fine Greek, but the original language in this verse is rather awkward. Scholars have noted this feature and have sought to smooth out the syntax. However, few have ventured to account for such rough prose coming at this point from the pen of such a fine writer. Could it be that Luke, in fact, faithfully represents something of the surprise Peter experienced at discovering that God had summoned him to Caesarea to preach Christ to Gentiles? The earthen vessel here may be showing its roughness, but that in no way affects the glory and power of the treasure contained within and conveyed to these Gentiles.

Friday, July 24th - Acts 10: 36

Peter speaks of the Word of God which became flesh in Jesus Christ. The inspired message of God given first to Israel, culminated in the coming of the man, Jesus Christ. When Peter says that the divine Word was preached, he informs his hearers that the redeeming revelation of God is neither mere spectacle nor subject

for debate, but rather authoritative proclamation. What is proclaimed is peace--not calm, subjective feelings, but objective reconciliation between the holy God and sinful man. Such reconciliation was wrought through the saving work of Jesus, who is Lord as well as Savior.

Saturday, July 25th - Acts 10: 36-38

Peter, in these verses, stresses the historicity of Jesus Christ. The gospel is not a collection of principles, nor is it composed of the fancies or philosophical reflections of men (2 Pet. 1:16). It is, rather, good news about glorious facts. The message of salvation is about a Man and His divinely appointed and accomplished work. The Man, Jesus, was truly human, having lived in time and space and having affected that creational continuum. He was appointed by God the Father and empowered by God the Holy Spirit. His work consisted of a negative dimension, namely, destroying the works of the devil, and thus releasing those held captive by him. The positive dimension was that Jesus consistently in thought, word, and deed did good and spread that good abroad. The person and work of the Savior form the heart of the message of salvation.

Sunday, July 26th - Acts 10: 39

The apostle does not speak from second hand knowledge. He declares that he and the other apostles personally witnessed the life and ministry of Jesus. Yet, he goes on to say that their witness extended most significantly to the death of Jesus. The public ministry of our Lord, which began with His submitting to be baptized by John the Baptist, culminated with Jesus shedding His blood. Whereas the baptism was a sign, the death of Jesus was the atoning substance through which sinful men could be reconciled to the holy, living God. As Jesus vicariously submitted to the rite of the sign, so He wrought the substance, bearing vicariously in Himself the penalty due for His people's sins. Through His having borne the curse of a criminal's death, His people inherit the blessing of their being cleansed to pure innocence before God. The life of Jesus was uniquely significant, but His death was of uniquely paramount significance.

Monday, July 27th - Acts 10: 39,40

Peter hastens to underscore the uniquely paramount significance of the death of Christ by speaking also of the resurrection of Christ. All men die, and many have been executed as criminals. Yet Jesus claimed that His death was voluntary, not compulsory as it is for all other men who have forfeited their lives due to their sin (Jn. 10:17,18). He further claimed that by His death He would save his people from their sins (Mt. 20:28). Any person could easily make such exalted claims, but only one person in all of history could do so truly, namely, the God/Man, Jesus Christ. The resurrection validated Christ's claims as nothing else could do. Whereas God could never countenance a person making such claims in lying or deceiving manner, He honored and vindicated Jesus and all of his claims by raising Him from the dead.

Tuesday, July 28th - Acts 10: 40,41

Whereas the resurrection of Jesus served to validate the claim that He died an atoning death, the fact that His resurrection could be attested to by credible witnesses served to validate the objective reality of the resurrection. Peter was one such witness, who saw, heard, and touched the resurrected Christ (Lk. 24:36-43; Jn. 21). Besides Peter, there were the other apostles to whom the resurrected Jesus also appeared. In fact, the Apostle Paul declares that the resurrected Jesus appeared to more than five hundred (1 Cor. 15:6). The death and resurrection of Jesus not only accomplished salvation, but, by divine arrangement, His resurrection received sufficient authentication through the testimony of so many credible witnesses that there should be no doubt that this good news of salvation accomplished in Christ is fact, not fancy.

Wednesday, July 29th - Acts 10: 42

The apostles, who were witnesses of the resurrection appearances of Jesus, were not mere spectators of that glorious reality. They were commissioned by the resurrected Christ to be His heralds, proclaiming to the world the gospel. They were to testify with that solemnity which comports with the reverent gratitude due

to God for so great a salvation, and the sobering fact that through the proclamation of the gospel men are called to accountability before the One who will be their saving Advocate or their avenging Judge. How shall any escape who neglect so widely published, so certainly accomplished, and so invitingly gracious good news?

Thursday, July 30th - Acts 10: 43

It was not only through the credible testimony of living apostles that the claims of Christ were verified. All of the prophets, so revered by the Jews and respected even by Gentiles, have in Scripture borne collective and consistent witness to the truth that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Lord. Both apostles and prophets portray Christ as the One who has accomplished salvation. They also present Christ as the object of saving faith, whereby those who believe find themselves to be subjects of the sovereign application of salvation. The good news is seen to be even better when we are told that we may participate in its glorious results.

Friday, July 31st - Acts 10: 42,43

A gracious transformation takes place between these two verses. In v.42, Jesus is presented as convicting Judge. However, in v. 43 He is presented as redeeming Savior, who takes away sins and so establishes reconciling peace (v.36) between God and man. This great difference results from the exercise of saving faith on the part of repentant sinners. Saving faith looks only to Christ as He has been revealed in God's Word, and finds Him to be One who neither accuses nor condemns, but rather One who carries away the believer's sins. Without such faith, all men remain united to their sin and must face divine condemnation. With such faith, believers are separated from their sin and are united to the Holy Son of God, who is the Beloved of the Father. What an infinite and eternal difference such faith makes!

Saturday, August 1st - Acts 10: 44

The Samaritans received the gift of the Holy Spirit when Peter and John prayed for them and laid hands upon them (8:14-17). Here we see that the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles as Peter preached to them. From these accounts we should learn that those instruments which the Lord effectually uses for the conversion of sinners are not the programs of men, but rather prayer and the preaching of God's Word. No wonder, then, that another apostle, Paul, charges pastors to eschew the gimmicks people demand for the gratification of their senses, and, instead, to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

Sunday, August 2nd - Acts 10: 44

The Gentiles gathered with Cornelius were converted and filled with the Holy Spirit while Peter spoke. What Peter spoke were not just any words, however considerately and respectfully they may have been phrased. The apostle spoke THE Word (to.n lo.gon), namely, the message of the person and work of Christ, apprehended by faith, and resulting in remission of sins. Indeed, it was as Peter was speaking the final words (r`h,mata) of this message that the Holy Spirit fell upon the listeners. Peter did not focus on the perceived needs and surface desires of his hearers. He did not present Christ as the giver of pleasant feelings and prosperous circumstances or the one who affirms men, refines men, and makes them more competent to live in this fallen world. Peter proclaimed Christ as the Savior from sin, death, and divine condemnation. This is the message inspired by the Holy Spirit, honored by the Holy Spirit, and used by the Holy Spirit effectually to call sinners to forgiveness and new life in Christ.

Monday, August 3rd - Acts 10: 45, 46

In these verses, we may note two significant things. First, Peter and the Jewish delegation of believers with him were amazed to witness the gift of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon the Gentiles. Had they more fully understood their Old Testament, they should not have been so amazed (cf., Ps 87; Is. 49:6; 52:15). How many depths of truth yet lay as buried treasure for us due to our superficial grasp of Scripture?

The second thing we should note is that which inspired the Jews' amazement, namely, that the Gentiles' receiving of the Holy Spirit was evidenced by their speaking in tongues. Through this, Peter and the other Jews perceived that God had cleansed these Gentiles in the same manner as they--believing Jews--had experienced. It was not by the rituals of the ceremonial law, but by the living, indwelling Holy Spirit that these Jews and Gentiles were alike cleansed by God. It should never fail to cause us to marvel when we see how our God continues to regenerate and sanctify by His Holy Spirit those who were dead in sin.

Tuesday, August 4th - Acts 10: 45, 46

When Peter preached to the Jews in Acts 2:38, he called upon them to repent, to believe in Christ, to be baptized, and to receive the Holy Spirit. While all of these elements are implied in the experience of Cornelius and his Gentile family and friends, it is notable that their experience was just like that which the disciples in the upper room had experienced on Pentecost. This similarity neither escapes Peter's notice nor his mention (11:15; 15:8). Through this initial application of redemption to the Gentiles, our God has irrevocably and indisputably put believing Jews and believing Gentiles on equal footing in Christ (Eph. 2:11-18).

Wednesday, August 5th - Acts 10: 47, 48

The apostle orders baptism, despite there being no explicit mention of these Gentiles professing faith in Christ and committing themselves to repentant living for Christ. However, Peter is not acting in irregular and rash fashion. Rather, he rightly recognized that when the Holy Spirit indwells a person, it is the case that the Spirit has wrought faith and repentance in that person. Peter's report, given subsequent to this event, makes this clear (11:17,18). Nor do we find that Spirit baptism does away with the need for water baptism, which was instituted by Christ (Mt. 28:19). The rite of water baptism is the appropriate response to the reality of the sovereign act of the Lord's regenerating and filling a person with the Holy Spirit.

Thursday, August 6th - Acts 10: 48

The Gentiles who, by the direction of God, had summoned Peter to come to Caesarea, ask the apostle to remain with them for a time. The reason is not simply so that they might be taught the necessary rudiments of the faith by the apostle. Their request for Peter to remain, and Peter's agreeing to do so, demonstrate a mutual gratitude to God for His redeeming mercy spread abroad so graciously, and a newly formed mutual respect between these Jews and Gentiles who had been made loving brothers in Christ. Once again, therefore, we see how the God who reconciles men to Himself in Christ, also reconciles to each other men who by their sins had been estranged from one another. It is beautiful to see the fellowship of saints who behold in one another the workmanship of God (Eph. 2:10) which He has cleansed in Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is infinitely more beautiful to experience such precious, pleasing, and edifying fellowship.

Friday, August 7th - Acts 11: 1

That which resulted from Peter's preaching in the house of Cornelius spread not only through Caesarea, but throughout Judea. The apostles and the brethren of Judea spoken of in this verse should have rejoiced in the realization that the exercise of God's saving grace had so brought Gentiles from death and darkness into life and light, and from their alienation from these Jewish believers into loving reconciliation with them. Accordingly, the Jewish brethren should have praised and thanked God. However, this verse indicates that the grace of God was not so much in sight of those Jews as was the response of the Gentiles to Peter's preaching. When men lose sight of the working of God, focusing instead upon Christ's workers and the fruit of their labors, suspicion and cynicism can grow in the place which should be occupied by gratitude and godly praise.

Saturday, August 8th - Acts 11: 2, 3

Rather than the believers in Jerusalem praising God for His redeeming of the Gentiles, they criticize Peter, the servant of God, for his instrumental part in the blessing of the Gentiles. It should humble us to note that even believers, in whom God's Holy Spirit dwells, can misconstrue the spreading of divine blessing. Thanks be to God that He does not require or wait to obtain our full understanding or permission before he spreads His saving grace.

Sunday, August 9th - Acts 11: 2, 3

God had cleansed the believing Gentiles, and yet these Jerusalem believers were treating them as unclean and criticizing Peter for his having gone to them. Their criticisms reveal their total ignorance of the working of God. Thus, they castigate Peter as though he had defiled himself through his social intercourse with the Gentiles. When we speak without knowledge of the Scriptures or of the grace and power of God, we perceive dangers and defilements where there are none, and we criticize what we should bless.

Monday, August 10th - Acts 11: 2, 3

These critical, believing Jews should have known from the Old Testament prophecies, from the great commission (Mt. 28:19,20), and from the words of the resurrected Christ in Acts 1:8 that the gospel would spread to and savingly claim Gentiles. Yet, even Peter needed a vision from God to overcome decisively his prejudice against Gentiles. As Peter goes on to relate that vision and all the details of his visit to Cornelius, the brethren would, as it were, see that same vision through Peter's words, and so perceive and accept the work of God. Meanwhile, we should note that our Lord demonstrates His willingness to bear the cost of temporary tension, complaint, and conflict in His Church in order to strengthen and enlarge His body. When we experience spiritual growing pains, we should not concentrate upon the pains, but rather upon the growth and the God who gives all true growth.

Tuesday, August 11th - Acts 11: 4

Peter was neither personally offended nor defensive in response to those taking issue with him. He knew well from personal experience that had it not been for the heavenly vision and voice he received in Joppa, he, too, would have remained prejudiced against the Gentiles. What Peter, prior to his vision, and what the poor Jerusalem believers were leaving out of their reckoning was the Lord and His gracious plans and sovereign, redemptive power. Therefore, Peter, who had his eyes opened by the instruction of the Lord, patiently and faithfully explains all that God had done in him and through him with respect to his ministry to Cornelius and the Gentiles. We may be challenged when we do the work of the Lord, but we will not be stopped in such work, for the Lord will not be stopped.

Wednesday, August 12th - Acts 11: 5-10

Peter faithfully recounts his experience in Joppa. He tells of the heavenly vision, the heavenly voice, his own initial reluctance, the correction of the Lord, and the emphasis the lesson received through its repetition. Prior to this telling, none of the Jerusalem believers beheld the heavenly vision, nor for that matter, have any believers in any age of Church history. But through this telling, they and we behold the very vision, as it were, through Peter's eyes and by the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the words of this account. The plain and faithful telling of God's revelation is God's revelation to those hearing such a telling. Let us never, therefore, in our day, lament the lack of contemporary visions we receive from the Lord. We have, in fact, all of such visions ever before us in Scripture.

Thursday, August 13th - Acts 11: 11, 12

Peter here tells how the Spirit of God sanctioned his accompanying the servants of Cornelius, whose visit to Peter had been orchestrated by the Lord. He further relates how six brethren from Joppa accompanied him, not only to the house of Cornelius, but also to the church in Jerusalem as corroborating witnesses to his actions, to God's actions, and to Peter's report. Hence, by a perfect number (six men and one apostle) of

credible men, the Lord confirms His work amongst the Gentiles so as to facilitate all future reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in Christ.

Friday, August 14th - Acts 11: 13, 14

As the Spirit of God overcame Peter's reluctance to go with and to Gentiles, so an angel of the Lord awakened in those Gentiles expectation of Peter's coming to them and his proclamation of salvation to them. The planning, presence, and power of God marked every stage of the matter in question. The believers in Jerusalem, of course, did not see all of this with their own eyes, but they were made to see it through the words of the apostle. Thus the critics were made to realize that their complaint was against their God, and not against the man, Peter.

Saturday, August 15th - Acts 11: 15

This verse tells how the Holy Spirit consummated the ministry of Peter amongst the Gentiles. It was not, as his critics charged, that Peter was defiled by his eating with Gentiles, but, rather, that the Gentiles were cleansed, having been justified by faith in Christ as the fruit of their having been sovereignly regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God. Peter stresses also that the Gentile experience of conversion and being Spirit-filled was in no way inferior to the experience of the Jewish believers on Pentecost. The apostle declares that the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles just as He came upon Peter and the other disciples in the upper room. Therefore, Gentile initiation into and status within the kingdom of God are in every way equal to Jewish initiation and status--a point for which most of us should be exceedingly grateful to God.

Sunday, August 16th - Acts 11: 16

When Peter saw the substance of Spirit baptism manifested amongst the Gentiles to whom he preached, he says that he recalled the word of the Lord (Acts 1:5) regarding that baptism. Peter is confessing that which all believers experience, namely, that whereas the Word of God alone enables us rightly to interpret God's works, it is the divine works which, when we perceive them, drive us back to a deeper and truer understanding of the Word. There is only one baptism, by which alone Jew and Gentile are cleansed in God's sight, and that is baptism with the Holy Spirit of God (Eph. 4:4-6).

Monday, August 17th - Acts 11: 17, 18

Peter drives the defense for his actions to its unanswerable conclusion. Those who began by criticizing the man, Peter, find at the last that they were in dispute against God. Yet, the fact that Peter's critics were mistaken and not maliciously driven is evident in their submissive acceptance of what God had done amongst the Gentiles. Therefore, they confess that the Gentiles' reception of the Word of God (v.1) was a response of their repentant turning from their sins to the Lord--a repentance prompted by the Lord having sovereignly regenerated them by His Spirit (v.15).

Tuesday, August 18th - Acts 11: 17, 18

What Peter says in v.17 and what the Jewish brethren say in v.18 may sound like reluctant acquiescence on their part. But Luke tells us that they all not only recognized and accepted the working of God in the conversion of the Gentiles, but they glorified the Lord for that work as well. Once we begin to glorify God for His rich and manifold grace, it will soon follow that we rejoice in Him and His workmanship in others as well.

Wednesday, August 19th - Acts 11: 19-21

What the Lord did for the Gentiles through Peter was but the pledge and first fruits of immeasurable blessing to follow. The believing Jews, though their practice had been to preach the Word to fellow Jews,

soon realized that what Peter did was an initiation and example to be followed. Thus, what began by God working through an apostle, was carried on through faithful brethren whose names we do not even know. The Lord blessed their faithful labors with fruit, just as He had done with Peter's service. From this, we should be encouraged to enter and serve likewise in the ranks of those who declare the gospel to the glory of God and for the good of men.

Thursday, August 20th - Acts 11: 19-21

Let us be certain to note that the continued spread of the gospel, not only to Jews through Jews, but also to Gentiles, resulted from the persecution scattering believers. That which Satan and the wicked Jews intended through such persecution, namely, the stopping of Christian testimony and consequent conversion of sinners to Christ, did not simply fail, it actually served to spread the reconciling grace of God to new regions and to new peoples. Truly our God presses all things--even attacks which threaten to destroy us--into the service of His glory and of our good (Rom. 8:28).

Friday, August 21st - Acts 11: 20, 21

The Gentile conversions, which began in the Caesarean home of the godly Cornelius, were not limited to that spiritually well-prepared soil. We are told that many Gentiles were converted through the faithful testimony of ordinary believers in Antioch. The city of Antioch was situated on the Orontes River in what is now Syria. It was, after Rome and Alexandria, the third largest city of its day. It was also a city notorious for its moral corruption and sexual laxity. The satirist, Juvenal, speaks of "the sewage of the Syrian Orontes has for long been discharge into the Tiber." However, a new chapter in Antioch's history was opening as the gospel was preached there and entered into the hearts and homes of so many of its citizens. For it was to be in erstwhile vile Antioch, not in Caesarea, that Gentile Christianity fully blossomed. Our gracious Lord hereby demonstrates that no persons or places are so far gone in sin as to be beyond the redeeming reach of His sovereign grace and power. Nor has our Lord's power to transform the worst sinners and the worst cities diminished in our day. Let us never shrink from proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ in any context.

Saturday, August 22nd - Acts 11: 22

The news about Gentile conversions in Antioch did not disturb the church at Jerusalem as did the news of Gentiles having been visited by Peter. What ordinary believers had done in Antioch was not challenged as had been the actions of an apostle. The reason is that Peter, by his obedience to God, and by his patient persuasion of the brethren at Jerusalem, served to pave the way for regular ministry to the Gentiles. The apostle bore the cost of his rendering pioneering service. He endured initial opposition and dealt with it faithfully and graciously so that his brethren would see the hand of God at work amongst the Gentiles and rejoice in, rather than criticize, that divine work. Accordingly, in response to this news of Gentile conversions at Antioch, the church at Jerusalem took no issue, but, instead, sent Barnabas, one of her most gracious members, to encourage the new babes in Christ.

Sunday, August 23rd - Acts 11: 22-24

The church at Jerusalem determined to send one of her members to Antioch in response to the news that Gentiles in large numbers (v.21) were there being converted to Christ. Those bringing the gospel to such Gentiles were not apostles, but ordinary believers from Cyprus and Cyrene. It is apparent that the mission of the man sent to Antioch from Jerusalem was one of evaluating the work and offering to it encouraging guidance. It was vital that the right man be sent on such a mission. In the providence of God, it was Barnabas, himself a Cyprian Jew (Acts 4:36), who was chosen. Barnabas was a man of deep and wide sympathies and proven character. He constantly lived up to his name, which means, *son of encouragement*. In the person of Barnabas the believers at Jerusalem were sending to their new-born brethren at Antioch neither criticism nor poor consolation, but a most apt and precious offering.

Monday, August 24th - Acts 11: 23, 24

These verses inform us of the reaction of Barnabas to his witnessing the work of God in Antioch. Barnabas saw no cause for concern or criticism at Antioch. Instead, he saw the grace of God prevailing in the lives of many there. Barnabas had keen power to detect the workings of divine grace, because he was himself a man full of the goodness and graciousness of God's Holy Spirit, and one who possessed and exercised a strong faith. What Barnabas saw with his spiritual eyes gave him cause only to rejoice. He whose selfish ambition had been so thoroughly mortified by divine grace, and who was filled with the love, joy, and peace of the Holy Spirit, beheld the gracious power of his heavenly Father at work through the labors of the dear Cyprian and Cyrenian believers and amongst their Gentile converts. Therefore, Barnabas not only rejoiced at what he saw, he rightly gave his encouragement to both workers and their work, resulting in ever greater numbers being brought to the Lord. Those most able to perceive and desirous to affirm the work of the Lord will not go unemployed in fruitful labor for the kingdom of God.

Tuesday, August 25th - Acts 11: 23, 24

The Word of God records the precise form of the encouragement offered by Barnabas. Words of approbation and loving acceptance no doubt were given to the new believers. However, the most loving and lasting encouragement Barnabas gave was the exhortation for the believers to set their hearts with steadfast consistency upon the Lord. Through such encouragement, the spiritual babes would put down sustaining spiritual roots (Ps. 1; Mt. 13:18-23), and would grow up in Christ to unshockable perfection (Eph. 4:11-16; Phil. 3:13-15; Col. 1:28). No more vital, practical, necessary, and blessed counsel could be given than the encouragement that believers should resolve to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Wednesday, August 26th - Acts 11: 25, 26

Barnabas did not simply exhort the new believers at Antioch to set their hearts on growing in the Lord, he took practical steps to assist them in their resolve. Thus Barnabas left those spiritual babes whom he had just encouragingly exhorted, to find the best teacher he could to supply their need, namely, the Apostle Paul. Barnabas rightly reckoned that if his exhortation were to have effectual benefit, he must make practical provision as well. He realized that all of the Gentiles coming to faith in Jesus were without much, if any, Scriptural background. He realized further that he could not, by himself, train up so many converts in the faith. Hence, this choice and humbly realistic servant of Christ set off to seek the most capable teacher he knew. The lambs of Antioch would for a time be deprived of the living presence of his incarnate encouragement, only that they could once more receive Barnabas back in company with the greatest Christian teacher of all time.

Thursday, August 27th - Acts 11: 25, 26

What the godly Barnabas exhorts, he takes pains to supply. In this, the servant acts like his Master. For what our God commands, He Himself supplies in fullest measure. Yet when Barnabas left Antioch soon after issuing his exhortation, it could have been thought by the converts there that they were left on their own, with only (if not empty) words of encouragement. Yet, Barnabas left to return with another encourager, even as our Lord left His Church only to return with another Comforter (Jn. 16:7,13,14,16).

Friday, August 28th - Acts 11: 25, 26

As Barnabas had earlier served graciously to reconcile the Jerusalem disciples with the newly converted Pharisee, Saul (Acts 9:26-28), so now he serves graciously to bring together Saul and the new Gentile converts in Antioch. In the latter case, Saul was no longer himself the spiritual babe, but had grown to maturity as an apostle. The happy issue of this encouraging ministry of word and deed by Barnabas was that he found Paul, they together returned to Antioch and served so faithfully to teach Christ for a year, and believers at Antioch took so vitally to heart the exhortation to remain true to Christ (v.23), that the disciples in Antioch were the first ones in the world to be called by the name of the Son of God.

Saturday, August 29th - Acts 11: 27

The church at Antioch had received in Barnabas a remarkably gracious and giving disciple (Acts 4:36,37). The church had received in Paul the greatest of the apostles. Now we read of that church receiving some prophets from Jerusalem. Truly the church at Antioch was one of the most fully blessed in terms of the graces and gifts of God. The Lord was nurturing with His richest blessing the church which would prove to be the staging point for the spread of Gentile Christianity. God's gifts did not then, and do not now, return to Him void.

Sunday, August 30th - Acts 11: 27, 28

Note that in the foundation of the Church, God employed prophets as well as apostles (Eph. 2:20). One of the prophets, Agabus, prophesied of a coming crisis. That crisis, which most would consider to be a curse, would be turned into an occasion of richest blessing through the response of the believers at Antioch, as they became themselves gracious and generous givers. The truth and grace of God enable disciples to turn every crisis into opportunity for blessing.

Monday, August 31st - Acts 11: 27-30

Jesus said that we shall know men by their fruits (Mt. 7:15-23). These verses inform us that the believers in Antioch were not only called Christians, but they acted as those in whom the Savior was vitally dwelling. First, we see how seriously they take the revelation of God through His prophet, Agabus. Then we see how they act upon that revelation. They not only practice that diligent husbandry so frequently extolled throughout Proverbs, but they also generously give of their substance to relieve their suffering brethren in Judea. Thus did these Gentile converts show themselves to be true disciples (v.29) of their gracious and giving Savior. May we, likewise, walk in a manner worthy of the blessed and blessing name of the Lord which is upon us.

Tuesday, September 1st - Acts 11: 29, 30

That of which the Jerusalem brethren were, at the beginning of this chapter, critical, proved to be a source of blessing and sustenance to them. By the providence of God, lack arose in Judea, where Jewish believers were concentrated. It was a lack which would be, by the loving wisdom and enabling grace of the Lord, supplied through the practical Christianity of Gentile believers from Antioch. What the Gentile brethren sent to the elders in Jerusalem through Saul and Barnabas was not only material food, but love from their hearts for the blessing and edification of their Jewish brethren. Thus, was Peter's vision of his being invited to feed upon that which God had cleansed most widely and wonderfully fulfilled as Christian Gentiles literally fed their Christian Jewish brethren.

Wednesday, September 2nd - Acts 12: 1

The church in Jerusalem had troubles to face in addition to the famine. As Barnabas and Saul went to Jerusalem with blessed relief for the saints, renewed persecution arose against the church, this time from the civil magistrate. Saints are called and equipped to persevere in godliness, and here we see that Satan inspires a mock perseverance amongst the wicked in their attacks against the people of the Lord.

The Herod here mentioned was the grandson of Herod the Great (Mt. 2:1-3), and the nephew of Herod the tetrarch (Mt. 14:1ff). Though all of the Herods considered themselves Jews, in fact, they were not true national Jews, and certainly not true spiritual Jews (Rom. 2:28,29). The Herods were descended from Esau, not Jacob, and had a long history of persecuting the covenant people (cf. Haman in Esth. 3:1ff). Herod the Great tried to kill the infant Jesus, while Herod the tetrarch had John the Baptist beheaded. This Herod, who proved to be a self-centered ruler, unpopular with the Jews, followed the natural family inclination and began to persecute the true people of God in order to court favor with the Jews. In this, he touched the apple of the eye of God (Ps. 17:8) and would pay dearly for it (Acts 12:21-23). Meanwhile, the faithful would suffer, but their martyrdoms would be most blessedly productive. The waves of trouble coming

against the Church should not surprise us (1 Pet. 4:12,13), but serve as sure signs of the coming destruction of the wicked (Phil. 1:27,28).

Thursday, September 3rd - Acts 12: 1, 2

Wickedness is never static, but grows in its fury. Therefore, we read that Herod progressed in his persecuting measures from arresting saints to executing them. Now, to win the approval of the unbelieving Jews, whose malice had driven them to stone the gracious deacon Stephen (Acts 6:54-60), Herod executes the apostle James--the first, but not the last apostle to be martyred.

James and his brother, John, had earlier sought to sit, one on the right hand and one on the left hand of Jesus. Both brothers, along with Peter, formed the inner traid of the disciples. But Jesus promised them not the honors they sought, but rather fellowship with Him in His sufferings (Mt. 20:20-23). The cup James was called to drink was that of a quick martyr's death. The cup of John was one of a long life of protracted persecution (Rev. 1:9). But neither life nor death could separate these brothers from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:35-39).

Friday, September 4th - Acts 12: 3

From this verse we learn the motive for Herod's deadly persecution of the Church. It was neither because he was zealously devoted to the Law, viewing Jesus as a blasphemer, nor because he hated the gospel that he acted against the saints of God; rather, it was simply that he might court the approval of the Jews over whom he supposedly reigned. In sum, Herod sought mere personal advancement and political security and was willing to procure them at the expense of his shedding innocent blood. In one's violation of the sixth commandment, one need not hate his neighbor to murder him; one need simply love himself above all others, and such misplaced love will lead one to seek the destruction of others.

Saturday, September 5th - Acts 12: 3, 4

Herod's diabolical progress in persecution ran from imprisoning believers, to killing an apostle, to arresting with intention to execute Peter, the apostle who was the acknowledged leader of the disciples during the life of Jesus, as well as the leader of the apostles after Christ's ascension (Gal. 2:8,9). Thus, Herod aimed at nothing less than the pillars of the Church. That Peter was put in prison and was so heavily guarded indicates that he was as good as in his tomb. The only thing staying Herod's execution of Peter was the Jews' religious festivals of Unleavened Bread and Passover, the same festivals which the Jewish leaders, who plotted Christ's death, sought to celebrate prior to their manipulated execution of our Lord (Mt. 26:1-6). Yet, whereas the redeeming Master gave His life at Passover as the Passover for His people, the redeemed servant would be miraculously set free from his death at this Passover. Peter's release from prison and death are typical of our liberation from sin and death through Christ's atoning death.

Sunday, September 6th - Acts 12: 3-5

It is likely that Herod turned his murderous attention upon Peter in large part because it was widely reported that Peter had visited Gentiles, eaten with them, and facilitated their entry into the Church. If such gracious action on Peter's part temporarily upset Jewish believers (Acts 11:1-3), it would have enraged the unconverted Jews. Thus, Herod played to the furious desire of the Jews when he arrested this apostle. Yet, the hatred of the Jews and the power of Herod arrayed against Peter would be no match for the prayers of the Church offered for Peter.

Monday, September 7th - Acts 12: 3-5

It was only the timing of the approaching Passover that delayed Peter's execution. Yet the Church members put the time of that delay to best use. They were not passively dejected and inactive, nor were they busy

marshalling political ploys, such as lobbying for Peter before Herod. Instead, they prostrated themselves in corporate prayer to the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. We are not told specifically for what they prayed. However, from the surprised reaction of the believers to Peter's release (vv.15ff), it appears that they either did not pray for the apostle's release, or prayed for it with less than full assurance that their request would be granted. We are told that they prayed fervently. Here Scripture indicates to us that how we pray can be more significant than for what we pray. For by our fervent, Spirit-inspired prayers (Rom. 8:26,27), we engage the almighty power of the Lord of hosts, who always answers our prayers above what we ask or think.

Tuesday, September 8th - Acts 12: 5-7

The Feast of Unleavened Bread lasted for seven days (Ex. 12:15), after which the Passover was celebrated. Since Herod would not have arrested Peter during the Feast, Peter was in prison for at least seven days. Prayer for him was offered during all of that time, continuing even after his release (v.12). From the shocked reaction of those praying when they learned of Peter's release (v.15), it is highly unlikely that any of them asked the Lord to send an angel to grant a miraculous liberation to the apostle. But an angel sent on such a miraculous mission was just what the Lord gave in answer to those prayers. Fervent prayer results in answers far greater than the measure of our most optimistic hopes.

Wednesday, September 9th - Acts 12: 6, 7

Fervent prayers were offered for Peter for days, with no apparent heavenly answer being given. The silence of the Lord did not discourage the saints from continuing their prayers. Hence, they, like the Canaanite woman beseeching Jesus for her daughter (Mt. 15:21ff), construed the Lord's silence as His tacit permission for them to persevere in prayer. Finally, a matter of hours before his execution, when the apostle was not only contained in a well-guarded prison, but was also bound with chains, an angel of the Lord appeared in that dark dungeon, transforming it into a place of light and liberty.

The Lord's answers to our prayers may seem to us slow in coming, but they are always timely. God always allows His opponents to have the first hand, so that we may see that when they are in full power, doing their worst, the Lord can reduce them to nothing in an instant. The God of Elijah, who let the 450 prophets of Baal, the sun god, take all day to answer from heaven with fire, who then Himself answered in an instant the humble petitions of His servant with fire that devoured not only the drenched offering, but also the altar stones, is the God who heard His children's prayers for Peter. By the Lord's sending of this angel, He rendered all of Herod's murderous designs void. The same God hears and answers our prayers.

Thursday, September 10th - Acts 12: 7

The angel of the Lord mentioned in this verse came in answer to prayer. He also came on a double duty mission. He struck Peter to awaken and release him from all harm; later, the angel struck Herod judicially, so that he died a most loathsome death (v.23). Both services were rendered in answer to prayer, though it is unlikely that either thing were specifically requested. We learn from Rev. 8:3-5 that to the prayers of the saints the incense of Christ's intercessions are added, resulting in fire from the heavenly altar being sent to earth in answer to the saints' prayers. Such fire purifies the saints and brings judgment upon the wicked. We wield more power in prayer than we may realize.

Friday, September 11th - Acts 12: 7-9

We earlier noted that for days there seemed to be no answer to the prayers of the Church for Peter. However, when we learn from these verses that the apostle was fast asleep in his chains, amongst the soldiers and guards, and amidst the prison--all on the eve of his death--we should understand that God answered prayer first by fortifying Peter's faith, then by changing his circumstances. Truly Peter, by a pure faith and strong trust in his Savior, had been delivered from fears and fretting and had entered into the blessed rest of His Lord (Ps. 4:8; 127:1,2; Heb. 5:9-11).

Saturday, September 12th - Acts 12: 7-10

It is evident from the miraculous appearance of the angel and from the power he wielded that Peter could have been in an instant miraculously translated from prison to the church prayer meeting. However, the Lord accommodates the working of His omnipotence so that we may contemplate the manifold causes we have to praise Him. Accordingly, Peter is awakened and told to get up quickly. That Peter did so shows unbelieving doubts vanquished from the apostle and a ready faith in operation. But then, their departure is quite deliberate--not at all a desperate rush, which would result from unbelieving fears. Thus Peter is led by degrees out of various dimensions of death: his chains fall off; he was led safely past two guards; the iron gate into the city opened as though triggered automatically (aavtoma,th). Our God is a God of manifold deliverances (Ps. 68:20).

Sunday, September 13th - Acts 12: 9-11

Not long before this miraculous liberation, Peter had seen a heavenly vision which led him to bring the gospel to Cornelius and the Gentiles (Acts 10:10ff). As the amazing and miraculous details of his deliverance from prison unfolded, it is understandable that the apostle should suppose that God was granting him another vision, one perhaps intended to fortify him for his death. Yet, when the angel departed, Peter came to himself, meaning that he realized that he had not simply been shown his liberation, he had by divine power experienced it. A visionary promise of deliverance from death is great, the actual provision of such deliverance is greater still. We have in Christ both great and precious promises and glorious provision of salvation from death.

Monday, September 14th - Acts 12: 11

Peter literally came in himself (geno,menoj evn evvautw/l). He supposed he was having an out of body experience like that to which Paul refers in 2 Cor. 12: 1-4. Yet the apostle realized that he was in fact delivered body and soul from the power (*hand*) of Herod and the seemingly certain expectation of the Jews. We, too, have not only been delivered from sin and death spiritually, but we shall be delivered bodily as well (Rom. 8:10,11).

Tuesday, September 15th - Acts 12: 11, 12

From prison Peter did not go to his own home first to tend to personal affairs or to seek his refuge from re-arrest in secrecy. Instead, he went to where he knew the church would be gathered in prayer. Christ grants His people liberty not so that each one may be concerned with his own interests, but rather so that we may concern ourselves with the higher interests of the body and bride of the Lord, in which we have become members of one another (Phil. 2:3,4).

Wednesday, September 16th - Acts 12: 12

The Mary mentioned in this verse clearly was a woman of true piety and generosity in that she opened her home to the church for corporate meetings. She was also courageous in her doing this, for the brethren were enduring persecution so severe at the time that one apostle had been executed and another, as far as everyone then knew, was about to be. This gracious Mary faithfully reared her child, John Mark, who would figure in the missionary service of Barnabas and Saul (v.25). From Col. 4:10 we learn that John Mark was cousin to Barnabas, and therefore Mary was the aunt of Barnabas. But the most significant thing we know of Mary is that she was a prayer warrior. May we be known as such.

Thursday, September 17th - Acts 12: 12-16

There is a blessed irony to be observed in the fact that Peter had an easier time getting out of prison than he had getting into the saints' prayer meeting. That is because whereas God sovereignly compels the wicked to

bow to His will, He gently and patiently persuades His people to do His will. We are at times more slow to perceive the full measure of God's goodness than are the men and things of the world to perceive the divine power.

Friday, September 18th - Acts 12: 17, 18

The last time a servant-girl had dealings with Peter was during the trial of Jesus, when she accused Peter of being one of the disciples of Jesus. Then, the disciple whom Jesus called a rock melted with fear and denied his Lord (Mk. 14:66ff). How different is this occasion, when another servant named Rhoda, recognizing the voice of Peter, was filled with such joy that she left the newly liberated apostle, much as the Samaritan woman had done in joyfully leaving her water pot (Jn. 4:28,29). Apparently, Rhoda's joy was not only in hearing the voice of the apostle she evidently knew and loved, but also in her being the first to perceive and thus to have the privilege of announcing to the brethren the glorious answer to their prayers.

Saturday, September 19th - Acts 12: 15, 16

Even prayerful saints are not as perceptive and considerate as they ought to be. When the believing assembly was told the surpassing wonderful truth about Peter, they thought and bluntly said that Rhoda was insane. But she took no offense. Those rightly perceiving God's answers to their prayers are filled with an unshakable joy and love which bears and believes all things. At Rhoda's earnest insistence, the brethren offered another more true explanation, namely, that an angel had come in answer to their prayers. It is a consoling truth that angels render service to the saints (Ps. 34:7; 91:11-13; Heb. 1:13,14). Yet, the very last thing they could conceive or credit was the truth which was being declared to them. That truth dawning upon them might be delayed through Rhoda's inadvertently having left Peter at the door, and by their own slowness to believe, but it would not be denied. Peter knocked and they opened the door to behold the liberated apostle, something above what they had asked or thought in their prayers. We must not judge their incredulity too harshly. More often than not, the very last thing we believe is that God has heard our prayers and answered them beyond our conception.

Sunday, September 20th - Acts 12: 17

The amazement of the brethren at their seeing Peter no doubt ranged from silent awe to joyfully grateful acclamation. Yet Peter insisted that their joy be grounded in truth and not the sort of misguided suppositions they had earlier offered (v.15). So he told them to close those lips which had spoken so amiss, and he reported to them how the Lord, by agency of His angel, led him out of prison. Peter then told them to carry the account to James--not John's brother, who had been executed (v.2), but apparently the son of Alphaeus (Mt. 10:3)--and to the other brethren. Peter wanted his brethren to rejoice in his release and to be encouraged in the preserving power of the Lord. The truth about what the Lord has done always inspires great joy and gives great fortification to the soul, overcoming all that we fear or mistakenly suppose.

Monday, September 21st - Acts 12: 17

Peter did not stay long at Mary's house. His experience of miraculous release from prison did not foster in him a graceless presumption. Therefore, he took pains to preserve the life the Lord had restored to him, leaving the place where Herod was sure to look for him. The apostle hid himself, we know not where, but we know that he sought and found his refuge in the Lord. Soon Peter's enemy, Herod, would be smitten by God, but Peter would emerge to speak words of liberating truth in the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:7ff). Herod could not find the hidden Peter, while, at the same time, Herod could not hide himself from Peter's God.

Tuesday, September 22nd - Acts 12: 18

The light of day revealed to the soldiers, natural men, that which Peter, a spiritual man, had experienced in the dark, namely, his liberation from prison and from imminent death. Yet, natural light could not disclose

how Peter had been set free. Thus, the soldiers were amazed to discover that their diligence and their dungeon had failed to retain the apostle. They were also assaulted with dread at the thought that they could give no acceptable account of their failure to Herod. The very last thing anyone suspected was the truth that an angel of the Lord had miraculously released Peter. Accordingly, these soldiers, seeing only the effect of the Lord's working, were blinded to the cause and to its significance. Had they heeded their prisoner's testimony and cause, they should have experienced their own joyful liberation from sin and from the divine wrath. Instead, they remained in darkness amidst daylight, in bondage to sin's dominion despite their being outside of the prison, and filled with dread of Herod, little perceiving that they were soon to be dispatched to meet the God whom men should fear above all earthly kings.

Wednesday, September 23rd - Acts 12: 18, 19

The workings of the God of light and liberty make evident how enslaved to hardness of heart and blind stupidity are the wicked. The soldiers had performed their duty with as great care and competence as possible. Yet Herod suspects them of slackness, and sets himself to finding Peter, as though he could succeed where they had failed. Did he think Peter was hiding in some unsearched corner of the prison? Did he think that he could search the town and find the man whom God had hidden? Did Herod think that he could re-arrest and execute the man who was liberated and given eternal life by the Lord of all? Herod is frustrated in all his designs against the Lord's servant; so he turns against his own servants, sentencing the guards to death. Woe to those serving wicked masters! The fickle hand that feeds them will as soon strike them down. But the sons and servants of the Lord are kept safe and are well-loved in the shadow of their heavenly Father's hand.

Thursday, September 24th - Acts 12: 19

Herod is compelled to accept that his wicked designs against Peter had been frustrated. He, whose pride had suffered a blow from the prayers of the humble servants of Christ (v.5), sought relief in a retreat from Judea. Thus, Herod retired to the sea coast town of Caesarea. There he would puff himself up again, only to be mortally struck down by the God whose servant he had imprisoned with intention for execution. Though men be kings of the earth, they do well not to touch the Lord's anointed ones. For the Lord sets His people free and apprehends for judicial smiting those who would harm them.

Friday, September 25th - Acts 12: 20

Undoubtedly, Herod's frustration and anger over the liberation of Peter did not abate with the execution of the guards and with Herod's retreat to the seacoast region of Tyre and Sidon. The fact that those cities were relatively prosperous and were free cities, not being under his yoke, perhaps fired his sore recollection of Peter's freedom from his murderous maw. The only dependence the two cities had upon Herod was for food, there having been no interior farming land within those coastal cities. The wicked king sought to exploit that dependence by indulging his anger and threatening to cut off trade between his realm and the cities. Scripture gives no reason for Herod's anger, but simply records that he came to Tyre and Sidon with a heated and hostile attitude (qumomacw/n). It seems likely that the cities did nothing to warrant Herod's anger, but that the proud king, having experienced a degree of impotence in the execution of Peter, was determined to exert his power in abusive fashion, threatening the lives and welfare of two great cities (recall, there was a famine on at the time, cf., 11:28ff). Pride cannot bear contradiction, and will swell to most imposing and threatening dimension when it is contradicted. It is well for all men that God is opposed to the proud.

Saturday, September 26th - Acts 12: 20-23

Humble Peter had been liberated and exalted by God. The time had come for God to oppose and strike down proud Herod. Our Lord never does His work by half measures. He never contents Himself with the deliverance of the righteous, but always completes His redeeming work by destroying the wicked. Recall Moses and Pharaoh, and Mordecai and Haman in this connection.

Sunday, September 27th - Acts 12: 20-22

So potent and threatening is a person's pride to most other people that they would rather pander to it than oppose it. Thus, we find the people of Tyre and Sidon, who had some natural rivalry between themselves, patching up their differences so that they might appeal to wicked Herod as a people unified in their desire to offer adulation to the king. It is convicting to note that men of the world do from self-regarding policy what believers should do from holy principle, namely, come to one mind before a king (Eph. 4:3; Phil. 2:1-4). If factions had been offensive to wicked Herod, how much moreso to the King of glory are they amongst His beloved and redeemed children?

Monday, September 28th - Acts 12: 20-22

Herod's pride drove him to play God. He fancied that he had power of life and death over the citizens of these two great cities. The citizens, too, agreed that their highest good—feeding their bellies—lay in their feeding Herod's conceit. Thus we find Herod dressing and acting in a manner calculated to inspire awe in the people. Josephus writes of Herod, on this occasion, wearing a silver robe, and appearing on the rostrum at a time to catch the sun's rays and reflect them from his robe in glorious show (*Antiquities*, XIX.8.2). The people of Tyre and Sidon reacted as most people would to superficial and sensual counterfeits of glory. They declare Herod a god. What an infinite difference there is between this concocted, reflected shining, and the essential glory emanating from the holy nature of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-8), or even the eternal weight of glory which is being produced for believers in Christ (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17). What an infinite difference there is between the extravagant and insincere flattery offered to Herod, and the sincere, loving, grateful, and fully warranted praise we offer to our glorious God.

Tuesday, September 29th - Acts 12: 23

Men consider outward appearance, but God considers the heart. Thus, we find the reaction of God to Herod's pretentious show quite different from that of the people who acclaimed Herod a god. As the angel of the Lord had struck Peter's side to arouse him from sleep and release him from prison, so the angel of the Lord struck Herod with a holy judgment. The Lord struck Herod with an awful physical condition which accurately portrayed Herod's morally rotten character. He who was covered with glimmering silver was inwardly consumed by worms. He who would have executed Peter is himself put to a most disgusting, ignoble death. If a king, whose position may have given him some cause to foster pride, was righteously destroyed in this manner by God, what end can common men expect, who are but rebellious worms deluding themselves with inflated conceit?

Wednesday, September 30th - Acts 12: 23

God continues to strike men who fail to give Him due glory. Those who ungratefully refuse to honor God are, by God, given over to most degrading inner passions which shall ultimately destroy them (Rom. 1:18-32). Thanks be to our saving God that He has graciously delivered us from the dominion of such consuming worms.

Thursday, October 1st - Acts 12: 24

Proud Herod is executed, but the Church he sought to destroy is extended. The body of Christ is an anvil which has worn out many hammers, and shall outlast all trials and troubles. Those hearing and receiving the gospel were not only being themselves added to the Church, they were winning others to Christ, and thus causing growth by multiplication. Luke speaks of this advancement of the Church through prosperous and adverse conditions as something which was not affected by those circumstances so much as by the constant ministry of the Word of the Lord. The Word, preached and spread abroad in season and out of season (2 Tim. 4:1,2), is the instrumentality by which Christ builds His Church, against which nothing shall prevail (Mt. 16:18).

Friday, October 2nd - Acts 12: 25

Barnabas and Saul had been sent by the Church at Antioch on a mercy ministry to the brethren at Jerusalem (11:27-30). They arrived in Jerusalem to find the brethren there not only suffering from the famine, but also from Herod's persecution. They left Jerusalem after the Lord had miraculously relieved the saints of the latter burden, and they themselves had served to relieve them of the former burden. They did not return to Antioch empty-handed, but carried with them John Mark, the son of Mary (v.12) and cousin to Barnabas (Col. 4:10). While the enemies of Christ's Church are consumed by worms (v.23), the servants of Christ continue to be nourished, enriched, and strengthened by their service and fellowship in which they ministered to each other the blessing of the Lord.

Saturday, October 3rd - Acts 13: 1-3

Barnabas and Saul returned to their home church in Antioch from their mission of mercy to Jerusalem. Yet they do not return to retire from ministerial labors. One task faithfully performed in the Lord paves the way for further service. Hence we find that these men, who had been faithful in a little assignment, are called by God to greater endeavor. But before Barnabas and Saul are sent out to evangelize the Gentiles, the Lord in His Word draws our attention to the sending church. We learn that it is a gifted church, with many pastors and teachers. Our Lord does not deprive a little flock of its sole pastor for the sake of a wider work; He rather draws from the riches of what His grace and power had brought together, taking gifted men from a church full of gifted men so that the work of evangelism could advance without the home base of prayer and material support suffering. Our heavenly Father is the perfect administrator.

Sunday, October 4th - Acts 13: 1

Our attention is drawn to the church existing (or being, ou=an) in Antioch. Not only did men in Antioch hear the gospel, but they embraced by faith the Savior proclaimed in it. Not only were these believers in Antioch called Christians, but they formed themselves into a church body, according to the express will of Christ and right understanding of the essence of redemption (Eph. 2:13-22). This church was composed of a rich mixture of redeemed souls, and it was rich in her leaders—all of whom were trophies of divine grace. Some of the leaders are named: Barnabas, who had been sent from the church at Jerusalem (11:22), heads the list as senior pastor. Simeon had a Roman surname, *Niger*, meaning black. Some identify him with Simon of Cyrene who bore the cross for Jesus (Mt. 27:32). Lucius was a Cyrenian, and is later greeted by Paul as his kinsman (Rom. 16:21). Manaen was an intimate with Herod Antipas, who ordered the beheading of John the Baptist. By divine grace Manaen, like Moses before him, refused the riches of a royal earthly court, counting the reproach of Christ of far surpassing value. Thus, Manaen had membership in the household of the saints, the truly majestic ones of the earth, and a glorious inheritance in heaven (1 Pet. 1:3,4), while Herod was consigned to hell. Finally, Saul, the Pharisee persecutor converted into champion of Christ had his membership in the church at Antioch. Churches on earth are rich mixtures of various redeemed souls, and the Church in glory shall be an immeasurably rich mixture of perfected saints.

Monday, October 5th - Acts 13: 1,2

The members of the church at Antioch were not inactive, nor were the leaders of the church content to sit in seats of honor, pontificating to the flock. We are told, instead, that they were a worshipping community, and that it was while they ministered to the Lord and denied themselves through fasting that the Lord made clear His will respecting the further vocation of two of these leaders. We see, hear, understand, and rightly obey all things better when we devote ourselves to our Lord in worship. Eyes fixed on Him behold His light in which we see all things properly.

Tuesday, October 6th - Acts 13: 1, 2

The Holy Spirit specifically intimated to the leadership of the church at Antioch that He would call out for a special mission the first and last of her leaders, Barnabas and Saul. That God the Holy Spirit has absolute

propriety in His Church and in the disposal of His servants is evident from the words, *...set apart for Me...*, and *...for the work to which I have called them*. All true pastors should have a clear sense that they serve by divine commission and direction. This intimation for Barnabas and Saul is of particular importance for most of us, who are Gentiles, as well. For it is clear that these men, by whom Gentiles were brought to Christ, were not serving by their own desire and devices, but by the commission and power of God the Holy Spirit.

Wednesday, October 7th - Acts 13: 2, 3

The spiritual health and maturity of the church at Antioch is indicated by the immediate and hearty obedience rendered to the directions of the Holy Spirit. The church members did not begrudge the fact that Barnabas and Saul—two of the most caring and competent spiritual leaders—were called out from them. Indeed, the members of that assembly acknowledged that they owned a share in the more extensive labors of their two pastors, as is evident by their laying hands upon them. They sent these two choice servants on the way of God's choosing, rightly reckoning that the Lord who had blessed them in sending Barnabas and Saul to them would not abandon them when He called them away from their local body.

Thursday, October 8th - Acts 13: 2, 3

With this calling of the Holy Spirit and prayerful sending forth of the church at Antioch, the next great movement of the acts of the ascended Christ begins to be recorded in this book. The first movement was from Jerusalem to Antioch; the next will be from Antioch to Rome and the rest of the world. Through His calling, equipping, directing, and sustaining His servants, our Lord Jesus has continued to build His Church through the labors of both those who go abroad and those who send and support in prayer those sent out. We should ever count it a privilege to serve our Lord in whatever capacity He should call us.

Friday, October 9th - Acts 13: 4, 5

The first place Barnabas and Saul went after their departure from Antioch was to the port town of Seleucia, in Syria. From there they sailed to the island of Cyprus, which was the native home of Barnabas (Acts 4:36). It was also an island devoted to the goddess, Venus, and thus was a place of most lax morals. The missionary pair went to Cyprus neither to visit the relatives of Barnabas nor to affirm the moral corruption of the place, but, instead, to proclaim the life, family, and community transforming gospel. In this they were led by the Holy Spirit, not natural inclination, and from this we should note the grace of God in sending the gospel of Christ to such an unworthy place. Barnabas and Saul began their ministry amongst the Jews in Salamis, but they did not end it there. They, along with John Mark who accompanied them to assist their ministry, proclaimed the Word of God in the synagogues and pressed on to other places on Cyprus. We have no account of the results of their service. At times our service is but practice and prelude to later, more effectual service, or it may be a sowing time, with a yield coming in the place where we have planted after we have moved on.

Saturday, October 10th - Acts 13: 6-8

Salamis is on the southeast of Cyprus, and Paphos is on the southwest. The missionaries preached their way across the island. Paphos was the chief seat of the worship of the goddess, Venus. There we learn that the Spirit directed missionaries encountered opposition. Bar-Jesus, or Elymas, as he was also called, was a nominal, degenerated Jew, who had departed from adherence to the Word and power of God in order to delve in magic and the occult. Those led by the Holy Spirit should expect to encounter counterfeit believers and experience opposition from them. Yet Barnabas and Saul also encountered a man prepared for the gospel. Sergius Paulus was the Roman proconsul of Cyprus. He had great intellectual endowment and attainments, yet he, like the preacher in Ecclesiastes, sensed that an emptiness remained in his life. The man hungered for the light and life of truth. Thus, he summoned Barnabas and Saul to hear the Word of God from them. The exposure of false believers is the incidental aim of Spirit led ministry; the effectual calling of the elect is the ultimate aim of such ministry.

Sunday, October 11th - Acts 13: 8, 9

The magician sought to oppose the Lord's servants and to dissuade Sergius from the gospel they proclaimed. It is most instructive for us to note how the Lord's servants dealt with this situation. They did not debate the magician, nor did they limit their efforts to positive endeavors to persuade the proconsul. Instead, Saul, here for the first time in Acts referred to by his Christian name, Paul, takes the lead which Barnabas had held until this point (Acts 11:30; 12:25; 13:1). Perhaps this was due proximately to Paul's being a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37; 22:25-29), but ultimately it was time in the Lord's providence for Paul to take and keep the lead as an apostle, and, indeed, the greatest of the apostles. What Paul does with this lead is to deal first directly and decisively with his wicked opponent. The commendation of the blessings of the gospel is but a part of true ministry; the publication of anathemas against error is the other essential part (Gal. 1:8,9). We are not only called to love what is good; we are also called to abhor, expose, and stand against what is evil (Rom. 12:9; Eph. 5:11; 6:10ff).

Monday, October 12th - Acts 13: 9-11

Although gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23), we must never suppose that the Holy Spirit ever and always prompts the Lord's servants to act with gentle moderation and mild winsomeness. There is a righteous indignation, a holy hatred of evil, that characterizes the Spirit-filled person as well as does loving gentleness (Mk. 3:5; Jn. 2:14-17; Eph. 4:26). Therefore, we read of Paul speaking against Elymas in most strong and condemning terms. He identifies the true character of the magician when he terms him a son of the devil, just as Jesus, at one point, designated certain of His enemies (Jn. 8:44). Paul diagnoses the man's wicked attitude when he calls him an enemy of righteousness; and his wicked actions are in view with the designation of Elymas being a perverter of the straight ways of the Lord and being a man full of deceit and fraud. Finally, Paul curses the false prophet, consigning him to temporary blindness—a state which accurately would portray the man's spiritual blindness. Yet, there is grace in this curse, even for Elymas, whose temporary blindness could have served to convict him and convert him to the light, as Paul's own temporary blindness had served him earlier.

Tuesday, October 13th - Acts 13: 11, 12

Paul's curses were not in vain. His anger was not selfish and sinful spite, but holy indignation. His curse was not a sinful retaliation against the magician's opposition, but was a righteous administration of the justice of God (cf., 1 Cor. 5:5). Whether or not such decisive dealing had any converting effect upon the magician, we do not know. It did, however, serve to convert the proconsul. Sergius, who by divine grace was predisposed to hear the Word of God (v.7), believed when he saw the power which the Lord's apostle wielded over the wicked imposter. He was amazed to discover that the gospel was not a mere collection of intellectual principles, but a coherent system of enlightening truth and practical power rooted in a personal Savior. We should likewise never cease to be amazed at the teaching of the Lord, which continues to bind evil and deliver evil's captives.

Wednesday, October 14th - Acts 13: 12

Scripture does not tell us how Sergius lived after he believed. However, since we are explicitly told that he believed we should conclude that he persevered in the faith, as do all true believers. In fact, respecting the whole mission of Barnabas and Paul to Cyprus, it is only of Sergius that we read of any conversion to Christ. This need not mean that there were not other conversions, but if there were not, the conversion of this one man justified the mission assignment from a Lord who would leave ninety-nine sheep to find one which was lost.

Thursday, October 15th - Acts 13: 13

The lead Paul had exercised in Cyprus continued after the team's departure from the island, as is evident by this verse referring to *Paul and his companions*. From Cyprus the missionaries sailed to Asia Minor, Paul's

native territory. It was there, Scripture notes, that John Mark left the team to return to Jerusalem. This recording of his departure may at first glance seem a notice of John's tending to legitimate business elsewhere. Yet, from Acts 15:37,38 we learn that John Mark was deserting the Lord's workers and work. Why John so disgraced himself at this point is a matter of conjecture. Perhaps he missed his home; perhaps he resented that his kinsman, Barnabas, was no longer the acknowledged leader of the mission. There are surely reasons, but no excuses for this man deserting a work of such paramount importance. There are casualties in Christian service. Let us pray that we never become such.

Friday, October 16th - Acts 13: 14, 15

As they did in Salamis (v.5), so Paul and Barnabas did in Pisidian Antioch, namely, they went into the synagogue to proclaim the gospel. We may wonder why these men, whose commission was to evangelize the Gentiles, went first to the Jews. The answer is that their priority was the Lord's priority. The gospel was to be offered to the Jew first (Rom. 1:16), to those invited to the wedding feast (Mt. 22:1-14), then, upon their rejection, to the Gentiles. Such rejection by the Jews had already begun, and was shortly and surely to be confirmed (v.46). By the grace of the Lord, the glorious treasures of salvation spurned by the Jews have come to us.

Saturday, October 17th - Acts 13: 16

From this verse through v. 41 we have recorded Paul's sermon. It is a rehearsal and exposition of redemptive history, encompassing the Law, the prophets, and the psalms, concluding with a call for the hearers personally to apply the fulfilled promises of God. As such, Paul's sermon is strikingly different from so many sermons preached in our day. There are no humorous quips; no engaging stories; no inspiring or instructive illustrations from so-called practical life; no endeavors to convince the hearers of the relevance of what the Word of God says. This is because true preaching, while it calls and converts sinners, is essentially directed to edify the saints—those who are of the true Israel of God, who fear the Lord. Preaching to such is a matter of proclaiming what God has done and challenging the hearers to accept it. Judging from the reaction of the hearers (vv. 42-44, 46-49), should not Paul's sermon be our model for preaching?

Sunday, October 18th - Acts 13: 17-19

Paul's sermon begins with the patriarchs, carries quickly through the exodus, and into the Jews' settlement in the promised land. In this way, the apostle reminds the Jews that from the very first they were a people chosen not because of their worthiness but because of God's gracious, electing love. They were made a nation not by their own might, but by the gracious operations of the almighty power of God. They were sustained in the wilderness not by their own ingenuity, but by miraculous divine provision. They were settled in the land not by their own efforts, but by the power of God working to fulfill His promises to the fathers. All of this makes clear that the Jews were what they were and where they were solely due to the saving grace, love, and power of God. But these early redemptive tokens were but shadows of salvation, pointing to the Savior, as Paul will demonstrate. We are what we are by the grace, love, and power of God in Christ.

Monday, October 19th - Acts 13: 20-22

From the promises and the property given by God to Israel, Paul moves on in his sermon to the personal leadership of the nation. He emphasizes that such leaders as the judges and kings of Israel were also divine gifts. God gave them judges (v.20). They asked for a king, an initiative on their part which sinfully anticipated the divine giving of a godly king. The result was that God gave them the kind of king their asking would deserve, namely, Saul, his reign being a disaster; then, God gave them a man of His choosing, a man after God's heart, committed to doing God's will. David's reign brought peace and security to Israel at last. The point here is that the masters we choose for ourselves bring us misery; those whom God

chooses for us serve for our good. Christ, the Savior and Lord of God's choosing and giving, serves for our eternal good and glory.

Tuesday, October 20th - Acts 13: 23, 24

Paul moves directly from the salient shadows of salvation to the substance of the Savior Himself. The apostle notes certain vital—though to his audience, not very welcome—truths. He reminds his hearers that Jesus came to Israel as the Messiah promised and provided by God. He further indicates that Jesus came to save the Jews from that sin from which they largely convinced themselves they were free due to their adherence to the law. Yet this necessity for the Jews to be saved is reinforced when Paul mentions John the Baptist, whom the Jews regarded as a prophet. John himself made it quite clear that the Jews were required to undergo a baptism of repentance. The Baptist came not to confirm Israel in the delusion that shadows and types had saved them, but to awaken them and call them to turn repentantly from their sin to the substance of salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Wednesday, October 21st - Acts 13: 25, 26

The Jews recognized John as a prophet, yet John prophetically declared that he was not the substance of salvation, but a sign—the last sign—pointing to the Savior. According to Paul, John the Baptist, the law, the prophets, all the writings of Scripture, as well as the providential workings of God throughout Israel's history, one thing is clear: that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Lord, for the Jew first, but also for people from every nation of the earth. No fact, no event, no phenomenon in all creation has so much authenticating testimony.

Thursday, October 22nd - Acts 13: 26-29

Paul engages his hearers' attention and affection by his addressing them as brethren. Together with him they were sons of Abraham. The apostle also addresses those who fear God, namely, Gentile proselytes, who had entered into at least the shadows of salvation via their conversion to Judaism. In this way, Paul stresses the natural affinity they together shared. Yet, he goes on to say that to the apostles of Christ the word of salvation's substance is now sent out. This new arrangement was occasioned by the Jewish leaders having rejected Jesus. Therefore, it was no longer the Jews, but the apostles of Jesus who bore the oracular light of salvation. Those who recognize and accept that fact are the true sons of Abraham, fearers of God, and brethren of Paul. Similarly, another apostle later wrote: We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 Jn. 4:6).

Friday, October 23rd - Acts 13: 26, 27

Paul tells why the Jewish leaders had so disqualified themselves from being teachers of the way of salvation. They who endeavored to destroy the Savior could hardly be expected to point men to Him for salvation. Yet, the treachery of the Jews marked no failure in God's covenant promises to His people. The Lord, through His prophets and in His Word, had all along predicted what the most spiritually favored people on all the earth would do to their own Messiah when He came to them. We read of this, as do the Jews even today, in such passages of Scripture as Isaiah 53. It is something which should

sober us all when we realize that no amount of external privilege can save a single soul. Only the grace of God working inwardly, giving a new heart and forming spiritual ears to hear, eyes to see, wills to obey, saves anyone. Christ in us, not surrounding us through the ordinances which He Himself has instituted, is our hope of glory.

Saturday, October 24th - Acts 13: 28

Paul does two things in this verse. He shows how the guilt of the Jewish leaders was magnified in that they put to death a man whom they knew to be innocent. More importantly, the apostle points up the innocence and holiness of Jesus. Men would rightly expect a true Savior to be Himself without sin or guilt. The fact that the most capable casuists, the most competent legal prosecutors, the most committed opponents of Jesus could find no ground for sentencing Him to death, but, instead, had to resort to a manufactured charge prosecuted before a pagan ruler convincingly manifests the innocence of Jesus. Furthermore, the resurrection of Jesus indicates that the Lamb of God was found blameless before a bar of justice infinitely higher than that of finite, fallible, and corrupt men. We may have absolute confidence in this High Priest and Advocate.

Sunday, October 25th - Acts 13: 29

The question arises: if Jesus was innocent, why was He convicted and executed as a criminal? The answer is that Jesus suffered as an atoning sacrifice for His people. For Jesus did not simply die, nor was He executed by stoning, as should have been a blasphemer (Lev. 24:16) which was what the Jews reckoned Him to be (Mt. 26:65,66). Instead, Jesus was crucified, hung from the wood of a tree, and so bore the penalty not merely of man's sentencing, but of divine curse (Dt. 21:23). Neither the death nor the mode of death of Jesus was coincidental. Each had been planned and purposed by God from the foundation of the world, as the Scriptures of God, written over centuries by various human authors, testify. The civil and ceremonial aspects of the Old Testament all point to the death of Christ as a vicarious, substitutionary atonement whereby the pure and holy Son of God gives His life as a ransom for guilty sinners.

Monday, October 26th - Acts 13: 30, 31

Whereas the death of Jesus remarkably fulfilled the many prophetic predictions of Scripture, the provision of the Savior was far greater than what we would expect even from those prophecies pointing to His death. For contrary to all human expectation, God raised Jesus from the dead. The heavenly justice, being satisfied by the atoning sacrifice of the great High Priest, reversed the sentence of ungodly men against Jesus. As Jesus demonstrated through His raising up of the paralytic that He had authority on earth to

forgive sins (Mk. 2:3-12), so by His own resurrection from the dead He manifested Himself as the source of forgiveness of sins and victory over death, the wages of sin.

Tuesday, October 27th - Acts 13: 30, 31

What sinful men do sinfully for the worst, God sinlessly uses and, by His holy ordaining, He contradicts that worst so that better than what man conceives to be best results. There are other but God phrases in Scripture (e.g. Rom. 5:8) all of which indicate that our Lord blessedly contradicts men's worst actions and expectations with His glorious best. That such blessed contradiction is fact and not fantasy is evident from the many credible witnesses who saw the resurrected Christ and bore testimony to what they saw. We should always expect and welcome the contradictions of our God.

Wednesday, October 28th - Acts 13: 32, 33

The resurrection of Jesus was a problem of greatest magnitude for the wicked, unbelieving Jews. If a living Jesus had troubled them, a crucified and resurrected Jesus increased their trouble exponentially. They themselves admitted that even a fraudulent resurrection would afflict them, let alone the genuine thing (Mt. 27:62-64). However, the resurrection of Jesus is good news to true Jews who are true, spiritual descendants of the patriarchs. Such spiritual sons of the fathers alone truly inherit the ancient and precious divine promise of salvation which was made not only to the patriarchs, but even predated them (Gen. 3:15). Read Gal. 4:21-31 for a more detailed consideration of the divine intent and fulfillment of the promise made to the fathers.

Thursday, October 29th - Acts 13: 32, 33

Paul quotes from the second Psalm, which all the Jews admitted was clearly Messianic, and proclaims that God's raising of Jesus from the dead was the fulfillment of that prophetic prediction. As such, the apostle declares Jesus to be the head and source of a new creation, wherein those issuing as branches from Him would have, like Him, eternal life and perfect righteousness. What the Jews sought by their adherence to a system of law, they should have sought only in the living and loving Son of God.

Friday, October 30th - Acts 13: 33-37

In these verses, psalms and prophecies are cited as pointers to the atoning death and justifying resurrection of Jesus. For centuries, God was telling the Jews and through them

the world, what He was going to accomplish through His Son. Those stumbling over Jesus as the Messiah—divinely anointed Savior and Lord—do so not because Jesus was novel in His person and work, nor because He was an imposter about whom no inspired prophet or psalmist had ever written. Those who hesitate fully to embrace Jesus as the Christ do so because they are at best slow to believe all that is written concerning Him in the Law, prophets, and psalms (Lk. 24:25-27). At worst they completely err, being ignorant of the Scriptures and the power of God (Mt. 22:29).

Saturday, October 31st - Acts 13: 33

Paul, by inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, here states that Ps. 2:7 refers not to the eternal generation of the second person of the divine Trinity, but rather to the resurrection of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God. Through the resurrection of Jesus, a new order of humanity has entered the world. The first Adam was created from the dust of the inanimate earth. He was created good, but was subject to falling into sin and thereby dying. The second Adam was not created but begotten by God. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born in the likeness of sinful flesh, but was fully begotten only when He emerged from the tomb, not a living soul, like the first Adam, but a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45).

Sunday, November 1st - Acts 13: 34

Paul cites another Scripture which predicts the resurrection of Messiah and tells something about the nature of that resurrection. He does not exactly quote, but alludes to Is. 55:3, which speaks of God promising to Messiah the faithful and sure mercies of David. Perpetuity of life and glorious sovereignty formed the essence of those mercies, and this point Paul makes with this verse. In Rom. 6:9 the point is made again, as well as in Rev. 1:18. Jesus was raised from death to die no more. But He does not merely exist perpetually. He is the essential possessor and issuing source of eternal life, holiness, happiness, and glory. These are the holy blessings promised to David through David's greater Son. Read of how Peter describes these holy mercies in 1 Pet. 1:3,4.

Monday, November 2nd - Acts 13: 34, 35

When Paul states in v. 34 that the resurrected Christ is no more to return to decay, he hastens to add another Scripture which indicates that Jesus never did actually undergo decay. Rather, the apostle is indicating in v. 34 that the resurrected Christ is never to return to living a life that is subject to death and decay. In v.35, a quotation from Ps. 16:10, we are informed that although Christ did die and His body was buried in the tomb, decay could not assert itself on the One who, though made sin-bearer, was essentially

without sin. The comforting thing for us to realize from this is that although our mortal bodies do undergo decay, we shall be raised in Christ without trace of corruption, as though we had undergone no decay whatsoever (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:50-54).

Tuesday, November 3rd - Acts 13: 34, 35

These verses make an incidental point which the Jews hearing Paul all acknowledged, but which is one that is important for us to note in our skeptical day. When the apostle tells his audience, He (God) has spoken..., and He has said..., then quotes Scripture, the incidental point is made that God is the Author of all Scripture. As B. B. Warfield has rightly remarked in his masterful work, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, It is written, and Scripture says, and God says are all equivalent expressions in the Word of God.

Wednesday, November 4th - Acts 13: 35-37

In these verses, Paul distinguishes the shadow from the substance of salvation. Though David wrote Ps. 16, verse 10 of which is here quoted, the apostle appeals to his hearers to recognize that David could not possibly have been referring in an essential sense to himself. The undeniable fact is that David died, was buried, and his mortal remains underwent decay. Thus, Paul concludes that the reference had to be to Messiah, who is Jesus, as proven by His resurrection. Yet, there is, a derived sense in which decay will not ultimately prevail over David or anyone in Christ. When Jesus called Lazarus from his grave, he should have stunk, but he did not. Our Lord's quality of holy, eternal life, of which we partake by faith now, shall in its consummation be such that not only all of our tears shall be wiped away, but also all vestiges of death and corruption shall be removed from us.

Thursday, November 5th - Acts 13: 38, 39

David served God's purpose in his own generation. Though that king of Israel and man after God's own heart is dead, yet, through the Scripture record of His life, he still speaks. However, we do not receive salvation through David, but rather through Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Therefore, in each of these verses Paul states that it is through Him (i.e., Jesus) that we have salvation from sin, death, corruption, and divine condemnation. Jesus did not serve His own generation only. He serves all generations.

All that He said, all that He did, all that He suffered, and all that He, by His passive and active obedience attained, is for the sake of those in every age who believe in Him.

Friday, November 6th - Acts 13: 38

Paul reaches the point of application in his sermon with this verse. All that he has said is calculated to bring his hearers to certain knowledge of vital significance. Those whom Paul affectionately addresses as brethren, he invites to become his true, spiritual kin in Christ. For that to take place, they must know, not merely by mental cognition or assent, but by total commitment through faith, that forgiveness of sins (man's greatest, though rarely perceived, need) is proclaimed as an accomplished fact (not a suggested potential) through, literally, this One (dia. tou,tou). Paul does not say less with his employment of the near demonstrative pronoun, rather than his using the personal pronoun for Christ. For in the way he states it, Paul is telling his hearers and the readers of Scripture that Christ is the one and only way of salvation, and that He stands near and ready to save.

Saturday, November 7th - Acts 13: 38, 39

The salvation in Christ is not merely from sins but is also unto perfect righteousness. In v. 38, Paul indicates that we are saved by Christ. In v.39, he indicates that we are saved through faith. Faith unites us to Christ clothed in all of His blessings. Faith not only serves to acquit us of all charges of violated divine law; it justifies us, so that we are accounted as ones who perfectly fulfill the law. The law itself—to which the Jews rightly looked for the standard of perfect righteousness, while they wrongly relied on their own efforts to meet that standard—could convict one of sin, but not convert one from sin. The law cannot renew, justify, or free anyone to serve God in gratitude and love. Where Sinai condemns, the Son converts and frees from all condemnation.

Sunday, November 8th - Acts 13: 40, 41

The proclamation and sure offer of salvation is accompanied by a warning against the dire consequences of men's rejection of the One who is the way, truth, and life. God, through the prophet, Habakkuk, here cited by Paul (Hab. 1:5), warned the ancient and apostate Jews that their lack of faithful acceptance of the work of the Lord would result in their perishing. They did perish at the hands of the brutal Babylonians. The point there demonstrated typically is here made essentially: that God's one and only gift of salvation is not rejected with impunity. No one can be neutral towards Jesus Christ. The Son of God is either preparing for His faithful brethren a place in His Father's glorious abode (Jn. 14:2,3), or He is preparing for those who reject Him a place amongst the devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41). Each soul must accept the blessing of salvation or take the bane of

his sin.

Monday, November 9th - Acts 13: 42, 43

These verses show something of the immediate fruit of Paul's sermon. The truth expounded had awakened in many of the hearers a hunger and thirst for more of the truth and for righteousness. Such a hunger was indicative of the hearers having received saving grace. Accordingly, the new babes in Christ followed the teachers of salvation in order to feed further on the teaching of salvation. Spiritual hunger and discipleship ever evidence new life in Christ as a result of the saving grace of God. Accordingly, Paul and Barnabas tell these spiritual babes to continue in the divine grace which had regenerated them. That such perseverance in saving grace is essential is made clear by Paul and Barnabas urging it upon the new disciples. What God begins, He completes. Yet we must not be complacent but work out our salvation with fear and trembling, precisely because our Lord shall continue to be at work in and through us as He has been at work for us in Christ.

Tuesday, November 10th - Acts 13: 44

The priority the message should take over the man is set out in this verse. We are told that nearly the whole city turned out not to hear Paul, but to hear the Word of God expounded through Paul. Whether we are hearing or preaching the Word, we must not let men intrude so as to obscure the message of salvation. When certain Greeks came to the disciple, Philip, they said, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. (Jn. 12:21). The perceiving of Jesus should ever be the aim of those attending gospel preaching, while the presenting of Christ, not the preacher, should ever be the aim of gospel ministers.

Wednesday, November 11th - Acts 13: 45

Not all who hear of salvation in Christ want it. The Jews spoken of in this verse manifest their bondage to sin by the motive driving them in their opposition. They were not sincere but mistaken in thinking Jesus a fraud and Paul a misleader of the people. They did not have zeal for God or love for the crowds. Instead, they were jealous because the crowds were attending the powerful and liberating preaching of Christ, rather than coming to hear the Jews' casuistic lectures which served only to confuse and confine the hearers. The Jews did not want the people to follow the Lord, or to follow Paul, but rather they wanted the people to follow them, even though they were blind guides, blaspheming rather than blessing, going to perdition and endeavoring to lead others there as well (Mt. 23:15). Selfish, sinful, and cursed motives always drive false teachers. Only the pure in heart see God, love God, and love to show others the way to God.

Thursday, November 12th - Acts 13: 46, 47

Paul and Barnabas were neither surprised nor intimidated by the opposition they experienced. Such opposition did nothing to diminish the blessings of salvation which the missionaries enjoyed and sought to share with others. However, it did indicate a disposition in their opponents which, for those opponents, would be very costly. Their repudiation of the proffered saving grace and glorious eternal life of God in Christ would result in that offer being withdrawn from them. This formal withdrawal both Paul and Barnabas loudly declared, not in petulant anger and sinful retaliation, but based upon the direction of their Lord (Is. 49:6; Mt. 22:1-14; Acts 1:8). The gospel was to come first to the Jews, but not only to them. And as the Jews rejected the gospel, it was the plan and purpose of God, into which plan his servants at this point openly and with conscious determination entered, that the word of life should be brought to the Gentiles.

Friday, November 13th - Acts 13: 48

When a gift offered to one person is despised and rejected by that person, that same gift, being offered to another who knows about the initial rejection could be viewed as defective and its offer as an insult. This was clearly not the case with the Gentiles to whom Paul and Barnabas turned with the gospel. The Gentiles saw no defect in the gift, no insult in the offer. They, instead, rejoiced in the gift and treasured it. Luke records that these Gentiles glorified the Word of the Lord. That seems to indicate that the Gentiles did not exult and exalt themselves over the rejecting and rejected Jews. Rather, they beheld in the new economy, wherein they were the primary target audience, not the make-shift tactics of men, but the eternal, wise, and loving plan and purpose of God. Indeed, that God was sovereign over this arrangement is clearly indicated when Luke further writes that all those elected by God to receive eternal life accepted that gift by faith in Jesus.

Saturday, November 14th - Acts 13: 49

Despite opposition, the spiritual sowing and reaping continued in and around Pisidian Antioch. What was spread was not gimmicks but the gospel, the pure, saving, and edifying Word of the Lord. That Word, which was sown, was being accepted by people and bearing fruit in their lives. What we sow, we reap. We win men to that with which we win them. The gospel is substantial. Gimmicks may stimulate, but never sanctify.

Sunday, November 15th - Acts 13: 50-52

As there is a perseverance of the saints, so there is a perseverance of the wicked. Thus, renewed persecution breaks out against Paul and Barnabas. This persecution came from a confederacy of Jews, devout and prominent women, as well as civil and social leading men of the city. That such a group of religious and socially eminent people should oppose the two missionaries of Christ is remarkable and could be a cause for wonder until we remember that the gospel contains bad as well as good news. The bad news is that man's natural endowments and attainments, however high and refined, are as filthy rags before God (Is. 64:6), and as rubbish in view of the surpassing riches of Christ (Phil. 3:8). Rather than humble themselves, repent of their sinful pride and accept true riches of salvation, these leading citizens drove the bearers of the riches of salvation from their district. In return, Paul and Barnabas enacted instructions given by Jesus (Mt. 10:14), who anticipated human swine rejecting the pearl of greatest price.

Paul and Barnabas had entered Pisidian Antioch to bring glad tidings of salvation. They left the place giving practical testimony of divine judgment against it. Was their mission a failure? No. For they left the city and its surrounding district a changed place. Some of its citizens had been enriched by and rejoiced in salvation. They had become citizens of heaven, having the pledge of glory in their hearts via the indwelling Holy Spirit. In order to reach these elect of God the missionaries had come, and they did not leave until their mission was completed.

Monday, November 16th - Acts 14: 1, 2

About 60 miles east southeast of Pisidian Antioch was the city of Iconium. There the missionaries went. Though the city and its citizens were different, the pattern of gospel preaching—begetting new life in some and arousing opposition in others—was the same. Changes in neither time nor space change the dynamics of spiritual service and warfare.

Tuesday, November 17th - Acts 14: 3

Paul and Barnabas were not discouraged over the opposition against them, but were determined to stay the course set for them by the Lord, relying ever more deeply and vitally upon Christ with sure expectation that He would enable them to prevail. Such dependence upon the Lord accounted for the prevailing manner in which they spoke the message of salvation (v.1), while their faithful determination was honored by the Lord granting to them power to work signs and wonders, which served to validate the Lord's messengers and their message. We should take care to note however, especially in our day of sensational spiritual claims, that all signs and sermons pointed not to powers or preachers, but to the word of God's grace.

Wednesday, November 18th - Acts 14: 4

The gospel divided the city. If this was a disturbing of the peace, it was a disturbance of the peace of death. Jesus came to bring a sword of division. By the sword of His Word life is carved out of that solidarity of sin and death in which all people are bound. No more blessed division could occur, than that which separates the living from the dead.

Thursday, November 19th - Acts 14: 5-7

The Lord's servants persevered through aggravations, insults, and strong opposition. Yet when they discovered that a mob would put them to death, they left Iconium, withdrawing from a rash and pre-mature death, just as their Master had done on several occasions during His earthly ministry (Mt. 12:14,15; Lk. 4:16-30; Jn. 8:58,59). Yet, though Paul and Barnabas changed location, they kept to their high and holy vocation. Thus, we find them preaching in a region where some of the choicest fruit would be borne (e.g. Timothy, see Acts 16:1ff). Our lives are invincible until our God-given work is done. But in our doing of that work, we are protected by the power of God through faith (1 Pet. 1:5), not rash presumption. It is not only Jesus whom the devil tempts to abort a godly mission by casting Himself pre-maturely into the jaws of death (Mt. 4:5-7).

Friday, November 20th - Acts 14: 8-10

These verses give an example of the signs and wonders performed by Paul and referred to in v.3. Here is also an example of the blessing the people of Iconium had driven away from themselves. The sign of a lame man made to walk is wonderful in itself. The substance to which it points, namely, a new walk with the Lord in the way of true blessedness (Ps. 1:1,2) is immeasurably precious. How poor and wretched those driving these gospel missionaries from their region made themselves.

Saturday, November 21st - Acts 14: 8-10

The lame man's incurable case is set out in v.8. In vv.9,10 we are shown the manifold grace, power, and blessing of the Lord. We should note that the lame man indicates the priority of his heart by his listening to the Word of God. He sought first the kingdom of God (Mt. 6:33), and a standing and a walk therein, more than he concerned himself with a physical walk. Such a priority is a gift of divine grace, and it is one which Paul is led by the Lord to recognize. The apostle does not perceive merely that the man had miraculous faith, whereby he expected only to be healed (qerapeuqh/nai), but rather Paul detected saving faith in the man (swqh/nai). The man was, in fact, walking in the Spirit, though his

legs remained paralyzed. In his case, by the mercy of God, the lesser healing would be added to the greater saving. Paul commands the man to walk, and immediately he did two things which he had never before done in his life—he leaped up and he walked. The wondrous sign in this man’s case may not apply to all who have saving faith, but the substance to which the sign points does. Christ apprehended by faith enables believers to walk in paths of righteousness, where they had never before walked, and to do so with alacrity and exultation.

Sunday, November 22nd - Acts 14: 11-13

There were reactions to the lame man’s spiritual and physical change wrought through the ministry of Paul. The man himself was converted to Christ and walked in the light and power of God’s Holy Spirit. His fellow citizens in Lystra, however, only perceived the miraculous physical healing, while they badly misconstrued its source and significance. They attributed the source of the miracle to Paul and Barnabas, whom they thought to be not servants of the one true God, but rather false gods themselves. The citizens of Lystra were right to attribute the miracle to a divine source, and, to some extent, they were right to exclaim that the miracle betokened gracious divine condescension. In fact, God did assume human nature in Christ, but He did so not to dwell with men in their fallen world and with their sinful hearts. He did so to lift men out of their sinful bondage and misery. This great truth, however, the crowds did not perceive. Even the miraculous works of God do not of themselves guide men to the salvation of God. Only the Lord’s Word shines the light of truth on divine works, so that men are led rightly to grasp the gift and devote themselves in gratitude to the Giver.

Monday, November 23rd - Acts 14: 14, 15

Paul and Barnabas respond to the superstitious worship offered them by first issuing a strong disclaimer. They reject in word and in deed the false worship offered to them. From this we should understand how awfully wrong it is for believers to allow men to rob God of His glory—especially when that glory due His name is attributed to our fallen and frail characters. Yet, Paul and Barnabas did not simply reject the false worship of the crowds, they sought positively to reorient the people’s impulse to worship to the true object, namely, the Lord. Only the one true God has manifested His praiseworthy power in creation and His glorious grace in redemption. Any persons or things other than this God are essentially empty, being themselves in need of the sustaining power of the Lord (Col. 1:17). Therefore, the worship of anything or anyone except God is vain.

Tuesday, November 24th - Acts 14: 15-17

These verses summarize a brief sermon which Paul preached to the citizens of Lystra. Unlike sermons preached in synagogues to Jews, this one does not present Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Instead, the apostle stresses: 1) man’s universal sin and ignorance of God (v.16); 2) man’s responsibility for his sin and accountability to God (v.17); and 3) the gospel as being the only God-given, and thus gracious, means for men to turn away from their gnawing emptiness to glorious eternal life in Christ (v.15). Even men with absolutely no knowledge of divine special revelation in Scripture must admit the force of these truths. God, through the general revelation of His creation and through the conscience of men, leaves men without excuse for their failure to hear and heed such truths (Rom. 1:18-20).

Wednesday, November 25th - Acts 14: 18

Jesus asked whether it would be easier to proclaim a man’s sins forgiven or to declare that a paralytic should rise, take up his pallet and walk (Mk. 2:9). Here we should perceive how it was easier for Paul to tell a lame man to stand upright on his feet than to dissuade a crowd from religious perversion and superstition. The crowds would have Paul and Barnabas to be gods despite the refusal of the Lord’s servants. This is so because men are sinfully inclined to grab at miracles as mere rare natural riches, men

making of them what they will. Pharaoh tried in vain to turn the miraculous dividing of the Red Sea to his own advantage, pursuing Israel into the dry way made by God in those waters, only to meet his death therein. Men are in greatest jeopardy when they wrest the Lord's works and His Word to their own destruction.

Thursday, November 26th - Acts 14: 18

As the people of Lystra had misinterpreted the natural revelation of creation (v.17), so they misinterpreted God's special revelation through the lame man's miraculous healing. Therefore, the Lord prompts His servants rightly to interpret His works by His Word. It is ever the Word of God which is the higher, safer guide for us all. For there is in us all a tendency to turn creatures into idols rather than to worship the Creator.

Friday, November 27th - Acts 14: 18, 19

It is disastrous when men misconstrue the works and refuse to heed the Word of God. The lack of desire on the part of the people of Lystra for the godly restraint of Paul issues in their being tossed violently here and there by Satan and his wicked helpers. Hence the people cease their flattery and move to flatten the Lord's missionaries. From their attempts to worship Paul and Barnabas, the people act to destroy Paul, who was the chief spokesman (v.12). Sinful unbelief is not only vain (v.15) and irrational, but destructive as well.

Saturday, November 28th - Acts 14: 19

We learn in this verse that the cost of faithfulness to Christ increases over time. In v.5 we read of the Jews attempting to stone Paul. In this verse they actually succeed in having him stoned. Fidelity to Jesus is a deadly serious business. We do well most carefully to heed our Lord's warning about our hating our own lives (Lk. 14:26) and being willing to lose them for His sake (Mt. 10:39).

Sunday, November 29th - Acts 14: 19, 20

Whether he did so nearly or actually, Paul lost his life for Christ's sake, and the Lord gave it back to him again. Which one of us would not be filled with dread and apprehension at the thought of our being stoned and left for dead? Yet, the apostle gives us a glimpse of the experience from his own personal experience. He tells us that he was stoned but once (2 Cor. 11:25), and then goes on to describe his being caught up to the third heaven, the Paradise of God, where he heard inexpressible words (2 Cor. 12:2-4). It is no wonder, then, that this apostle declares that for the believer to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil. 1:21). Thus, we need not fear death, especially when we die for our faith. Christ has made us more than conquerors in both life and death.

Monday, November 30th - Acts 14: 19, 20

Paul used his restored life not to flee to safety from his enemies. The apostle instead returned to Lystra, going back into the very teeth of death. Yet, from his experience he knew that death had been de-fanged by Christ. We, as soldiers of Christ, can stand fearlessly and serve fruitfully in the most evil of days when we put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10ff).

Tuesday, December 1st - Acts 14: 20-22

Paul and Barnabas were faithful to the crucified and risen Christ. Their fidelity to the Redeemer led them to and through their own suffering and death. The process, far from destroying or disheartening them, made them fruitful in producing many other faithful followers of the Lord. They ministered freely and fearlessly, returning twice to Lystra where Paul had been stoned. Far from their being killed in those cities where they ministered, they were instrumental in bringing many souls to new life in Jesus. Those who responded to

their ministry Luke does not call mere associates of Paul and Barnabas, but rather disciples, following the teaching of the Lord Jesus (Mt. 28:18-20). If the production of such disciples issues from our death to self, let us resolve to die daily (1 Cor. 15:31), and have done with vain attempts to entice people to the Lord with cheap games and entertaining gimmicks.

Wednesday, December 2nd - Acts 14: 21, 22

Paul and Barnabas not only planted gospel seeds, they also returned to nurture their growing children in the faith. Their return was prompted neither by sentimental feelings nor practical convenience. Paul and Barnabas returned to those cities in which they had ministered the gospel with as clear a missionary goal in mind as they had on their initial visits. They labored to fortify the souls of the disciples. All true ministry—while it may be considerate of circumstances and touch physical needs where appropriate—aims ultimately to minister to the souls of men, their characters, their essential and immortal selves. We should endeavor to make all of our visits to friends and relatives ministry whereby we serve for the good of their souls, bringing them closer to their knowing and being conformed to the Savior (Col. 1:28).

Thursday, December 3rd - Acts 14: 21, 22

These verses tell us how our souls may be truly fortified. Soul strengthening is not a matter of having our feelings soothed, but rather is a matter of our being nourished upon the facts of spiritual life. Those facts are that as we have begun in Christ, so we must continue. Perseverance in the faith is not optional, but is mandatory. Furthermore, we learn that such perseverance is neither easy nor automatic. We must continuously press on through many contrary and painful obstacles. We do well to mark it down as an elementary and fundamental lesson of true discipleship that it is with considerable difficulty that the righteous are saved (1 Pet. 4:18).

Friday, December 4th - Acts 14: 21, 22

All true disciples of the Lord find deep encouragement in the counsel given in v.22. Such encouragement is gained when we take what Paul says as a whole, not stopping but persevering through each phrase. The first two phrases can seem daunting and discouraging, but they speak the truth, thus forewarning and forearming us. It is neither from, nor around, nor merely up to tribulations that we enter the kingdom of God, but *through* such tribulations. Nor are we called to pass through some, or a few, but rather *many* such trials. There is no avoiding of these trials. We *must* pass through them. There is divine necessity to the process (1 Pet. 1:6,7). Thus we should never be surprised by such tribulations (1 Pet. 4:12-14). In them we shall be more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37); through them we are given assured entrance into the Lord's kingdom. Our entrance into that kingdom makes all the trials worthwhile, and in comparison with the glory we inherit, all sufferings fade into insignificance (Rom. 8:18).

Saturday, December 5th - Acts 14: 23

Paul and Barnabas returned to the disciples they had begotten in the Lord not only to encourage them by their personal presence and teaching, but also to ensure their perpetual edification through the organizing of their assemblies into local churches. Accordingly, we read of the apostolic appointment of elders in every church. The final touches of these encouraging visits were the prayers of the missionaries and their commending of the disciples to the Lord. The appointment of elders does not obscure, but serves to strengthen believers' direct, personal communion with Christ. Our Lord does not despise proper church order, but has ordained it for His own glory and for our good.

Sunday, December 6th - Acts 14: 24-26

The cities mentioned in vv.24,25 mark plotting points for the return of Paul and Barnabas from their first missionary journey. However, the Lord's servants did not merely pass through those cities. We read of them speaking the Word in Perga (where John Mark had earlier deserted them, see Acts 13:13). If our

hearts are set on testifying to people dead in sin about the good news of eternal life in Christ, we shall find and use even incidental opportunities to share the gospel.

Monday, December 7th - Acts 14: 25, 26

What began at the instigation of the Holy Spirit in Antioch (13:1,2), was completed by the faithful service of Paul and Barnabas, as they depended upon the Lord's gracious guidance and sustaining power. What our God's grace begins, the arm of His strength completes. The Redeemer's declaration, *It is finished*, marks all service rendered in Christ by His disciples. Such knowledge should encourage our diligence and empower our faithful perseverance in the service of Christ.

Tuesday, December 8th - Acts 13: 27, 28

These verses record the final duty performed by Paul and Barnabas at the completion of their first missionary journey. They reported to their sending church the results of their service. Here they demonstrate the biblical principle of missionaries being accountable to their sending and supporting churches. What was reported was most encouraging to all. Paul and Barnabas gave a comprehensive review of all that God had done with them. This would have included realistic accounts of opposition and persecution they encountered, and painful things they suffered. Yet through it all, the missionaries were sustained by divine grace and blessed with manifold fruit for their labors. They further told not only how God opened a door for their service, and blessed them in that service, but they also reported how the Lord graciously prevailed in the hearts and minds of many Gentiles, granting to them access to salvation by the same means which had been given to converted Jews, namely, faith in Jesus. Finally, we are told that these precious fruits of their mission were not only shared with the church, but savored for some time by the missionaries and their brethren at Antioch. Yet the service of Paul and Barnabas was not at an end with the completion of their mission. Faithfulness in one task paves the way for faithful service in greater tasks.

Wednesday, December 9th - Acts 15: 1, 2

Paul and Barnabas had to contend with enemies other than those outside of the Church. In this fifteenth chapter of Acts, we learn how troubles arose within the Church, and how the apostles and elders, in response, convened the first general Church Council at Jerusalem. When we view the course of Church history, we find that advances in theological understanding have generally taken place when inadequate and erroneous doctrines have arisen, challenging the orthodox to a deeper study of Scripture, a surer grasp of the treasures of redemption, and a clearer declaration of the truth. What Satan instigates to afflict the Church, our Lord overrules for the blessed enrichment of the Church.

Thursday, December 10th - Acts 15: 1, 2

It is perhaps significant that Luke refers to the opponents of Paul and Barnabas as, *some men from Judea*, rather than as *disciples*. In v.5, it is clear that Paul was disputing against professing believers. If those mentioned in v.1 are the same as those mentioned in v.5, the way that Luke designates them indicates that by their erroneous doctrine and deeds they were not acting as true disciples of Jesus. By what is said of them in v.24, the men from Judea were members of the Jerusalem Church either visiting Antioch on their own, or, if commissioned by that church, exceeding their commission. In either case, let us, if we think we stand, take heed, lest we fall. It is all too possible for believers to let their cultural prejudices take priority over and thus obscure their faith in Jesus.

Friday, December 11th - Acts 15: 1, 2

The issue at stake in this chapter is the question of whether Christianity is a sect of Judaism or the perfection of it. The question arose in a local dispute, but was referred to, considered, and determined by the highest court of the Church, namely, the general assembly of the apostles and elder representatives from all of the local churches. Thus we have manifested in this crisis the connectional nature of the Church. The

body of Christ has organic integrity. She is not a loose association of autonomous congregations. When we allow the Church to become such a loose association, we are failing to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

Saturday, December 12th - Acts 15: 1, 2

Circumcision was graciously instituted by God Himself. The fact that God took this sign and seal of the covenant of grace so seriously may be seen from the account of when God sought to put Moses to death due to his having failed to circumcise his son (Ex. 4:24-26). Nor is there clear indication in Scripture that the rite of circumcision was to be abrogated. It thus appears that the men from Judea urged a legitimate concern. But while we find no explicit scriptural indication that circumcision should be abrogated, we have in Christ, the living Word, the essence of salvation which circumcision foreshadowed. Jesus instituted baptism and the Lord's supper—bloodless sacraments—not in addition to circumcision and the passover, but in place of them. His blood, the substance of which our blood in circumcision and the lamb's blood in the passover are but shadows, has been shed once for all.

Sunday, December 13th - Acts 15: 1, 2

If circumcision cannot itself save, can it undo salvation? What harm would have occurred had Paul and Barnabas not challenged the teaching of the men from Judea? Why did Paul and Barnabas so strongly resist, debate, and cause dissension over this matter? In answer we must note that the teachers from Judea make it a matter of salvation, and therefore a question of supreme importance. If the Judean teachers prevailed: 1) the sufficiency of Christ's atoning sacrifice would be obscured, if not materially compromised; 2) liberty of believers from the ceremonial law--a liberty procured by the blood of Jesus--would be taken away, for if we are obliged to receive circumcision, we are obliged to observe the whole ceremonial law which points to the Savior not yet come (Gal. 5:2,3); and 3) if we are bound to keep the whole ceremonial law after Christ has come, treating Him as though He has not come, we are bound personally, perfectly, and perpetually to keep the moral law as well, and so contribute to, if not accomplish entirely, our own salvation. Let us therefore note how the making absolute of a provisional means of God's grace is a dangerous and destructive thing (compare Num. 21:4-9 with 2 Ki. 18:4).

Monday, December 14th - Acts 15: 1, 2

If Acts 14:22 tells us that our enduring tribulations in the world is one facet of our pilgrimage, these verses and the ones following tell us that our right dealing with and working through dissensions in the Church is another unavoidable facet of our pilgrimage. Jesus Himself tells us that such stumbling blocks inevitably come (Mt. 18:7). Paul agrees, adding that God superintends such dissensions, overruling them for the advancement of His people in that truth which sets them free (1 Cor. 11:19).

Tuesday, December 15th - Acts 15: 3

On their way to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, which were non-Jewish areas where Philip, Peter, and John had labored and borne fruitfully children in the faith (Acts 8:5,14,40). The missionaries from Antioch, now sent on a doctrinal mission to Jerusalem, made the most, not the least, of their journey. They did not merely hasten to their destination, but rightly viewed how they traveled and what they did along the way as essential as the place to which they traveled. Accordingly, they spread their report of their Gentile mission amongst sympathetic disciples in those regions. They did so not as a political ploy to raise support for their cause in Jerusalem. Rather they did so to glorify the God of grace who had wrought so fruitfully through them, and to increase the joy of the believers in Phoenicia and Samaria who learned to their delight that the family of faith, of which they were a part, had been growing.

Wednesday, December 16th - Acts 15: 3, 4

What Paul and Barnabas did along their way to Jerusalem, namely, reporting on their Gentile mission, they did also when they reached Jerusalem. Their report left no doubt that God was the effective worker throughout their mission, and that His workmanship amongst the Gentiles was not in any way defective or incomplete. In this way, with purest motives to honor God and bring joy to His people, Paul and Barnabas effected preparatory and indirect resistance against those who contended that Gentile believers must be circumcised. By their simply telling what God had done, they promoted an atmosphere of light and truth in which error would be exposed and vanquished. Let us never believe that it is good policy to hide the light of the Lord's works under a bushel.

Thursday, December 17th - Acts 15: 5, 6

Here we learn that believers can be mistaken in what they believe, misdirected by Satan, and misdirecting of their brethren in what they teach. We also learn that circumcision was, in fact, the thin edge of the wedge of commitment to the whole ceremonial law. From v.5 and v.1 we also see how mistaken brethren can be the ones to seize the initiative in expressing their views. Such has been the pattern of Church History. Yet, whoever takes the initiative, issues such as these in the Church are settled neither by individuals, nor by parties seeking to attain a majority, but by the leadership of the whole Church, in humble reliance upon the Holy Spirit (v.28). In company of many such leader/servants there is great wisdom.

Friday, December 18th - Acts 15: 7-9

At the Council, Paul and Barnabas apparently did little talking. We learn from v.7 that there was much debate, but the only explicit mention we have of the contribution of Paul and Barnabas is their report in v.12. Does this imply that Paul was a less zealous advocate for his Gentile children in the faith at the highest court of the Church than he was outside of the Church? The answer to that question lies in our finding the answer to another question: Did this Jerusalem Council take place before or after the events related in Gal. 2:11-21? There Paul challenged Peter for his withdrawing from fellowship with the Gentiles at Antioch after the arrival of a Jewish delegation from Jerusalem. There are a number of unanswerable problems raised if we assert that the Council was before Paul's challenge of Peter. Yet, if we assume that Paul's challenge preceded the Council, we have no problems, no contradictions, and several wonderful lessons to contemplate. When we compare Scripture with Scripture, the truth and order of things lies with consistency, not contradiction.

Saturday, December 19th - Acts 15: 7-11

If the Pauline challenge to Peter related in Gal. 2:11-21 took place before the Jerusalem Council, then the fact that Peter and James (vv.13ff) speak persuasively for the Gentiles and against the Judaizers is a direct fruit issuing from Paul's faithful dealing with his erstwhile erring brothers and fellow apostles. Paul strongly charged Peter at Antioch with fear of the circumcision party (Gal. 2:12) and hypocrisy to such an extent that even lovingly gentle and encouraging Barnabas was led astray (Gal. 2:13). Paul rightly saw and said that the issue was whether God had provided a complete salvation for the Gentiles, or one which required augmentation by their observing the law. If Paul had kept his peace at Antioch, the actions of the Jewish brethren would have indicated that the status of Gentiles in the Church of Christ was second rate, and that the salvation offered by God through the apostles, having been prophetically predicted in Scripture, was defective. In short, this matter was an issue of salvation: no circumcision, no salvation (15:1). In Antioch, Paul alone gave a clarion call for Peter and all brethren to realize it is not a matter of Jesus plus anything else. Christ alone as the Author and Object of salvation rightly won the day at Antioch, and by Paul's having advocated this glorious truth there, his words were amplified in Jerusalem by a repentant Peter and James. Only God knows what fruit our faithfulness in one situation will bear in another situation of greater magnitude.

Sunday, December 20th - Acts 15: 7-11

It is wonderful for us to note how completely Peter recovered from his temporary lapse into bigotry. The apostle to the Jews had for a time done something similar to what he did with Jesus as he and his Lord walked together on a stormy sea, namely, he took his eyes away from his Lord and allowed human distinctions to magnify in his sight. That God was the Worker of a perfect salvation, to which nothing needed to be added by Jew or Gentile—since their common redemption and regeneration had cleansed their hearts before God—is most forcefully declared in the Council by a fully repentant and restored Peter.

Monday, December 21st - Acts 15: 7-9

Peter, having been effectively reminded himself of the truth via Paul's faithful dealing at Antioch, reminds the brethren how God had used him to preach to Cornelius and the Gentiles at Caesarea. God, through that preaching had regenerated, converted, and filled those Gentiles with the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ alone. Peter further reminds his brethren that all of this indicated that God had made no distinction between Gentiles and Jews in His application of redemption to them. Thus, in effect, the apostle to the Jews declares that those who God had joined together in Christ should not by any man—and certainly not by a Church General Assembly—be split asunder. We should realize that our bonds to our brethren in Christ are infinitely stronger than differences in culture, gender, nationality, social, or economic status. Indeed, the strong bonds of our redemption bind us together even through death. Let us accordingly live with loving acceptance of one another in Christ.

Tuesday, December 22nd - Acts 15: 10, 11

From what Peter says in these verses, we can judge how completely the apostle to the Jews had recovered from his temporary lapse into bigotry and hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11ff). In fact, Peter says essentially what he had earlier said when his own visit to Gentiles at Caesarea had been challenged (Acts 11:17). The point made at both times was that God was the One who wrought Gentile conversion, and that those judging such conversion to be in any way defective were being critical not only of divine work, but of the divine worker Himself. We know that our Lord feels the attacks of pagan persecutors against members of His body. On the Damascus road He said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *Me*?" Similarly, our Lord feels the burdensome yokes we believers endeavor to place on the necks of our fellow disciples. We do well to treat even the least of our brethren with as much loving respect and unreserved acceptance as we would treat our Lord Himself.

Wednesday, December 23rd - Acts 15: 11

In this verse, Peter declares the same wonderful truth regarding the ultimate basis for salvation as Paul declares in Eph. 2:8,9. We are saved not by our endowments or attainments; not by our worthiness or endeavor; not by our parentage or personal production. We are not saved by what we were, are, or shall be. We are saved solely by the grace of our Lord Jesus. Whatever discernable differences may appear between ourselves and others who manifest true conversion, the basis of our acceptance before God is precisely the same. Thus, our communion in Christ is one of loving gratitude to our Lord and not one of mutual self-regard, self-endeavor, or self-distinction.

Thursday, December 24th - Acts 15: 12

Paul and Barnabas wisely take a back seat at the Jerusalem Council. This verse notes the only time they spoke. They confine themselves in their speaking to giving a faithful report of what God had done through them. The drawing out of the import and significance of such divine workmanship they leave to ones such

as Peter and James. By their doing so, Paul and Barnabas manifest their humility. They are submissive to godly principle rather than being driven by personal ambition. They remain quiet, content, and no doubt prayerful, so long as the truth is being advocated through whatever source. Read Phil. 1:12-18 in this connection. The truth being advocated is that God is the author and applier of salvation, giving it to whomever He chooses as a free gift of His grace received through faith. God alone can and does release men from the crushing yoke of violated divine law (v.10). God calls men to bear the easy yoke, the light and restful burden of Christ (Mt. 11:28-30). The burden the Lord gives us is that of a priceless gift, and we are, accordingly, called to work out what God has worked into us. That working out is no pain, but sheerest pleasure and highest privilege. Such workmanship of God is perfect. It is blessed and blessing, giving no true cause for criticism.

Friday, December 25th - Acts 15: 12

The work which God has done in accomplishing salvation through the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, He continues to do through His Spirit's application of salvation to specific individuals. This divine gift obliterates all human defects and alienating distinctions resulting from such defects. Human distinctions neither add to nor subtract from this glorious gift. By this gift we are inseparable from Christ (Rom. 8:38,39) and from one another in Christ. There should be from us ceaseless expressions of gratitude for—never grumbling criticisms against—this divine work so graciously given to us and to countless others in Christ.

Saturday, December 26th - Acts 15: 12, 13

We should note in the character of the debate at this Jerusalem Council that which should characterize all deliberative councils of the Church. There is a conspicuous absence of bitterness, of endeavors to manipulate others, and of crass politicking. The object of the speakers is not to attain a majority voting for their motions, but rather to express the truth and so persuade all the members of the Council, while alienating none. Accordingly, we read of the gathered commissioners keeping silent after Peter spoke and while Paul and Barnabas spoke. When James raises his voice, it is to add further confirmation to the truth already expressed. How good and pleasant it is when brethren deliberate together in unity (Ps. 133). How rare it is, too! The key to such mutually respectful deliberation is found in v.28, where it is declared that God's Holy Spirit, and not men's personal feelings, reigned in the Council.

Sunday, December 27th - Acts 15: 13

The James here mentioned is obviously not the brother of John, whom Herod had previously executed (Acts 12:2). Rather, this James is most likely the son of Alphaeus, who was one of the twelve (Lk. 6:15), and was a cousin to Jesus. From Gal. 2:11ff, we learn that Peter and James had been for a time together implicated by Paul in Judaizing hypocrisy with respect to their treatment of Gentiles. As with Peter's previous speech at the Council, so now by the words of James we may judge how purged he had become of such bigotry. Whereas James—or at least his representatives previously sent to Antioch (Gal. 2:12)—had promoted Jewish superiority, now he thought and spoke in reconciling terms. We do well to listen to such a man who has been freed from self-regard and filled with loving regard for Christ and His workmanship.

Monday, December 28th - Acts 15: 13-18

James begins where Peter had concluded, acknowledging how the Lord had used Peter to bring Christ to Gentiles. Yet James takes the matter further when he reminds the Council that Gentile conversion was neither a fluke nor a novel divine make-shift. This leader of the Jerusalem church declares that such Gentile conversion accorded with prophetic prediction as recorded in Scripture. Thus, all should realize that what God was doing with the Gentiles was part of the eternal plan and purpose of the Lord. Those who claim Gentile converts to be defective accordingly are criticizing not only the work, but also the wisdom of God. When a doctrine or practice squares with Scripture, our wisdom lies in submissive acceptance, not in critical rejection.

Tuesday, December 29th - Acts 15: 14

James says that God took from among the Gentiles a people for His name. We should understand from this that by such converted Gentiles professing faith in Jesus and receiving baptism, no lesser name than the name of the triune God was conferred upon them (Mt. 28:19). The name of God is not an arbitrary designation, bearing no essential connection to the divine nature. Those receiving the name of God receive God Himself, and God cannot give Himself partially or defectively to anyone. Furthermore, we should understand that James is also saying that Gentile conversion serves not to dishonor the name of God, but rather to glorify that name. It is humbling and amazing when we realize not only that our lives have been savingly honored by the name of the Lord, but that also our Lord's grace and glory are adorned by our names (i.e., our lives) being given in loving trust to Him.

Wednesday, December 30th - Acts 15: 18

James mentions the prophets, then he proceeds to cite only one prophet. We may wonder why he cites only Amos, whose prophetic writing about Gentile conversion may not seem to us to be nearly so clear as, say, the prophecies of Isaiah (e.g., Is. 11:10; 42:1,6; 49:5-7; 55:1-5; 65:1; 66:19). However, there is such a clear consensus amongst the prophets that to cite one—even the least of them—is to cite them all. Also, the Amos passage which James paraphrases contains very explicit reference to the Gentiles being called by God's name. Finally, the Amos passage declares such divine work in converting Gentiles to be in accordance with the eternal divine counsel. Thus does James draw out from the prophets that the Gentile conversion under consideration at the Jerusalem Council is the work of God, manifesting the glory of His character, the perfection of His wisdom, and the wonder of His eternal counsel.

Thursday, December 31st - Acts 15: 19-21

After James establishes from Scripture the divine planning and perfection of Gentile conversion, he goes on to forward a motion for consideration and adoption by the Council. A right understanding of the Word of God should not merely inform our minds, but should also guide our actions. The prayerful speeches and deliberations at the Council were yielding for the entire Church a clearer understanding of the provisional nature of the ceremonial law, and the trouble it would cause, especially but not exclusively for Gentiles, should such shadows be allowed to enshroud the substance of salvation which had come in Christ.

Friday, January 1st - Acts 15: 19-21

James sets out minimal requirements which represent a sanctified conditioning of Christian liberty by enjoining upon believers a loving consideration for their weaker brethren. Far from the Gentiles being required to receive a rite of fleshly circumcision, they are directed how best to nurture holy hearts and loving, inoffensive hands. Such counsel we should all ever be ready to give and to receive.

Saturday, January 2nd - Acts 15: 19, 20

We see from vv.28,29 that the Jerusalem Council adopted the motion of James without modification. The Gentiles accordingly were directed to abstain from things tainted by idol association, from things strangled, and from eating blood. Such things were in themselves not sinful, as Paul teaches in 1 Cor. 8. Yet they could and likely would have occasioned scandal amongst weaker brethren and certainly would have done so amongst Jewish believers. Thus, for the sake of unity in the Church, these directives were given. The prohibition against fornication pertains not to something indifferent, but rather to a moral imperative reflected in the seventh commandment. This particular commandment was singled out for emphasis most likely due to the fact that its violation was so rampantly widespread amongst Gentiles that it had practically become an acceptable custom in their view. Thus, in place of the proposed yoke of calcified ceremonial

law, the Gentiles are given true and apt direction for their own sanctification and for their faith working itself out in love for their Jewish brethren (Gal. 5:6).

Sunday, January 3rd - Acts 15: 21

James mentions that the Christian liberty conditioned by loving consideration for others which he advocated in no way slighted the ceremonial law promulgated through Moses. That law had been taught for centuries amongst the Jews, and would continue to be expounded. However, amongst believers the ceremonial law would increasingly be seen as shadows and types which point to Christ, the substance of salvation. This Gentile controversy and the resultant deliberation of the Jerusalem Council served to help Jewish and Gentile believers alike to realize the shadowy, provisional nature of the ceremonial law. Although in fact the old administration of types and shadows died at the cross of Jesus, the early Church rightly treated that aspect of Moses to a respectful burial.

Monday, January 4th - Acts 15: 22, 23

The consensus of the Church is noted in v.22. Anything resembling the dictates of an ecclesiastical hierarchy is completely lacking here. The truth of God in Christ persuades the Church through her representatives at the Council. This persuaded consensus the Council commissioners determine to communicate to the Gentiles, and, through Luke's inspired scriptural account, it is communicated to the Church universal. The matter is put clearly and concisely in a letter. Yet, living representatives from the brethren at Jerusalem are sent to accompany and expound this letter. Judas and Silas represent the cream of the spiritual crop at the Council. In fact, Silas would later contribute immeasurably to the future expansion of the Church amongst the Gentiles (vv.44ff). Thus we see how the Church leaders take pains to express themselves clearly and more than adequately on this vital matter. Such manner of expression bespeaks not legal precision but loving concern.

Tuesday, January 5th - Acts 15: 23

The Jerusalem Council addresses not only the affected (and offended) Gentile brethren at Antioch, but all Gentile regions. Therefore, what is here communicated is pertinent not only to the case and parties at hand, but to all Gentiles in all regions. Indeed, we have much to learn from it ourselves today. For our liberty in Christ and our call to exercise loving consideration and care for the capacities of our brethren in Christ are matters ever relevant to believers in all ages and in all places.

Wednesday, January 6th - Acts 15: 24

In this verse the Church leaders, especially those from Jerusalem, demonstrate their commitment lovingly to be their brothers' keepers. While censuring the Judaizers, the Church leaders implicitly take some responsibility for their failure to prevent the injury, and commit themselves to doing all in their power to repair the damage. The depth of damage is acknowledged in this letter by the mention of how the Judaizers' words unsettled the souls of the Gentile believers. That from which they had been unsettled was the perfect redemption of Christ and the riches of every spiritual blessing in Him (Eph. 1:3). Inconsiderate words and erroneous teaching can do deep and extensive damage. Recall how much damage Satan inflicted on the world by his plausible words to our first parents. Let us guard our tongues, so that we speak only the truth which edifies.

Thursday, January 7th - Acts 15: 25, 26

With these words the Church leadership makes further restitution for the injury inflicted by certain Church members upon the Gentile members of the body. First, with the words, *it seemed good to us*, there is expressed a humble—as opposed to doctrinaire—attitude on the part of the Church leaders in their apprehending the good provision of the Lord and applying it appropriately in this matter. Next, testimony is given regarding how the Council came to a clear and unanimous consensus regarding the question at hand.

It inspires respect for leaders when they acknowledge that they themselves must study, learn, and apply the deep treasures of the Word of God. It further inspires respect for leaders in the body of Christ when it is manifested that they exercise a caring commitment to achieve unanimity in their deliberations and decisions, thereby disenfranchising or marginalizing none of their brethren. Furthermore, the loving commendation of Paul and Barnabas served to restore the reputations of those servants of Christ, whose names had suffered for a time under a cloud of criticism raised against the products of their ministry. Finally, the sending of Judas and Silas represents the giving of the best loving compensation to the injured Gentiles. Such reconciling, full and lovingly lavish action should characterize all Church Councils and courts.

Friday, January 8th - Acts 15: 27

The written epistle is augmented by two living epistles. Lest any should take unintended offense at the brevity of the Council's letter, or in the event that further questions should arise in consequence of the letter, two of the best members of the Council are sent to add appropriate commentary to the letter. Here we see how lovingly responsible leaders of the Church labor to resemble their Lord in providing more than these dear Gentile believers would ask or expect in this matter. Our Lord works through His servants to ensure that the healing bandage is larger than the sore wound inflicted upon His lambs.

Saturday, January 9th - Acts 15: 28

In this verse, the source of the lovingly admirable and abundantly adequate response of the Jerusalem Council is acknowledged. The affectionately faithful concern, sympathetic sensitivity, and restorative fullness of the Council's action did not result from the natural endowments or endeavors of the Council's members. Rather, they sought and submitted themselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit in all that they discussed and decided. The Holy Spirit leads us into the truth (Jn. 16:13), into the good provision of our loving Redeemer, while enabling us to discern and eschew entangling accretions to that good and essential provision.

Sunday, January 10th - Acts 15: 28, 29

The substance of James' motion (v.20) is here incorporated in the letter. The Gentiles are thus informed that while they do not need to observe the ceremonial law, they do need to work out their salvation with faithful care and loving consideration. Even things indifferent must be dealt with carefully, lest they occasion entangling sin in our own lives, or serve to make others stumble. Such sanctified and loving care, such working out of our salvation with fear and trembling—the very opposite of careless presumption—is good and essential for all believers.

Monday, January 11th - Acts 15: 30, 31

The Church leaders at the Jerusalem Council, by their prayerful dependence upon and submission to the Holy Spirit, faithfully and fruitfully deliberated and drafted a response to the challenge of the Judaizers against the full incorporation of converted Gentiles into the Church. In today's verses we read of the response of the Gentile brethren at Antioch upon their receiving the Council's report. They rejoiced because of its content, which acknowledged their full status in the Church while giving gentle and helpful direction for their working out of their faith in love. They also rejoiced over the loving tone of the letter. Here we see how the Holy Spirit, who speaks to and through the leaders of the Church, at the same time prepares the hearts and minds of Church members rightly to receiving and rejoice in the godly instruction so given.

Tuesday, January 12th - Acts 15: 32, 33

Luke records for us how faithfully Judas and Silas fulfilled their duty in their delivering of this Council decision. They who were prophets gave to the saints at Antioch a generous helping of inspired preaching and teaching. They reinforced their preaching ministry by their staying for a time in Antioch to contribute to and receive from the fellowship of the brethren. Thus these men gave not only their entrusted message, but also they gave themselves as the loving messengers. The gospel is never a bare message, but is a most precious and personal gift from the living and loving God, through His living and loving servants, to souls made alive by divine grace, truth, and love. Thus Paul tells the Thessalonians that he and his co-laborers imparted to them not only the gospel but also their own souls (1 Thess. 2:8). So should we minister.

Wednesday, January 13th - Acts 15: 33, 34

The fact that v.33 seems to indicate that Judas and Silas were sent back to Jerusalem, while in v.40 we read of Silas being in Antioch with Paul may seem confusing and contradictory. Yet, v.34, which some versions of the Bible omit, supplies the explanation. The Church at Antioch, having been greatly blessed by the delegation from Jerusalem, dismissed with gratitude the commissioners from Jerusalem when their service was completed. Thus Judas and Silas were free to return to their home church. However, Silas rightly sensed that he would better fulfill God's will by staying on at Antioch. Our goings and comings should not be ordered by what others are doing around us, but rather by what our God is doing in and through us.

Thursday, January 14th - Acts 15: 35

Paul and Barnabas also chose to remain at Antioch, which was essentially their home church (Acts 13:1). Although we are informed from this verse that there were many in that church who exercised faithful ministry of the Word of God, Paul and Barnabas are not found relaxing under the ministry of others. Instead, they busy themselves teaching and preaching as well. No church can be over-blessed with faithful teachers and preachers; no congregation can be over-fed the heavenly manna of God's truth. When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, our God provides abundant filling.

Friday, January 15th - Acts 15: 36

Although Paul and Barnabas busied themselves ministering the Word while they remained in the church at Antioch, they knew that their calling was to a wider work (Acts 13:2). Hence these spiritual giants rightly determined to re-visit and strengthen the brethren in all the churches which they had planted. Because the world ever distracts, Satan ever entices and intimidates, and the flesh ever seeks to assert its ensnaring power, constant vigilance and perpetual nurture are required from those whom the Lord has called to pastor His flock. Accordingly, the ministers of the Lord are called to lead the way in their looking out not for their own interests, but for the interests of others (Phil. 2:4).

Saturday, January 16th - Acts 15: 36-40

If Satan fails to frustrate godly intention, he will try his hand at frustrating godly execution of that intention. Hence, with the characteristic frankness of Scripture which portrays the saints with their warts and all, Luke records how Paul and Barnabas came to a parting of their ways. They who were united in the bonds of Christ, united in their calling (Acts 13:2), they who had suffered together in Christ and had been united in defense of the glorious truth of salvation by God's grace alone, they who had stood together in the Jerusalem Council, defending the fruit of their ministry against Judaizing attacks, find themselves separated over the matter of the composition of their missionary team. If such pillars of the Church can fall into disputes which, at least for a time, alienate each from the other, how much more careful do you think we should be to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

Sunday, January 17th - Acts 15: 37, 38

What are we to make of this dispute between an apostle and the man who had encouraged him so soon after his conversion, and had introduced him to the other apostles (Acts 9:26-28)? These godly brethren agree on

the object of their mission, but disagree over who shall participate in the accomplishment of the mission. The determination of how we pursue a godly objective proves to be as vital as the determination of that objective. The selection of those with whom we serve the Lord is as important as our commitment to that service. Our Lord, who is not constrained to save by many or by few (1 Sam. 14:6), appears to place a premium on the quality and not on the quantity of His servants. Recall the reduction in Gideon's army (Jud. 7:2-8). We must take very prayerful care as to whom we should include or exclude from participation with us in Christian service.

Monday, January 18th - Acts 15: 37-39

The incident here recorded was not only grievous to those involved in it, but it is challenging, yet instructive, to us. We must be careful how we analyze and apply to ourselves this dispute. It is not a paradigm of godly planning and execution which we are called to follow. Rather, it is a humbling reminder that even the best of the Lord's servants with the best of intentions have inherent faults and limitations sufficient to ruin any good work to which they put their minds and hands—save by the grace of God.

Tuesday, January 19th - Acts 15: 37-39

Barnabas expressed a desire to take along his young cousin, John Mark. No reasons for this desire are recorded in this part of the Word. However, we know Barnabas was an encourager, and such people tend to perceive potential in others, even as Barnabas had seen potential in the newly converted Saul (Acts 9:26,27). In fact, godly potential was in John Mark, and it did develop to a point where Paul himself later acknowledged it (cf., Philemon 23,24; 2 Tim. 4:11). Should we be critical of Paul for his insensitivity to this potential? The Holy Spirit appears to indicate from our passage and the rest of Acts that it was the concern of the Lord and of Paul more to strengthen the newly planted churches, and to plant other new churches, than to restore and train up John Mark. As it worked out, both the main mission and the minor one were accomplished not by John Mark's accompanying Paul into such hostile and persecuting areas as Lystra and Derbe (compare Acts 16:1 with Acts 14:6, 19), but rather by Paul and his new team sticking to the originally adopted course, while Barnabas and John Mark went to the home region of Barnabas (Acts 4:36). Thus, we see how the desire of Barnabas actually hardened into a demand which he failed to attain. Yet our Lord overrules the faults and failures of His servants for His glory and for their own good.

Wednesday, January 20th - Acts 15: 39-41

The desire of Barnabas and the refusal of Paul escalated into a sharp disagreement, which, in turn, led to a separation of missions, if not a rupture of the ties of godly respect and affection between the men. Yet, God overruled for good in this, as we find two teams, instead of one, re-tracing the steps of the first missionary journey in a coordinated, rather than competing or redundant fashion. Barnabas and John Mark head for Cyprus, the point where the first missionary journey commenced (Acts 13:4-12), while Paul and Silas head through Syria and Cilicia on their way to Lystra and Derbe in the region of southern Galatia, where the first missionary journey had concluded. Despite the faults and failings of His servants, our Lord provides perfect ministry for the alpha and omega of His Church, and for all that lies between.

Thursday, January 21st - Acts 15: 40, 41

Paul and Silas receive the brethren's prayerfully committing them to the grace of the Lord. Scripture does not record such commendation of Barnabas and John Mark, nor does Scripture follow the course of these latter two as it follows so fully the course Paul and Silas. This is not tantamount to an expressed censure of Barnabas. Yet, where Barnabas appears to be an encourager of his young cousin, Paul proves to be an unswerving encourager of entire churches. Those churches were not only in Syria and Cilicia (areas also addressed in the letter from the Jerusalem Council—vv.23ff) but far afield from there, even to the very heart of the Roman Empire. Therefore, in the providence of God, we learn that the converted Pharisee, whose natural inclinations were toward rigorous exclusion of any failing to measure up to godly standard, was by God's grace a far more deep and extensive encourager than was the man whose name and nature

carried that designation. Let us then, above all, marvel at and with deepest gratitude magnify and appropriate to ourselves such grace which makes us also to be faithful and fruitful in the service of Christ.