

*The  
Guild Text Books*

---

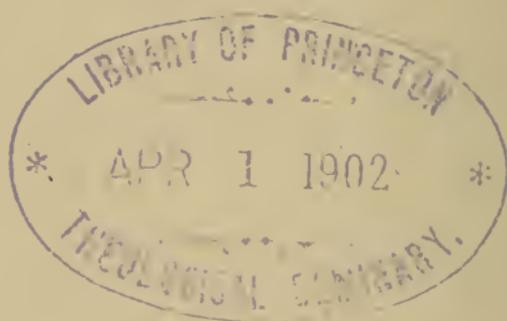
*Studies in the  
Acts of the Apostles*

*Robertson*

BS2625

.8.R65

*Fleming H. Revell  
Company*

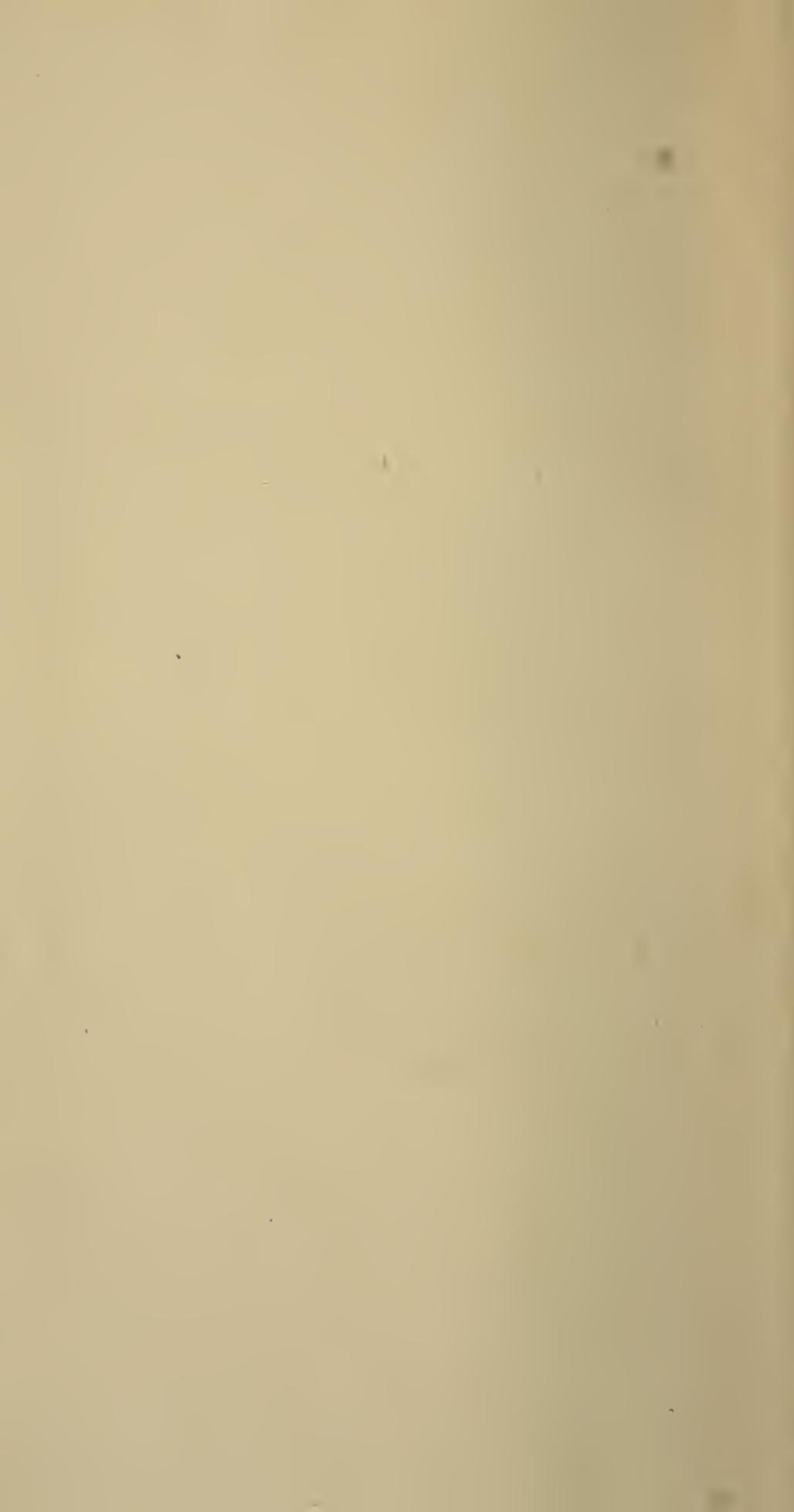


Division B52625

Section 8.R65

No. ....





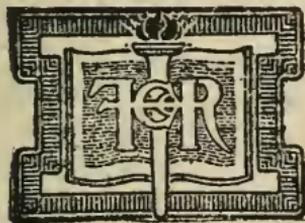
*THE GUILD TEXT BOOKS*

---

Studies in the  
Acts of the Apostles

By

William Robertson, M. A.



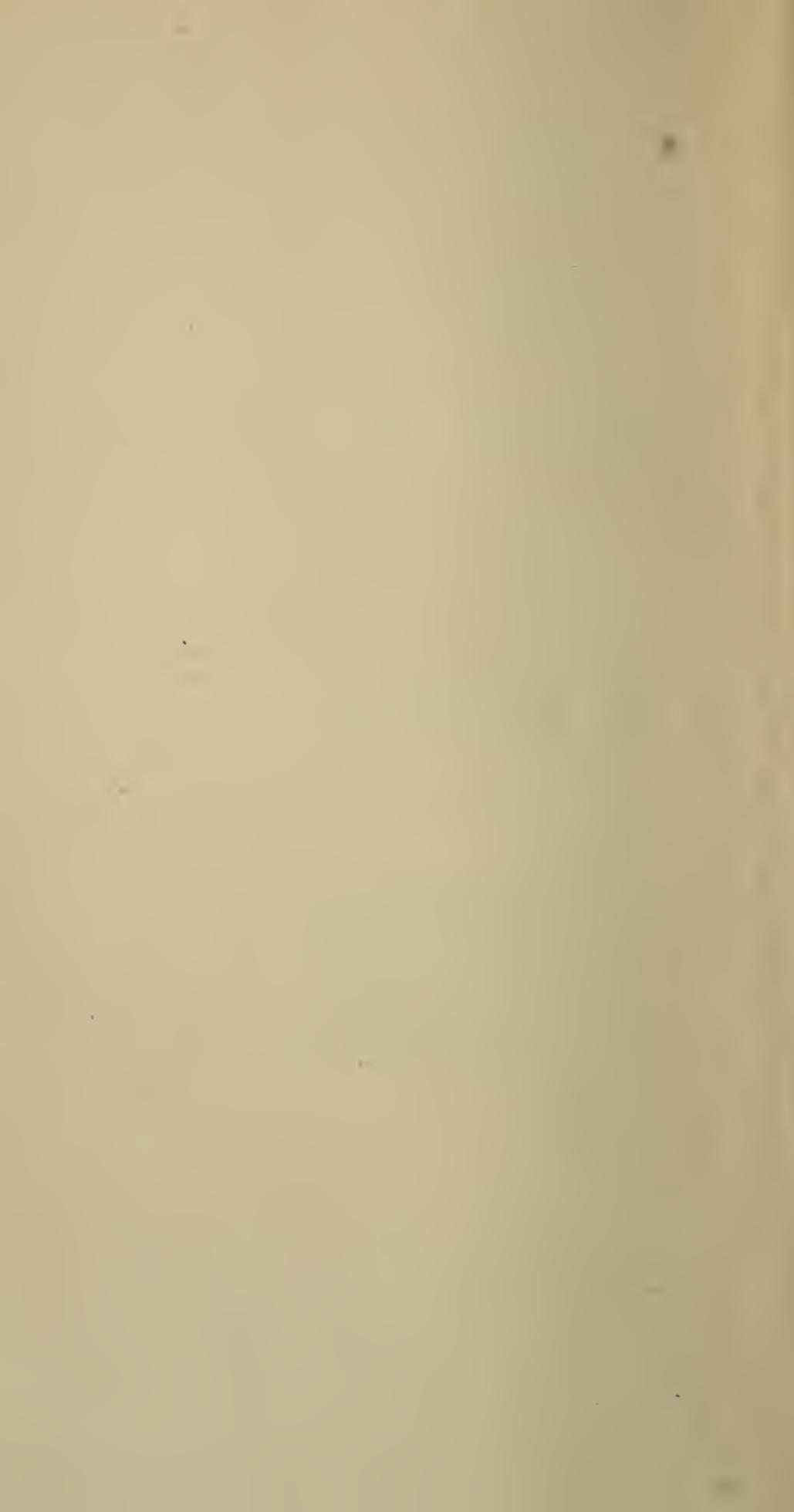
New York

Chicago

Toronto

Fleming H. Revell Company

Publishers of Evangelical Literature



## EDITORIAL NOTE

IT is a pleasure to the Editors to issue this book of *Studies*. It seems to us to be admirably calculated for use in Bible Classes; and this is the primary object with which it has been prepared. Its language is singularly clear and simple; the author has a distinct purpose in every sentence; he avoids no difficulty; he is aware of the most recent controversies, and his reverent commentary on the Acts is both instructive and impressive. Another purpose may in our opinion be served with this little book. In many households there is a sincere wish to find suitable books for family reading on Sunday evening; and this book—a narrative rather than a commentary, yet a narrative which explains every point without formal explanation—will be found to bear the severest test of composition, for it keeps up interest when read aloud. We say this after actual trial when the proof-sheets were passing through our hands.

A. H. CHARTERIS.

J. A. M'CLYMONT.

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE aim of this text-book is to help members of Bible Classes and Guilds to obtain a clear and intelligent knowledge of the contents of the Book of Acts. As it is intended to be used along with the Scripture narrative, it is arranged in chapters corresponding to those of the Acts, each paragraph having prefixed to it a note of the verses referred to in it.

The writer has striven to present the various scenes and incidents in a form which it is hoped will be found interesting to the young and suitable for use in elementary Bible Classes. At the same time he has endeavoured also to supply, both in the text and in the notes, such explanatory references, historical and geographical information, and illustrations drawn from the conditions of Eastern life as will enable the reader to realise more clearly the details of the story, and to enter more sympathetically into the experiences of those who were the founders of the Christian Church. Care has been taken to secure that the information given is accurate and reliable in the light of the results of the most recent scholarship. Free use has been made of all available books on the subject, and the author desires to acknowledge his indebtedness to these.

He has also to thank several friends for assistance in the revision of the proof-sheets, particularly Professor Nicol, Aberdeen, and Dr. M'Clymont, Joint-Editor of the series of Guild text-books.

COLTNESS MANSE, *August 1901.*

## CONTENTS

| CHAP.  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| INTRODUCTION—THE BOOK AND ITS AUTHOR                                 | I    |
| 1. COMMISSIONED TO BE WITNESSES . . . . .                            | 6    |
| 2. PENTECOST . . . . .   | 12   |
| 3. A MIRACLE THAT HAD GREAT RESULTS . . . . .                        | 18   |
| 4. TESTIFYING BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN . . . . .                         | 22   |
| 5. THE FAITH SPREADING AND THE AUTHORITIES<br>ALARMED . . . . .      | 28   |
| 6. THE BEGINNINGS OF CHURCH ORGANISATION                             | 37   |
| 7. THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR . . . . .                              | 41   |
| 8. PERSECUTION AND ITS RESULTS . . . . .                             | 44   |
| 9. THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL . . . . .                              | 52   |
| 10. PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO GENTILES . . . . .                       | 63   |
| 11. THE DEVELOPMENT AND SPREAD OF CHRIS-<br>TIANITY . . . . .        | 68   |
| 12. MORE PERSECUTION . . . . .                                       | 73   |
| 13. PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY . . . . .                        | 77   |
| 14. MISTAKEN FOR GODS . . . . .                                      | 88   |
| 15. THE FIRST COUNCIL OF THE CHRISTIAN<br>CHURCH . . . . .           | 93   |
| 16. PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY . . . . .                       | 101  |
| 17. PERSECUTED FROM CITY TO CITY . . . . .                           | 111  |
| 18. SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY ENDED AND<br>THE THIRD BEGUN . . . . . | 116  |

vi *STUDIES IN ACTS OF THE APOSTLES*

---

| CHAP.                                    | PAGE |
|--|------|
| 19. PAUL AT EPHESUS . . . . .            | 121  |
| 20. MACEDONIA, TROAS, MILETUS . . . . .  | 124  |
| 21. THE RETURN TO JERUSALEM . . . . .    | 129  |
| 22. ENTERING A ROMAN PRISON . . . . .    | 134  |
| 23. TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN . . . . . | 136  |
| 24. WEARY DAYS IN PRISON . . . . .       | 139  |
| 25. THE BEGINNING OF THE END . . . . .   | 141  |
| 26. PAUL AND KING AGRIPPA . . . . .      | 144  |
| 27. A DISASTROUS VOYAGE . . . . .        | 146  |
| 28. ROME AT LAST . . . . .               | 150  |

# STUDIES IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

## INTRODUCTION

### THE BOOK AND ITS AUTHOR

**1. The Title.**—The title as it appears in our Bibles can hardly have been given to the Book by the author, nor does it correctly describe the contents. The Book does not record all the acts—nor indeed the principal acts—of all the Apostles. In the first half of it little is recorded of any of the Apostles except Peter, while the acts of Philip and Stephen, who were not Apostles, are recorded at length. In the second half the only Apostle whose acts are fully recorded is Paul. It is believed, therefore, that this title was given to the Book at a later date. This view is confirmed by the fact that in the more important of the early manuscripts of the New Testament the title given to it is “The Acts of Apostles.” In one very important manuscript it is simply “Acts.”

**2. The Date.**—No statement is made in the Book itself as to the date at which it was written. One or two circumstances, however, have been noted which have led scholars to fix a date about which it was probably written. Although the author makes frequent and invariably correct reference to historical events taking place during the period of which he is writing, there is no indication that he knew of the destruction of

Jerusalem. On the contrary, he refers to the city as if still in its grandeur, speaks of the Temple services as if still being observed, and alludes to individual localities, such, *e.g.*, as Solomon's Porch, as if existing and well known. Had the terrible tragedies accompanying the siege and fall of Jerusalem taken place, there would almost certainly have been some reference to them. We know that Jerusalem was destroyed in the year A.D. 70. It is therefore concluded that the Book of Acts was written before that date. It has been noticed further that the writer makes no mention of the death of the Apostle Paul. If he had known that the Apostle had actually laid down his life for the Gospel, he could hardly have avoided mention of the fact. Now St. Paul was martyred at Rome probably about the year A.D. 67 or 68, and we therefore conclude that this Book was written before that date. The absence, moreover, of any reference to the writings of St. Paul or to those heresies which disturbed the peace of the Church in the later years of the first century confirms this view. It is believed, therefore, that the Book was written between the years A.D. 63 and 70, and the general opinion is that it was written at Rome.

**3. The Dedication.**—The Book is dedicated to Theophilus—the same to whom the Gospel of St. Luke is dedicated. Nothing is known of this person, but from the epithet “most excellent”<sup>1</sup> applied to him, it has been concluded by some that he was a person of rank, holding some high official position. Others have doubted whether he was a real person at all, and have suggested that the word (which means “lover of God”) is merely a name intended to indicate any believer.

**4. The Author.**—The author's name is nowhere mentioned in the Book. All the traditions of the early Church, however, were to the effect that it was written by Luke, the author of the third Gospel, and in very

<sup>1</sup> This adjective **Most Excellent** is applied to Felix twice (Acts xxiii. 26, xxiv. 3), to Festus (Acts xxvi. 25), and to Theophilus again (Luke i. 3).

early Christian writers we find him mentioned by name.<sup>1</sup> We find confirmation of this in the Book itself. If, for example, we compare the introductory sentences of the two books, we notice that the opening words of the Book of Acts ("The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus") imply that it was written by the same author, as well as addressed to the same individual, as the Gospel. A striking similarity of style and language marks the two books. It is an interesting fact that more than fifty Greek words which are found nowhere else in the New Testament are used both in the Gospel of St. Luke and in the Book of Acts. Though the author does not speak directly of himself in his book, yet there are significant grammatical changes in his language implying that on certain occasions he was present, and had a share in the events which he describes, while on others he was not. For example, in describing Paul's second missionary journey, he says (chap. xvi. 8), "*they* passing by Mysia came down to Troas:" Immediately after (verse 10), continuing the narrative, he says, "after that he had seen the vision, immediately *we* endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called *us*." The change from *they* to *we* is significant. Thereafter the writer continues to use the pronoun "*we*" until it disappears (in verse 17) just before the imprisonment of Paul and Silas at Philippi. From that point the word "*they*" is used till we reach chap. xx. 5, where we find them again at Philippi. Here the writer resumes the use of the word "*we*," and continues it throughout the account of the journey to Jerusalem as far as chap. xxi. 18, when he again begins to record what "*they*" did. In chap. xxviii. 1, in describing the party embarking at Cæsarea to sail for Italy, he

<sup>1</sup> Irenæus, A.D. 190, and Tertullian, A.D. 200, both refer to Luke as the writer. Eusebius, A.D. 325, says: "Luke, by race a native of Antioch and by profession a physician, having associated with Paul, and having also associated less closely with the other Apostles, has left us examples of that healing of souls which he acquired from them in two inspired books, the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles" (*Hist. Eccl.* ii. 11).

once more uses the pronoun "*we*," and continues it throughout the journey to Rome. Thus we learn that at certain parts of his career Luke was a companion of St. Paul, and an eye-witness of the events recorded.

In this way, and from these expressions, we have to glean most of what we know regarding Luke. All that we learn of him beyond this is gathered from three beautiful references made to him by Paul in his Epistles to the Colossians,<sup>1</sup> to Philemon,<sup>2</sup> and to Timothy.<sup>3</sup> Luke (or Lucas), the beloved physician, was not a Jew, for in Col. iv. 11, 14, we find him clearly distinguished from those companions of St. Paul "who are of the circumcision." Probably he was a Greek freedman. Of his previous history, or of the time and manner of his conversion, we know nothing. The first notice we have of him is in that word "*we*," which tells us that he joined Paul at Troas. It has been suggested that he may have been a physician in Troas converted to Christianity under the ministry of Paul in that town. Certain it is that when the Apostle left Troas and went into Macedonia, Luke accompanied him as far as Philippi, where they remained together for some time. When Paul left Philippi to proceed to Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica, Luke appears to have remained behind, for his narrative says, "Now when *they* had passed," etc. (chap. xvii. 1). When, seven years afterwards, Paul, in the course of his third missionary journey, paid another visit to Philippi, he found Luke the physician still there, and the grammar tells us they left the city together, for it is written, "*We* sailed away from Philippi" (chap. xx. 5, 6). We have no record of what Luke did during those seven years, though it has been conjectured that he devoted himself to missionary work.

<sup>1</sup> "Luke, the beloved physician" (Col. iv. 14).

<sup>2</sup> "Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers" (Phil. 24).

<sup>3</sup> "Only Luke is with me" (2 Tim. iv. 11).

The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon were probably written during Paul's first imprisonment at Rome; the Second Epistle to Timothy probably during his second imprisonment.

From the time of their reunion at Philippi, Luke remained in constant attendance on Paul during his journey to Jerusalem, being his companion at Miletus, Tyre, and Cæsarea. When, finally, we hear of Paul setting out for Rome, we find Luke accompanying him. He was along with him in the shipwreck (chap. xxviii. 2), and travelled with him by Syracuse and Puteoli to Rome (chap. xxviii. 12-16). There he remained with the Apostle during his first imprisonment, and comforted him in his trials and labours. If, as is most likely, the Second Epistle to Timothy was written during Paul's last imprisonment, then Luke was his faithful companion during the last scenes of the Apostle's life (2 Tim. iv. 11), and the last glimpse we get of the beloved physician is closed with a testimony from the Apostle's pen to his faithfulness amidst the general defection. As he tells Timothy how, when he was brought before Nero the second time, all had forsaken him, he adds, "Only Luke is with me," and Scripture tells us no more.

**5. The Aim of the Book.**—What purpose had Luke in view in writing this book? Clearly its main purpose was historical. It fills the gap between the Gospel and the Epistles, and shows in the history of the Christian Church the continued action of the risen Christ through the Spirit bestowed on His disciples. Beginning with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it traces the growth and spread of Christianity from its small beginnings in Jerusalem until it reached Rome, the metropolis of the world. Along with this history of the *outward spread* of Christianity, however, the book traces the *inward development* and organisation of the Christian Church, showing how the little company of believers, possessed and guided by the Spirit, grew into a widely-spread and fully-organised Church. It tells how for the management of certain affairs office-bearers (deacons) were appointed; how arrangements were made for the instruction of believers, for the observance of the Lord's Supper, etc. It tells further how questions arose as to the terms on which Gentiles might be admitted into the membership of the

Church, and how these were settled. In such ways it traces the successive steps in the development of the Christian Church. Clearly, however, it is not the writer's purpose to give a continuous and complete history of the Church in all those places in which it was planted. He desires rather to record the planting of it, and to describe the circumstances connected with its beginning in each place, showing how first in Jerusalem, then in other Jewish centres, and finally among the Gentiles, it was so organised that when the Apostles passed away those Churches would be able to maintain their existence and continue their witness. These things he records in such a way that what most impresses the reader is the rapid spread of Christianity. We cannot but admire the artistic manner in which Luke ends his book. He traces the gradual spread of the Christian faith throughout the Roman empire till he reaches a point where he presents to us a picture of the great Apostle in Rome, the metropolis of the world, "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, no man forbidding him." It was the triumphant proclamation of a universal Gospel in the capital of the world. When he has described this, the writer of the Book of Acts has accomplished his purpose, and lays down his pen.

## CHAPTER I

### COMMISSIONED TO BE WITNESSES

**Introduction** (chap. i. 1-12).—Luke begins by dedicating his book to Theophilus, the same to whom he had formerly dedicated his Gospel, and he intimates a connection between that treatise and the one he is now about to write.<sup>1</sup> In the Gospel he had related what "Jesus

<sup>1</sup> The Gospel of St. Luke closes with a very brief notice of the Ascension. Fuller details of it are given here so as to form a con-

began both to do and to teach" while He was yet in the world. The work thus begun on earth, however, was continued by the Saviour after He had ascended to heaven, by means of His Holy Spirit working through and guiding His Apostles.<sup>1</sup> To trace the development and progress of the work in this new form is the purpose of this second treatise, the Book of Acts. It opens by telling how the risen Saviour remained on earth for forty days,<sup>2</sup> and during that time showed Himself repeatedly to His disciples. Very interesting would it be if we could read His conversations and follow His intercourse with them during those forty days; but only on two points have we information on the subject. His appearances were intermittent, not continuous, and the subjects on which He conversed with them were "things pertaining to the kingdom of God." One glimpse of such an interview is given us—the last before His ascension,—and it shows us how far the Apostles were even then from realising the spiritual nature of His kingdom and of the work on which they were about to be sent. The Resurrection had kindled anew in their hearts the old hope that perhaps after all He was now going to restore the earthly kingdom to Israel. Very gently our Lord sets aside such expectations, and rather turns their attention to their own future. They must wait patiently, He tells them, until there has been fulfilled to them the promise of the Father, which they had heard of Him.<sup>3</sup> Some of them—John and Andrew at least—had heard the Baptist speak of a time to come when they would be "baptized with the Holy Ghost."<sup>4</sup> That prediction

nection between the two treatises, and indicate the purpose for which this one was written.

<sup>1</sup> After His passion.—Literally, "after He had suffered."

<sup>2</sup> Forty days.—Better, "by the space of forty days" (R.V.). Christ was not continuously with His disciples, but showed Himself to them frequently at intervals during the forty days. The length of time between the Resurrection and the Ascension is mentioned only here.

<sup>3</sup> The promise of the Father.—Luke xxiv. 49; John xiv. 16, 26; xv. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. iii. 11; Mark i. 8; Luke iii. 16; John i. 33.

of the Baptist had been endorsed and made clearer by our Lord's own promise. Now it was almost about to be fulfilled. To rest on that promise, then, was their present duty. When once the fulfilment of it had come, and they had received the Holy Ghost, they would find themselves endued with a power which as yet they did not possess,—a power which, when they received it, would fit them for discharging the great commission with which He was now about to entrust them. He called them to be witnesses for Him before the world, testifying to His life and character, His death and resurrection, and bearing this testimony in a constantly enlarging sphere, first “in Jerusalem, then in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

From this parting injunction of our Lord it will be seen (1) that after His ascension He retained His relation with His Church on earth by His Holy Spirit; (2) that the mission of the Christian Church is to be a witness in the world for the ascended Christ; (3) that from the first that missionary commission of the Church has been world-wide in its extent. Luke takes the words of this commission as his guide in planning out his book, and keeps it before him from first to last, tracing out the incidents which were the fulfilment of it. Thus this verse summarises the contents of the Book of Acts.<sup>1</sup> When our Lord gave His disciples this parting promise and charge—the promise of a spiritual endowment and a world-wide missionary commission—it was His last word to them. While the thought was still but entering their hearts, while their eyes still looked on Him as He stood with uplifted hands in the act of blessing them,<sup>2</sup> He was “taken up,” and a cloud

<sup>1</sup> The Book of Acts first records the preaching of the Gospel “in Jerusalem” till the martyrdom of Stephen; then the dispersion throughout “Judæa and Samaria” (viii. 1); Philip going down to Samaria (viii. 5), and afterwards Peter and John (viii. 24); then the conversion of Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, and the vision of Peter; finally a full account of the missionary labours of Paul, Barnabas, Mark, Silas, Timothy, and the others by whose labours the Gospel spread until it reached Rome, the capital of the Roman world.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxiv. 51.

received Him out of their sight. They saw Him ascend out of their midst, and that was one of the facts to which they were called to bear witness. With what feelings must they have watched Him disappear thus from their sight! Little wonder if they stood awe-struck gazing up into that heaven<sup>1</sup> which had so mysteriously received their Master! So strong was their sense of wonder and amazement, that the unexpected appearance of two men strangely clad in white apparel standing beside them did not add to it. Indeed, the strangers stood unnoticed till the deep silence was broken by the question they asked, "Ye men of Galilee,<sup>2</sup> why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." With profound calmness the strange message was received; without a word of surprise the marvellous promise was accepted. He would come back, and in the same wonderful manner as they had seen Him go! At these words they turned away in silence and walked quietly back the short distance<sup>3</sup>—three-quarters of a mile—that lay between the Mount of Olives<sup>4</sup> and Jerusalem, their hearts filled with a great joy. Did it occur to them that they were carrying back with them two precious contributions to the faith of the Christian Church—their personal testimony as eye-witnesses of the **Ascension**, and that explicit promise of a **Return** which has been ever since a star of hope shining on the Church's path? The visible ministry of the Saviour was ended; the invisible ministry of the Holy Spirit was about to begin.

**The Upper Room** (chap. i. 13, 14).—Returning to

<sup>1</sup> Toward heaven should be "into heaven," the phrase being used five times with quiet emphasis in these two verses.

<sup>2</sup> Ye men of Galilee.—They were all Galileans now. Only one of the twelve belonged to Judæa, and he was Judas, the traitor.

<sup>3</sup> A Sabbath day's journey.—2000 cubits, *i.e.* about three-quarters of a mile.

<sup>4</sup> Olivet, otherwise known as the Mount of Olives, is on the east of Jerusalem on the way to Bethany. Hence the expression used by Luke in his Gospel is, "He led them out as far as towards Bethany" (Luke xxiv. 50).

Jerusalem after their marvellous experience, with the strange joy still in their hearts, the disciples went up into *the* upper room—probably the upper room mentioned before as that in which the Lord's Supper was instituted.<sup>1</sup> It was an interesting gathering, this first company of disciples met in the name of the ascended Saviour. It was like the mustering of God's host. It was but a little company, but it was marked by three striking characteristics—unity (they were all of one accord), prayerfulness (they continued in prayer and supplication), and expectancy (waiting for the fulfilment of the promise). Luke records at the outset the names of the eleven men who were to be the founders of the new Church, the leaders in that work which it is his purpose to describe.<sup>2</sup>

With them were certain women—probably those who had been wont to minister to Jesus while He was on earth. One of these was Mary, the mother of Jesus. This is the last mention of her in Scripture, and it is noteworthy that in the last glimpse we have of her we see her as one of a company of worshippers, kneeling in prayer. We notice also that the brethren of Jesus, who six months before did not believe on Him,<sup>3</sup> are now among His disciples.

**Filling the Vacant Office** (i. 15-26).—The ten days that followed the Ascension the disciples spent mainly in devotion, "waiting for the promise." One solemn and important matter of business, however, they must discharge, and it was the energetic Peter who called them to it. On one occasion, when about 120 of them were present, he rose to speak on a subject that

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the four lists of the Apostles given in the New Testament. See Matt. x. 2; Mark iii. 16; Luke vi. 14, and above. In each of these lists the twelve names fall into three groups of four. Each group is headed by the same name in all the four lists. The first and second groups are the same in all the lists. In the third group, two of the lists give the name of Thaddæus, while the other two give instead Judas, the brother of James. These are, therefore, believed to designate the same disciple.

<sup>3</sup> His brethren.—Their names were James, Josès (Joseph), Simon, Judas (Matt. xiii. 55; Mark vi. 3).

must often have been painfully in their thoughts—the treachery of Judas and his terrible fate. Distressing as it was that one of their own number should have come to so dreadful an end, he pointed out that this should not have been, and need not now be, a cause of surprise to them. It was exactly what prophecy had foretold, and the Scripture must needs be fulfilled. In the Book of Psalms, David, speaking by the Holy Ghost, predicted (1) that the Messiah would be betrayed by one holding an office (“a ministry, a bishoprick”), and (2) that the traitor’s habitation should be cursed and desolate (“Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein”).<sup>1</sup> Thus in the fate of Judas they could see the fulfilment of prophecy, and so the fulfilment of the purpose of God. But he further pointed out that the prophecy goes on to say that his office would be filled up (“His bishoprick let another take”).<sup>2</sup> In order, then, that that also should be fulfilled, it was necessary, he argued, that they should now proceed to elect a successor to Judas<sup>3</sup> by filling up the vacant apostleship. He laid down what were the qualifications necessary in any one for the office. As he was to be, like other Apostles, an eye-witness to the life of Jesus, he must be one who had had a personal knowledge of Jesus from the very beginning of His ministry (in the days of John’s baptism) down to the Ascension. This condition would probably make the number from whom a choice might be made a very small one. Using their own judgment as they best could, the disciples selected two who possessed this qualification—Joseph called Barsabas, and Matthias<sup>4</sup>—and then, kneeling in prayer, they asked that God, who alone can judge the heart, would indicate which of these two He

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxi. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cix. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Now this man purchased, etc., verses 18 and 19, are not a part of Peter’s speech, but an explanation inserted by Luke to emphasise by a minute description the ruin that had come upon Judas.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph called Barsabas, and Matthias.—Nothing is known of these two men beyond what is mentioned here.

had chosen.<sup>1</sup> Then they gave forth their lots.<sup>2</sup> Each name was probably written on a small tablet. These tablets were shaken in a vessel or in the lap of a robe, and the one which first leaped out indicated the person chosen. In this way the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven Apostles. Thus, not by lot only, but by prayer answered through the lot, was the vacant apostleship filled up. It is worthy of note that this use of the lot occurred before the gift of the Holy Ghost, and that there is no recorded use of it by the Apostles after Pentecost.

## CHAPTER II

### PENTECOST

(1) **The Descent of the Holy Spirit** (chap. ii. 1-13).—Slowly the days passed while the expectant disciples still waited for the promise. It was now the tenth day since the Ascension, and the streets of Jerusalem were thronged with crowds of men and women. It was the feast of Pentecost,<sup>3</sup> and, as usual at that season, Jews from every part of the world were in the city, having come up to keep the feast in even greater numbers than at the Passover. Away from the throng, however, the little company of disciples were gathered quietly for prayer in their upper room. Suddenly the stillness of their meeting was broken in upon by a great noise—like

<sup>1</sup> **Shew whether of these two.**—Literally, **Show of these two the one whom Thou hast chosen.**

<sup>2</sup> **Gave forth their lots.**—Better, **Cast lots for them.**

<sup>3</sup> **Pentecost.**—As its name (= fiftieth day) implies, this feast was kept on the fiftieth day after the Passover. It was the Jewish Harvest-home. It was also called "the feast of Weeks," from the fact that a week of weeks intervened between the Passover and it. The three great feasts of the Jews were the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. To these all males were commanded to go up and appear before the Lord (Deut. xvi. 16).

the sound of a mighty wind rushing through the house where they were. The sound which startled them was followed by a sight as startling, for immediately great tongues as of flaming fire were seen in the room, distributing themselves<sup>1</sup> over the little band, one resting on the head of each. It is not said that there was wind, nor yet that there was fire, but a sound was heard "as of a wind," and "there appeared cloven tongues *like as* of fire." These were the nearest resemblances the writer could use to describe them, but they were only resemblances. They were strange external manifestations of a reality far more wonderful still. God, the Holy Ghost, had come! As at Bethlehem the Son of God had come down to dwell among men, so now, on this day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit had come to be with men after the Lord Jesus had left them. The power of a new life—the forces of a new kingdom—were coming into operation. It was a spiritual wonder, and its effect was felt by all of them, apostles and disciples, men and women. Presently a still more startling manifestation of that Divine Presence was given when, amidst great excitement, the disciples began to speak with tongues different from their own, and were understood by the foreigners who heard them. It was not the form of instruction or preaching that this miraculous utterance took, but rather that of praise and adoration, showing forth the wonderful works of God. The sound like a rushing wind that had filled the upper room had been heard<sup>2</sup> also throughout the city. It could be traced to the house where the disciples were, and little time was needed for a crowd to collect. Filled as the city was with foreign Jews, the multitude which gathered contained representatives of nearly every country in the known world,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cloven tongues.—"Distributing themselves," *i.e.* one to each, as in the R.V. in margin.

<sup>2</sup> Noised abroad.—"When this sound was heard" (R.V.).

<sup>3</sup> Parthians and Medes, etc.—These were Jews who had settled and become naturalised in these localities. They were known as "the Jews of the Dispersion." While the Temple stood, those Jews made periodical pilgrimages to the feasts. Thus from the

and great was the surprise when all of them heard those simple Galileans praising God in the languages with which they were familiar in their own far-off homes. No wonder all were amazed and said one to another, "What meaneth this?" What could be the explanation of this unusual spectacle? Hasty conjecture quickly offered one explanation—these men were intoxicated! "They were full of new wine."<sup>1</sup>

(2) **The First Christian Sermon** (chap. ii. 14-36).—At this suggestion, Peter and the eleven stand forward from the other disciples, and with characteristic zeal he again assumes the position of spokesman. Standing up and speaking aloud<sup>2</sup> to the multitude, he repudiates the suggestion of drunkenness, pointing out that it was still but the third hour of the day<sup>3</sup>—the hour of the morning sacrifice in the temple, before which no pious Jew might eat or drink. The explanation of the mystery, he said, would be found not in that, but in the fact that prophecy was being fulfilled before their eyes. Recalling the prophecy of Joel<sup>4</sup> that in the last days God would pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh, he claimed that this marvel was the fulfilment of that promise. Taking this as his text, he delivered an address which is interesting in many ways. It was the first sermon preached in the Christian Church, and it is an interesting sample of Apostolic preaching. The congregation to which it was addressed was a singularly representative one. To read the list of lands from which they came is to sweep, in thought, round the nations of the known world. East and north, south and west it leads us, showing how wide was the

very beginning the Apostles were witnesses for Jesus to the uttermost ends of the earth, for Peter's sermon was addressed to those who had their homes all over the known world.

<sup>1</sup> **New wine.**—Literally, "sweet wine"—stronger than the thin sour wines used as a daily beverage.

<sup>2</sup> **Standing up, lifted up his voice.**—This pictorial use of standing up is a marked peculiarity of St. Luke, being used by no other writer in the New Testament. See Luke xviii. 11, 40; xix. 8; Acts v. 20; xvii. 22; xxvii. 21.

<sup>3</sup> **The third hour.**—That is about nine o'clock in the morning.

<sup>4</sup> Joel ii. 28-32.

dispersion of God's people even at that time, for we must remember that those who had come from all those lands were not Gentiles but Jews—"the Jews of the Dispersion."

Reading the sermon itself, we feel that its brave, outspoken tone is evidence of a great change wrought on Peter by the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. Only seven weeks before, when Jesus was arrested, all those Apostles forsook Him and fled.<sup>1</sup> Peter himself could not then muster courage sufficient to confess his Master even before a maidservant. Now, standing boldly before that great multitude, he charges them as a nation with having in the person of Jesus of Nazareth killed the Prince of Life, and he points to this wonderful gift of tongues as evidence of the truth of the charge he makes. His own courage was evidence no less striking. He speaks with all the intensity of an overwhelming conviction. His personal knowledge of the Resurrection and the Ascension had given him that conviction, and now the Holy Spirit gave him courage and power to bear witness to it. His discourse divides itself into four parts:—

1. (vv. 14-21).—This which you hear is not the effect of drunkenness; it is the promised outpouring of God's Spirit.

2. (vv. 22-32).—Jesus of Nazareth, whom your nation crucified, God has raised from the dead—a fact of which we (the Apostles) are witnesses.

3. (vv. 33-36).—Being now ascended to the right hand of God, that same Jesus has shed forth this gift of the Holy Ghost, the effects of which you see and hear.

4. (ver. 36).—Therefore (he concludes) let all the house of Israel know that this same Jesus whom ye crucified<sup>2</sup> is the One whom God has made both Lord and Christ. Ye have crucified the Christ of God!

Very solemn and profound was the impression made by such a discourse, preached as it was with the spiritual power now resting on Peter. Those who heard it, feel-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvi. 56.    <sup>2</sup> That same Jesus, ver. 36 (compare R.V.).

ing its truth, were stung with remorse at the blindness and wickedness of their nation in having crucified the Messiah whom God had sent, and in distress of mind they asked Peter and the rest of the Apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ," was the Apostle's reply; and with the exhortation he gave them the assurance that in Jesus Christ not only would they obtain remission of their sins, but they would also receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. This was in compliance with the direction given by Jesus before His Ascension, that "repentance and remission of sins" should be preached in His name,<sup>1</sup> and also with the injunction given them—"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."<sup>2</sup> In his invitation to those believers to come forward for baptism Peter also included their children. Under the Old Testament covenant a man's children were included with him in the covenant of God. We read that when God made a covenant with Abraham, He said, "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed," and accordingly every Israelite was commanded to have his son circumcised when eight days old, thus putting upon him the outward mark of that spiritual covenant with God into which he was admitted. Under the new covenant of God, children were not to be worse off than they had been under the old, but just as "to Abraham *and his seed* were the promises<sup>3</sup> made," "so also," says Peter to those Jewish converts, "the promise is to you and to your children." Yea, and even wider still is that promise, for it is to include also "them that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call." The Church of God is no longer to be confined exclusively to the children of Abraham. Now the proclamation is "God so loved **the world**, that . . . whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Many another charge and exhortation did Peter add to these, though

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 47.<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxviii. 19.<sup>3</sup> Gal. iii. 16.

not written for us, for Luke makes no attempt to give more than the substance and character of the address; but so great was the awakening and such the response to his appeal that to the infant Church with its 120 believers there were added that day about 3000 souls.

Thus we notice that on the day on which we have the first Christian preaching we have also the first mention and administration of **Christian baptism**. Before this there had been baptism for the remission of sins by John,<sup>1</sup> but now we have the important addition "*in the name of Jesus,*" i.e. confession of their faith in Jesus as the Christ.<sup>2</sup> This constituted the ground of admission to the membership of the Christian Church. Three thousand souls in one day was a vast addition to the little Church, and it is with evident satisfaction that Luke tells how those new converts continued steadfast. In doing so he sketches for us in outline the Church life of those early days. He tells us that (1) they continued under the *instruction* of the Apostles; (2) they shared in *fellowship* with one another for mutual encouragement and help; (3) they joined together in the *breaking of bread*—the earliest name used in the New Testament for the Lord's Supper, so that the second sacrament took its place in the Church along with baptism from the beginning; (4) they joined together in *the prayers*, i.e. public worship.

Under the influence of such exercises as these, the spirit of unity in the Church deepened; her members were drawn more closely together in a common life as well as a common worship; she began to be regarded with feelings of awe and almost fear by those who were without, while those within her communion had their

<sup>1</sup> Luke iii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Almost without doubt this first baptism, like that of the first Gentile converts (chap. x. 47), must have been administered not by immersion, but by pouring or sprinkling. The immersion of 3000 persons in a city so sparingly furnished with water as Jerusalem is inconceivable, while the idea of a procession of over 3000 persons down from the city to the Brook Kedron or the Pool of Siloam is equally so.

daily life brightened by the joy and gladness of a single-hearted purpose. And so the Lord added to them daily such as were being saved.

## CHAPTER III

### A MIRACLE THAT HAD GREAT RESULTS

(1) **A Wonderful Cure** (chap. iii. 1-10).—Soon after this there occurred in Jerusalem an incident which made a great sensation and had important results. It not only attracted attention, and so afforded Peter an opportunity of explaining the Christian faith to a large gathering of people, but it brought the Apostles for the first time into collision with the authorities, and so led to the first of that long series of persecutions which the Church of Jesus Christ has had to endure. Through it also Peter got an opportunity of testifying for Jesus Christ before the Sanhedrin itself—the highest and most bigoted ecclesiastical court of the Jews. We do not wonder, therefore, that St. Luke describes the incident somewhat minutely. The early disciples, although they became Christians, still continued faithful to their Jewish worship and regularly attended the Temple services. One day as Peter and John<sup>1</sup> were going up to the Temple for the service held at three o'clock in the afternoon,<sup>2</sup> they noticed a poor cripple sitting at what was known as the Beautiful Gate.<sup>3</sup> He was a life-long helpless

<sup>1</sup> Peter and John are often associated together. They were partners (Luke v. 10); they were sent together to prepare the Passover (Luke xxii. 8); they ran together to the sepulchre on the Resurrection morning (John xx. 2-5); they were sent to Samaria together (Acts viii. 14).

<sup>2</sup> The ninth hour.—There were three hours of public prayer, viz. the third hour (9 A.M.), the sixth hour (12 noon), and the ninth hour (3 P.M.). See Ps. lv. 17; Dan. vi. 10; Acts ii. 15, and x. 9.

<sup>3</sup> The Beautiful Gate.—This gate is not named elsewhere. It was probably the gate leading from the court of the Gentiles to the

cripple, whose friends carried him daily to that spot that he might beg from all who passed by.

As the Apostles passed he asked for alms. Arrested by his piteous cry, they stopped, and both looked at him with a fixed and earnest gaze. Instinctively feeling that that gaze meant something more than ordinary interest, the man looked up. His expectation was awakened, and still more so when he heard Peter's authoritative word, "*Look on us!*" Peter's next words, however, may well have brought him disappointment. "*Silver and gold have I none,*" said the Apostle. A shadow clouded the expectant face at these words, deepening into a look of wonder as he heard the Apostle say further, "*But such as I have, give I unto thee!*" These were no words of apology for the smallness of the gift Peter was about to bestow. Not silver and gold, but something much more precious; for as the wondering cripple gazed in expectancy the Apostle added, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Walk!"<sup>1</sup> We can imagine the changing lights and shadows on the poor man's face reflecting the changing emotions succeeding each other in his soul. His first cry had been the mechanical, half-indifferent one with which for years he had addressed every passer-by. At the earnest look of the Apostles, however, and at the word of Peter, he waked up, anticipating some gift. Then came a sense of disappointment when he heard Peter, as he thought, pleading poverty, but ere the sentence was ended he was conscious of a strange, undefined, but very real expectation of something which he felt sure the Apostle was about to give him.

This was faith,—dim and feeble, no doubt, small as a grain of mustard seed,—yet living and eager to catch whatever Peter might say more. The moment that word "Walk" fell on his ear he responded. He

court of the women. Josephus, after describing the other nine gates, which were overlaid with gold, says of this one that it was made of Corinthian brass, and far surpassed in value all the rest.

<sup>1</sup> Rise up and walk.—In the R.V. the command runs simply, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Walk!" which, addressed to a man who never had walked all his life, sounds more startling.

grasped the Apostle's outstretched hand, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received a strength<sup>1</sup> they had never known. The life-long cripple, who never before had stood on his own feet, rose up and walked. He entered the Temple with his benefactors, leaping and walking and praising God, thus letting his first walk in life lead him into the sanctuary, there to praise the Lord. Little did the poor man think how great a share he and those lame feet of his were to have in moulding the future history of the Christian Church.

(2) **Peter's Sermon** (chap. iii. 11-26).—That entry of his into the Temple caused the marvel to enter on a new phase, for there, leaping strangely about, exulting in his newly-found—and not yet familiar—power, he attracted the attention of the people, who knew him quite well by sight, and were struck with amazement. Soon a wondering crowd gathered round him and the Apostles as, turning to the left, they passed from the court of the women into Solomon's Porch.<sup>2</sup> Wonder was on every face, questioning in every look. So eager were they to know what all this meant, that Peter proceeded to explain its significance. It was not, he said, by any power or godliness of their own that he and John had been able to make this lame man walk. It had been done "in the name of Jesus." It was really the God of their fathers who had done it, and in the doing of it He had borne testimony to Jesus as His son,—that same Jesus whom their nation had rejected and compelled the unwilling Pilate to crucify. But though they had crucified Him, God had raised Him from the dead, a fact of which the Apostles themselves had

<sup>1</sup> **His feet and ankle bones, etc.**—The Greek words used are those which a physician would naturally use in describing a case, and they form one of those coincidences which go to confirm the belief that the Book of Acts was written by Luke the physician. We notice also that the graphic description given is evidently that of an eye-witness.

<sup>2</sup> **Solomon's Porch** was a handsome arcade running the whole length of the east end of the Temple enclosure. It was said to have been built by Solomon, and to have survived from the former Temple.

been eye-witnesses. He asserted that it was through faith in the name of this Jesus—a faith which was also His gift—that they had been able to make the cripple walk in presence of them all. How terrible then, he argued, must be the responsibility resting on a nation who had rejected and crucified the Son of God ! But in ignorance they had done it, and, moreover, in doing it they had been unconsciously fulfilling the purposes of God, revealed by the prophets ; and even this great sin of rejecting His Son, God would forgive if they repented. “Repent, therefore,” he cried, “Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come<sup>1</sup> times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord ; and that He may send the Christ whom He hath appointed, even Jesus.” Peter then, appealing alike to the testimony of the prophets<sup>2</sup> and to their own position as the covenant people, pressed home the truth that God, having raised up His Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead, now offered Him first of all to them and their nation as their Saviour, that He may bless them in turning them away from their iniquities. Thus did he combine a terrible indictment of the Jewish nation, and an appeal for individual repentance on the part of those whom he addressed, with the testimony he bore to the resurrection of Jesus and the offer of forgiveness and salvation to all who should repent.

<sup>1</sup> **When times of refreshing shall come.**—R.V. rightly, “that so there may come” seasons of refreshing. The times of refreshing can only follow the repentance and conversion.

<sup>2</sup> **All His holy prophets.**—Peter justifies his reference to all the prophets (1) by quoting from Moses, the greatest of them ; (2) by referring to “all the prophets from Samuel,” who also all foretold Messiah. The same division into “Moses” and “all the prophets” is found chap. xxvi. 22 ; Luke xxiv. 27.

## CHAPTER IV

## TESTIFYING BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

(1) **Peter and John arrested** (chap. iv. 1-4).—While Peter thus addressed the eager crowd, there stood by two different sets of spectators whose gloomy looks betokened great offence. The priests<sup>1</sup> and those officials<sup>2</sup> whose duty it was to preserve order in the Temple were scandalised at seeing such a rabble within its precincts, and were afraid lest a disturbance should arise. Apart from them there stood another group, looking even more angry and annoyed. These were the Sadducees.<sup>3</sup> Their favourite doctrine was that there was no Resurrection and no such thing as an angel or a spirit. When, therefore, they heard Peter declaring to the crowd that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead, and that the Apostles were witnesses of His resurrection, they felt that their doctrine was being deliberately attacked. The prospect of having to defend their teaching against men who boldly asserted that they had seen the risen Saviour sorely troubled them.<sup>4</sup> For nearly three hours the crowd listened to Peter's words, but at last those two hostile parties, animated by different motives, combined to lay hands on the Apostles and have them arrested. It was, however, almost sunset, and there could be no trial of them that day, so they were conveyed to prison to await

<sup>1</sup> **The priests.**—The priests were divided into twenty-four courses, each of which served a week in the Temple. The priests mentioned in the text were probably those on duty for that week.

<sup>2</sup> **The captain of the Temple.**—Probably a priest whose duty it was to command the guard of Levites stationed in the Temple.

<sup>3</sup> **The Sadducees.**—These were the aristocratic and priestly party, whereas the Pharisees were the leaders of the people. The Pharisees taught many precepts and observances—traditions of the fathers—said to have been given orally by Moses in addition to the written law. These the Sadducees rejected, holding by the written law of Moses. They also denied the Resurrection because it was not mentioned in the written law.

<sup>4</sup> **Being grieved.**—R. V., "sorely troubled."

their trial next morning.<sup>1</sup> \* These priests and Sadducees, however, were too late to prevent what they feared, for the mischief was already done. Many who had heard Peter's address had been convinced by it and had joined the disciples,—so many indeed that the number of believers was brought up to<sup>2</sup> about 5000—a marvellous increase in so short a time. Christianity was making its way in Jerusalem. The priests and Sadducees might imprison the Apostles, but God was multiplying the members of His Church.

(2) **The Apostles before the Sanhedrin** (chap. iv. 5-22).—Next morning a meeting of the Sanhedrin,<sup>3</sup> or great national council of the Jews, was held, and the two Apostles were arraigned before it. It was an imposing and venerable tribunal, believed to contain those highest in authority, those wisest in counsel, and those most learned in doctrine among the Jewish people.<sup>4</sup> Its seventy-one members were seated in a semicircle,

<sup>1</sup> **Eventide.**—The Jewish day ended at sunset, and it was not lawful to hold a court in the night. The scribes based this law on Jer. xxi. 12.

<sup>2</sup> **The number was.**—Better, R.V., “came to be,” *i.e.* the total number of Christians was by this addition brought up to about 5000.

<sup>3</sup> **The Sanhedrin.**—This council, which included seventy-one members, was composed of the three classes mentioned here—“rulers, elders, and scribes.” Before this council Jesus was brought (Matt. xxvi. 3; Mark xiv. 53; Luke xxii. 66).

<sup>4</sup> **The scribes.**—“Writers.” These were a body of men who rose into prominence during the Captivity. At first they were occupied in making copies of the sacred writings, but later, when the Hebrew language was being gradually supplanted by Aramaic, they became also the expounders of the Scriptures. Thus they came to be the religious teachers of the Jews.

**Annas** was leader of the Sadducean aristocracy. He had been high priest from A.D. 7-14, and was then deposed by the Romans.

**Caiaphas** was his son-in-law, and was *legally* the high priest at this time, holding that office from A.D. 25-37. Annas was a man of great ability, and of great influence among the Jews, who still regarded him as high priest, although Caiaphas was so according to Roman law. Luke (chap. iii. 2) mentions both as high priests, the one being so in the eyes of the Jews, the other by Roman law. It will be remembered that when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, the soldiers led him first to Annas, by whom he was sent on to Caiaphas, who in turn sent him to Pilate, the Roman Governor. Annas lived to see five of his sons and a son-in-law fill the office

at the centre of which the accused were made to stand. Little wonder if the two simple Galilean fishermen felt overawed as they found themselves called to answer before such an assembly. If anything were needed to intensify this feeling, it was supplied by the terms of the opening question addressed to them.<sup>1</sup> In what name, they were asked, or by what power had persons like them done this? The question was as significant as it was contemptuous. It admitted the cure. To deny that was impossible, for the man was standing there—a silent witness, whose testimony could not be gainsaid. But it asked by what authority they had presumed to do it. The questioners manifestly intended to bring the Apostles within the scope of the law laid down in Deuteronomy against any who should seek by signs or wonders to tempt Israel away from God.<sup>2</sup> God does not desert His servants in their time of need, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was thrilling through Peter as he stepped forward to reply to that question. Calmly and respectfully he began, “Ye rulers of the people,<sup>3</sup> since<sup>4</sup> you ask about the good deed<sup>5</sup> done to this poor man, and inquire as to how he has been made whole, be it known unto you—yea, and to all Israel—that this has been done through the power of Jesus of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, but whom God raised up from the dead. The saying of the Psalmist has this day been fulfilled. The stone which was set at nought by you builders has become the head of the corner. In crucifying Jesus ye were fighting against God; but behold!

of high priest, and for nearly fifty years he wielded, through his kindred, the power of that office.

**As many as were of the kindred of the high priest.**—Those would probably all be of the Sadducees’ party.

<sup>1</sup> **Ye.**—In the Greek the pronoun “ye” is placed last, a position which gives it a contemptuous turn. *Such people as ye!*

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xiii. 1-5.

<sup>3</sup> **Ye rulers of the people,** for this was the highest judicial tribunal which the Jews had.

<sup>4</sup> **If.**—Used with great rhetorical skill for “since.” *If for a good deed we are being tried.*

<sup>5</sup> **The good deed,** etc.—Literally, “a good deed done to an impotent man.” Both nouns are without the article.

God has triumphed ; and now not only is bodily healing to be found through His name, but the great salvation<sup>1</sup> for which men have so long looked must be sought in Him ; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we<sup>2</sup> must be saved."

The bold manner and straight speaking of the two Apostles<sup>3</sup> were not without effect. The members of the council were impressed. They knew that these men had never studied in the rabbinical schools ;<sup>4</sup> they had had no theological education, and they marvelled as they listened to their words. Their astonishment set them thinking, and by and by they remembered that they had seen the men before. They were some of those who had been with Jesus. That thought made them pause. It brought back unpleasant memories. Was history going to repeat itself? They directed the Apostles to leave the hall while the court should consult together on the case. "What shall we do with these men?" they asked one of another. It was no use attempting to deny the miracle. All Jerusalem could see that it had been wrought, for everybody knew the lame beggar who lay at the Temple gate. All they could do was to try to prevent the matter going further by forbidding the Apostles to speak any more in this name. The accused were therefore recalled, and warned that if they were again found speaking in the name of Jesus<sup>5</sup> serious consequences would follow. This threat, however, produced little effect, for immediately Peter and John, bold as ever, returned the perti-

<sup>1</sup> Salvation.—"The salvation" for which we look. "Our salvation."

<sup>2</sup> We.—In the Greek "we" is emphasised by being placed last.

<sup>3</sup> Of Peter and John.—From this we learn that all that was spoken is not recorded. There is no record of any word spoken by John, yet we are told that his boldness of speech, no less than that of Peter, impressed the council.

<sup>4</sup> Unlearned and ignorant.—This gives a wrong impression. The words in the original merely indicate that they had never studied in the rabbinic schools and had no special knowledge of rabbinic teaching. Ignorant is literally "laymen," *i.e.* men without any professional knowledge of a subject. It does not imply *general* ignorance.

<sup>5</sup> Not to speak, etc.—The Greek seems to imply that they were warned not to utter the name of Jesus.

ment but embarrassing answer, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye! As for us, we cannot but testify what we have seen and heard." The court's reply to this was a further and somewhat undignified threatening and an abrupt dismissal of the accused. Much as they would have liked to inflict some punishment on them, they did not dare, lest there should be an outbreak of indignation on the part of the people; they therefore let them go. The would-be persecutors were foiled, and the two Apostles walked from the bar and from the court conscious that the cause of Jesus Christ had triumphed.

(3) **The Apostles released. A Second Baptism of the Holy Ghost** (chap. iv. 23-31).—On regaining their liberty; Peter and John quickly made their way to where their fellow-disciples were—possibly in the upper room of Pentecost, or it may have been in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark.<sup>1</sup> Gladly were they welcomed, and to an interested and wondering company they related their strange experiences, telling what the chief priests and elders had said to them. Wonder and thankfulness filled the hearts of the listening disciples, and soon we see the little company joining in a fervent prayer of thanksgiving and praise—a remarkable prayer, in which, after adoring God, and acknowledging Jesus as the Christ, they asked for courage to continue their witness-bearing, and prayed that God would confirm their preaching by further signs and wonders done in the name of Jesus. Immediately God's answer came in a second outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The house in which they were assembled was shaken as it had been at Pentecost, and they, filled with the Holy Ghost, spake the Word with boldness. The first baptism of the Spirit had made them speak with tongues; this second prepared them to preach the Gospel with boldness.

**Life in the Early Church** (chap. iv. 32-35).—At this point there is a break in the narrative. St. Luke pauses a moment that he may present to us a picture of

<sup>1</sup> Compare chap. xiii. 12.

Christian life in the infant Church. Three distinct features characterised it. Prominent among these was the remarkable unity and concord that existed among its members. They were all of one accord<sup>1</sup>—of one mind. Very noticeable, too, was the great subject of their preaching. It was the Resurrection of Jesus. The Apostles, baptized anew with the Holy Ghost, never wearied of bearing powerful testimony to this great truth. But most striking of all was the fruit of such fellowship and faith, the generous self-forgetfulness with which each member of the little community sought the good of all. Those who had means enabled the Church to supply the want of those who had none. Many parted with their lands and possessions for this purpose, placing the proceeds<sup>2</sup> at the disposal of the Apostles, who distributed them according as there was need.<sup>3</sup> A very beautiful picture of the Christian community is thus presented to us, but alas! it has its shadows. Then, as now, the Church of Christ had its trials and dangers. We have already seen how it was threatened with destruction by persecution from without; now we see it in danger of corruption from within. Beside the genuine religion of Jesus Christ there sprang up a counterfeit. In presence of the spirit of Christian liberality a spirit of hypocrisy appeared, tempting people to pretend to a generosity they did not possess. Alas! the true and the false were already found together in the brotherhood of believers, and Luke, in his picture

<sup>1</sup> **Of one accord**, etc.—A better translation is, “The heart and the soul of the multitude of those that believed were one.” There was an invisible spirit of unity binding them together, as well as an outward union.

<sup>2</sup> **The prices of the things that were sold**.—The language used expressly avoids saying that these men sold all that they had. They sold some things, and the amount realised was given to the Apostles to be used for the relief of those in need. It will be noticed (*a*) that this giving was voluntary, at the prompting of the inward spirit (see chap. v. 4); (*b*) that it was not universal. Every one did not sell his property; nor does any one seem to have sold his all.

<sup>3</sup> **According as he had need**.—Many no doubt were deprived of their means of support in consequence of having become Christians, and so were in need.

of the early Church, furnishes us with an instance of each.

**An Instance of Christian Generosity** (chap. iv. 36-37).—One of these instances is interesting because of the prominent part which the man concerned in it afterwards took in the planting of the Christian Church. He was a Levite,<sup>1</sup> Joses or Joseph<sup>2</sup> by name, although better known to us by the surname Barnabas, which the disciples gave to him because of his remarkable power in exhortation.<sup>3</sup> A native of Cyprus,<sup>4</sup> now living in Jerusalem, he owned a small property, perhaps a farm, or it may be only a field, although belonging to the tribe of Levi, a tribe whose members were by the law of Moses forbidden to hold land. This property he sold, and generously gave the money to the Apostles for the help of the brethren. For some reason this generous act attracted considerable attention.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FAITH SPREADING AND THE AUTHORITIES ALARMED

**Counterfeit Christianity** (chap. v. 1-11).—In contrast with this Luke records another incident, memorable for the tragic fate that befell those concerned in it.

<sup>1</sup> **A Levite.**—The Levites were the descendants of Levi, other than the house of Aaron, the latter being priests. The Levites received no inheritance in the Holy Land, but were scattered among the tribes. In the time of Jeremiah we find that they had begun to possess land (Jer. xxxii. 7-12), and this probably became general after the Captivity, when the Mosaic division of the land was no longer accurately observed.

<sup>2</sup> **Joses.**—The better spelling is *Joseph*, as in R.V. The case of Barnabas is mentioned probably because of the prominent part he afterwards took in the work of the Church; but the fact of its being mentioned at all shows that there was *no absolute rule* as to the sale of property.

<sup>3</sup> **Son of consolation.**—Better, "son of exhortation" (R.V.). He was, as we should say, a great preacher (compare chap. xi. 23).

<sup>4</sup> **Cyprus.**—The island still so called in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. Though born in Cyprus, Barnabas was a Jew of the tribe of Levi.

As among the twelve disciples there was a Judas, so in the infant Church there were some whose Christian profession was insincere and unreal. One of these, a man named Ananias,<sup>1</sup> along with his wife Sapphira, eager to gain a reputation for Christian liberality as Barnabas had done, gifted to the Church a property which they possessed. When they had sold it, however, they agreed together<sup>2</sup> to retain<sup>3</sup> a portion of the purchase money, handing the remainder to the Apostles as the whole. The amount retained cannot have been great, otherwise the general sense of the value of the land would have made it conspicuous; but it was a deliberate attempt to be false in religious matters, to deceive the Apostles, and to obtain credit among men for a Christian virtue which they did not possess. They were trying to serve two masters while appearing devotedly to serve only one. Moreover, this was not a momentary act into which they had been betrayed by a sudden impulse. It had been deliberately planned, and was the more aggravated inasmuch as it was a gratuitous piece of hypocrisy. There was no call for their doing it. There was no Christian law of compulsion requiring them to sell their field, nor yet to give the whole price they had got for it.<sup>4</sup> The only thing required was that in giving to God for Christ's sake they should be honest and true. Peter having had the truth revealed to him by God, and acting under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, warmly reproved Ananias for having thus yielded to the promptings of Satan and lied not merely unto men but unto God.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **Ananias.**—A common name. See chaps. ix. 10-17; xxiii. 2; xxiv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> **His wife also, etc.**—This is mentioned to show that the offence was aggravated by having been deliberately planned between them.

<sup>3</sup> **Kept back, i.e.** while professing to be giving the whole. The word used is the same word which in Titus ii. 10 is rendered *purlaining*.

<sup>4</sup> **Whiles it remained, etc.**—There was no law compelling him as a Christian to sell his property, nor yet after it was sold to give the whole price.

<sup>5</sup> **Lie to the Holy Ghost.**—Rather, "cheat" or "deceive." The Holy Ghost had been given to the Apostles to guide them; an attempt to deceive them is therefore an attempt to deceive Him.

Immediately Ananias, smitten through the power of that Holy Spirit whom he had attempted to deceive, fell at Peter's feet a lifeless corpse, and amidst the terrified looks of the awe-stricken beholders was carried forth for burial.<sup>1</sup> As if the tragedy were not already sufficiently startling, hardly had three hours elapsed before his wife, unconscious of her widowhood, but partner in her husband's sin, came in where Peter and the Christian congregation were assembled, and in answer to a question from Peter repeated the false story. Once more that strange look shone in Peter's eyes, and again speaking by the awful power of the Holy Spirit, he said sternly, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?"<sup>2</sup> Behold, the feet of them that have buried thy husband are now at the door, and shall carry thee out!" It was the first intimation she had had of her husband's fate, and on hearing the words she also fell dead at the Apostle's feet,<sup>3</sup> and, like her husband, was carried to an untimely and dishonoured grave. What a painfully startling day this had been in the Christian assembly! No wonder that awe and dread fell both upon the members of the Church<sup>4</sup> and upon those outside! Believer and unbeliever alike felt the awe-inspiring presence of God and the lesson He was teaching by such a judgment—a judgment sent doubtless to protect the Church from the entrance of a spirit which would have proved its ruin. It recalls to our minds the severity

<sup>1</sup> **Carried him out, etc.**—In a hot climate like that of Palestine burial has to take place almost immediately. The Jews, like the Greeks, buried their dead outside the city walls, and the graves, which consisted of caves and niches hollowed out in the rock, were prepared beforehand, and were therefore always ready.

<sup>2</sup> **To tempt the Spirit of the Lord, i.e.** to test the discernment of the Holy Spirit, and see whether He would reveal the deception they had planned.

<sup>3</sup> **At his feet.**—Close to the place where the money her husband brought had been laid, and where perhaps it was still lying. It is unlikely that it would be put with the other offerings. Possibly Peter may have pointed to it as he said, "Did ye sell the land for so much?"

<sup>4</sup> **The Church.**—Here first used in the Acts for the "assembly" of believers.

with which God punished the impiety of Nadab and Abihu at the commencement of the Jewish priesthood.<sup>1</sup> It was the hand of God interposed to save His Church from danger, just as He interposed to build it up by the mighty works wrought by the first preachers in the name of Jesus.

**A Growing Church** (chap. v. 12-16).—The Christian faith continued to spread. Day after day the believers gathered round the Apostles in Solomon's Porch and listened to their exhortations. The people regarded them with respect and awe, and although none of the others dared to intrude among them, multitudes of new believers, both men and women, were daily added to their number. Such a report of their miracles had gone abroad that not only from Jerusalem, but from the cities round about,<sup>2</sup> people came bringing sick friends, and laid them on beds and couches<sup>3</sup> in the streets to await the Apostles' coming, and we read that they healed them all.

**All the Apostles arrested** (chap. v. 17-21).—The jealousy and indignation of the authorities were aroused. The streets leading to the Temple were daily lined with sick folk, and the wonderful cures wrought in the name of the crucified Jesus were exciting the public mind. The Sadducees especially were irritated, for their favourite doctrine that there was no Resurrection was being brought into contempt. Accordingly, the high priest and his Sadducean friends<sup>4</sup> resolved to take active measures to put down the movement. They had the whole twelve Apostles arrested and put in the common prison<sup>5</sup> to await their trial next day. That night, how-

<sup>1</sup> Lev. x. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cities round about.—Some of these were Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho, Emmaus, Bethany. The use of the word *city* is common even when the places were very insignificant.

<sup>3</sup> Beds and couches.—The beds were what the richer people lay on; the couches were the rugs or mats of the poorer people.

<sup>4</sup> The whole influence of the Sadducean party was called forth, partly owing to their antagonism to the Christian doctrine of a Resurrection, and partly to their jealousy of this rapidly growing movement.

<sup>5</sup> The common prison.—Better, "in public ward," not for punishment, but for safe keeping till their trial.

ever, another was added to the many wonders of the time, for in the darkness an angel of the Lord<sup>1</sup> came and, opening the prison doors, set the Apostles free, giving them at the same time a charge that they should return to the Temple and continue to testify<sup>2</sup> there of the new life that is in Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> Faithful to this charge, they proceeded to the Temple at daybreak.<sup>4</sup>

**A Perplexed Court** (chap. v. 21-33).—Their opponents, however, were no less alert, for the morning had hardly dawned when a hastily summoned meeting of the Council<sup>5</sup> assembled in the Council chamber to consider the steps to be taken to deal with this movement. How serious and important the case was considered is shown by the fact that summonses were issued not only to the members of the Council, but also to the Senate or body of Elders, selected because of their age and experience to be assessors or advisers to the Council in cases of special importance.

The court had assembled, and was waiting for the prisoners to be brought in, when suddenly a great sensation arose. The officers of the Levitical guard entered in a state of great excitement and reported that when they had gone to fetch the prisoners they had found the prison with its doors safely shut, the guards standing at their posts outside as usual, but on entering they found no prisoners within. Nor was there trace of any kind to indicate how they had escaped. The whole matter was a mystery, and they could offer no explanation. A dead stillness fell upon the court. A look of

<sup>1</sup> **The angel of the Lord.**—An angel, as if in protest against the proceedings of those who taught that "there was neither angel nor spirit."

<sup>2</sup> **Go stand, etc.**—There was to be no attempt to conceal their deliverance or to attempt escape. They were to return to the same place and to continue the same teaching.

<sup>3</sup> **This life, i.e.** the eternal life which is in Jesus, and the pledge of which was given in His Resurrection. The doctrine objected to by the Sadducees was to be persisted in.

<sup>4</sup> **Early in the morning.**—The words used mean immediately after daybreak. The morning sacrifice was offered at dawn, and the Temple doors were then opened.

<sup>5</sup> **The council.**—The Sanhedrin (see chap. iv. 6 note).

wonder and alarm, almost approaching dismay, was on the faces of the high priest and the other leaders.<sup>1</sup> What could those things mean? and what was all this to come to? No one dared to suggest any explanation or to propose any line of action. Presently, in the uncomfortable stillness, some commotion occurred near the door of the hall. A messenger approached the high priest and informed him that the men they were seeking were at that moment standing in the Temple teaching the people. Whether this news would bring much relief is doubtful, but it at least suggested something that might be done, and the captain and officers were ordered to go and fetch the Apostles. It was not a congenial task, and the guard displayed little enthusiasm in the discharge of it. Great was their relief, however, to find that the Apostles offered no resistance, so that violence was unnecessary.<sup>2</sup> The distance of the hall of judgment from the Temple was not great, and very soon the Apostles were marched into court and placed at the bar. Even a casual observer might notice a striking contrast between the confident aspect of the accused and the grave, troubled, manner of the judges. It fell to the high priest, as President of the Council, to interrogate the accused, but we notice that he asked nothing about their remarkable escape from prison. Probably he had no desire to hear of any more supernatural wonders. Possibly Caiaphas and his party were remembering how Jesus had risen mysteriously out of His grave in spite of the Jewish guard set to watch it. Anyhow, he had no wish to furnish the Apostles with new topics on which to discourse, so he went at once to what, in his eyes, was their grave offence. That was contempt of court. Despite the orders given by that court at their former trial,<sup>3</sup> the Apostles had con-

<sup>1</sup> **The chief priests.**—The heads of the twenty-four courses into which the priests were divided.

<sup>2</sup> **Without violence, etc.**—The Jews were a turbulent people. We see in the death of Stephen (chap. vii. 58) that an outbreak of popular rage might result in the death of one against whom popular feeling was displayed (see also John x. 31).

<sup>3</sup> **Did not we straitly command you, etc.**—Rather, "We straitly charged you" (R.V.). Not a question but a statement.

tinued to teach their new doctrine till Jerusalem was filled with it.<sup>1</sup> He does not condescend to mention Jesus by name, but speaks of their continuing to "teach in *this* name," adding as a further charge that they wished to "bring this man's blood"<sup>2</sup> upon the Sanhedrin, probably implying that they were trying to rouse the people to avenge the murder of Jesus. Was there in his soul a haunting memory of that morning when the chief priests and Sadducees shouted, "His blood be upon us and on our children"? At once Peter replied, "We ought to obey God rather than men!" That was an answer the members of the Council had heard before<sup>3</sup> from those same fearless lips, only now there seemed to be greater stress laid upon the impossibility of doing otherwise, and Peter followed it up by a statement of the grounds on which they must speak as they had done. The Covenant God of Israel,<sup>4</sup> he said, had raised up Jesus,—that same Jesus whom they had slain,<sup>5</sup>—and had made Him to be a Prince and a Saviour, in order that in Him Israel might find repentance and forgiveness, and to these things the Apostles had been called to be witnesses. They *must* therefore bear their testimony, and that testimony had been confirmed by the Holy Ghost. Thus in a single sentence he put before the Sanhedrin an

<sup>1</sup> **Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.**—A striking testimony from their enemies that the Apostles had faithfully fulfilled the first part of the charge committed to them by Christ: "Ye shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem" (chap. i. 8).

<sup>2</sup> **To bring this man's blood, etc.,** *i.e.* to make us out to be responsible for his death. They had voluntarily undertaken to bear that responsibility. See Matt. xxvii. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. iv. 19.

<sup>4</sup> **The God of our fathers, etc.**—Note the emphasis laid on "God" in v. 29, 30, and 31. As in chap. iii. 13, Peter is careful to point out that in their Christian faith they did not separate themselves from the worship of the God of Israel. On the contrary, they taught that in Jesus God's covenant promise was fulfilled. It was their own God, he says, who had raised Jesus, who had made Him a Prince and a Saviour, and who had sent the Holy Ghost, of whose presence and power they had seen evidences.

<sup>5</sup> **Whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.**—Better, "Whom ye hanged on a tree and slew." This sentence describes the Roman, not the Jewish mode of execution. With the Jews only those already dead were to be hanged (Deut. xxi. 22; Josh. x. 26)

outline of Christian doctrine, including the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of Repentance, the Forgiveness of Sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. His words had a manifest effect on the Council. Dark looks grew darker; perplexity gave place to furious anger. They were cut to the heart,<sup>1</sup> not with compunction but with rage. Once before, in blind fanaticism, those chief priests had cried, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" Now history repeats itself, for they take counsel together how they might kill those troublers also.

**A Wise Counsellor** (chap. v. 34-42).—The storm of rage was at its height when a dignified councillor, with calm, self-restrained mien and quiet voice, uprose in the hall and asked that the accused should be removed that the Council might deliberate on the case. Immediately there was respectful silence, for the speaker was one held in high esteem both for wise counsel and for sanctity of life. It was Gamaliel,<sup>2</sup> the grandson of the great teacher, Hillel, and himself so distinguished a ruler that he afterwards became president of the Sanhedrin. As a doctor of the law, so profound was his learning that he was known long after as "the Glory of the Law." Moreover, he was a Pharisee, and believing in the resurrection of the dead, would not have the same bitter feeling towards the Apostles as the Sadducees had. His suggestion was complied with, and the accused<sup>3</sup> were removed. Then in a quiet, temperate speech he counselled caution, bidding them think well before they resolved on any extreme step. He appealed to history, reminding them that time and again in the history of their nation men had arisen claiming to be prophets, and stirring up popular movements which

<sup>1</sup> **Cut to the heart.**—Literally, "sawn asunder" with rage.

<sup>2</sup> **Gamaliel**, the son of Rabbi Simeon, and grandson of Rabbi Hillel. He was one of the seven Rabbis to whom the higher title of Rabban was given. He is mentioned (in chap. xxii. 3) as the teacher of Saul of Tarsus.

<sup>3</sup> **The Apostles.**—A better reading is "the men," as in R.V. Gamaliel would certainly not call them "Apostles."

had seemed alarming,<sup>1</sup> but which in the end had come to nothing. In view of this he recommended that they should submit this claim also to the test of history—that they should, in fact, let the Apostles alone. If this were merely a movement got up by a few men, it would soon come to nought, as the others had done. If, on the other hand, it was in reality of God, they could not overthrow it, and they might be found fighting against God. The tolerant spirit, the historical argument, and the temperate appeal calmed the assembly and so convinced the majority of its members, that the course he recommended was followed. They were agreed, however, that it would not do to let it appear as if the Apostles had triumphed. The Sadducees, therefore, insisted that they should be beaten, receiving the “forty stripes save one” appointed by the law of Moses to be given to the party who had been wrong in a dispute.<sup>2</sup> This does not seem either consistent or just, but it was done. The Apostles were beaten in presence of the court, after which they were dismissed with a renewed injunction to teach no more in the name of Jesus. And so the matter ended, and another attempt on the part of the Sanhedrin to stop the progress of Christianity had failed. The Apostles indeed suffered, but they went from the judgment hall rejoicing that Christianity had triumphed, and that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake. Their work was not stopped. Every day they continued, both in the Temple and at home, to teach and to preach the truth that Jesus is the Christ.

<sup>1</sup> **Theudas.**—Josephus mentions a Theudas who was leader in an insurrection, but it was fifteen years after this, so that this could not be he. The name, however, was not uncommon; and, amid the many revolts of these times, just as there were three insurrectionary leaders called Judas, and four named Simon, there may have been two named Theudas.

**Judas of Galilee.**—In the early years of our Lord this man raised a revolt against the Roman power. Maintaining that only God was King, he took as his watchword, “It is not lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar.”

<sup>2</sup> See Deut. xxv. 1-3.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BEGINNINGS OF CHURCH ORGANISATION

**The Beginnings of Church Organisation** (chap. vi. 1-7).—A new chapter in the history of the Christian Church now opens. By the admission of the high priest himself the Apostles had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine, so that the first part of their Lord's commission had been discharged.<sup>1</sup> Luke now describes for us a series of events which in the providence of God drove most of the disciples away from Jerusalem, carrying the Christian faith with them throughout Judæa and Samaria, and so fulfilling the second part of the commission.<sup>2</sup> In his account of these we get a glimpse into the inner working of the Primitive Church, and see a beginning of church organisation made by the election of **The Seven**.

For a time the persecution by the Sanhedrin ceased,<sup>3</sup> and the work of evangelisation went on rapidly, many new converts being brought into the Church. Increase in numbers, however, brought difficulties with it. The

<sup>1</sup> Chap. i. 8: "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost ends of the earth."

<sup>2</sup> Chap. viii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> **Persecution by the Sanhedrin.**—We are struck by the fact that the Sanhedrin seem to have ceased to interfere with the Apostles. A comparison of historical dates suggests an explanation of this. Stephen was martyred in 37 A.D. Pilate was Roman Governor from 26 to 36 A.D., when he was recalled. His whole rule was marked by tyranny, but the concluding years were the worst. During these years the members of the Sanhedrin were specially excited by two of his oppressive acts which more immediately affected them. He seized the accumulated proceeds of the Temple tax, amounting to a vast sum, and spent it in making an aqueduct for the supply of Jerusalem. He also set up images of the Emperor in the Holy City, the abomination of desolation "standing in the sacred places." These doings concentrated the attention of the priests and Sadducees upon Pilate, and for the time being the Apostles were let alone.

money subscribed by the wealthier members for the relief of those who were in need had been placed in the hands of the Apostles,<sup>1</sup> but with the rapidly increasing numbers the task of supervising the distribution of the alms became heavier, and, with the other demands upon their time, increasingly difficult. It is not surprising that dissatisfaction arose. In Jerusalem at that time there were two distinct classes of Jews, viz. those born in the Holy Land and speaking the language which in the New Testament is called Hebrew,<sup>2</sup> and those who had come from Jewish colonies outside of Palestine and spoke Greek as their ordinary language. From both of those classes Christianity drew converts, so that both were represented in the Church, and between those two elements trouble arose. A complaint was made by the Greeks that in the daily distribution of alms their widows were neglected.<sup>3</sup> Inquiry seems to have shown that there was some ground for the complaint, for the Apostles at once took steps to provide a remedy. They proposed that this special duty should be delegated to certain qualified men, so that it might be efficiently done, while they themselves, being relieved of it,<sup>4</sup> would be able to devote themselves unreservedly to prayer and the ministry of the Word. They asked the members of the Church to select from their own number seven good, wise, spiritually-gifted men who might be entrusted with the duty. The proposal was cordially received. Seven men<sup>5</sup> were chosen, and these, being approved by the

<sup>1</sup> Chap. iv. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Aramaic.

<sup>3</sup> Their widows.—The very persons who, being desolate and speaking a foreign language, would be likely to be overlooked in the crowd of applicants.

<sup>4</sup> Serve tables.—By tables is meant the bench or counter at which the money was distributed. Compare "the tables of the money-changers" (Matt. xxi. 12).

<sup>5</sup> Seven men.—These men were probably the first office-bearers of the early Church. They are sometimes referred to as the officials called *deacons*, but in the New Testament they are only alluded to as *the seven*. Their appointment marked the beginning of a new order of things, and out of it developed the whole organisation of the Christian Church.

Apostles,<sup>1</sup> were solemnly ordained<sup>2</sup> to the office with prayer and the laying on of hands.<sup>3</sup> One of the seven was Stephen, a man whose name will be held in perpetual remembrance as the first of the Christian band to win the martyr's crown. Internal discord having thus been removed, the Gospel spread rapidly. Great accessions were made to the Church, notable among them being many Jewish priests who became convinced that Jesus was the Christ.

**Arrest and Trial of Stephen** (chap. vi. 8-15).—Stephen, who was a man of remarkable faith<sup>4</sup> and spiritual power, immediately took a prominent place in the work of the Church. In Jerusalem there were numerous synagogues,<sup>5</sup> and in many of these the congregation consisted of Hellenistic or Greek-speaking Jews. To one of these synagogues Stephen doubtless belonged, and being a Hellenist himself, he seems to have directed his efforts chiefly to the conversion of the Hellenists. His activity and his power in disputation awakened keen opposition, and it is noticeable that whereas previous persecutions of the Apostles had been instigated by the Sadducees—the parties whose prejudices were chiefly assailed—the one now initiated was due to a combination of the representatives of four of these Hellenistic synagogues, viz. those of the Libertines,<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **Whom we may appoint.**—While leaving to the assembled brethren the selection of the men, they retained in their own hands the control of the appointment.

<sup>2</sup> If we may judge of the men appointed by their names, every one of them would seem to be a Grecian. They are all Greek names. Of none of them except Stephen and Philip (chap. viii. 5, xxi. 8) is anything further mentioned in the New Testament.

<sup>3</sup> **Laid their hands on them.**—An act implying the setting apart to an office. (Comp. Thess. viii. 10; xxvii. 18-23; Acts xiii. 3; 1 Tim. iv. 14; v. 22).

<sup>4</sup> **Faith.**—Better, "grace," as in R. V.

<sup>5</sup> **Synagogue.**—Literally, "place of meeting." A Jewish place of worship. The institution of the synagogue dates from the Captivity. The number of synagogues in Jerusalem was very great. It is said, though on doubtful authority, that there were 480. The different communities of Greek-speaking Jews had each their own synagogue.

<sup>6</sup> **Libertines.**—"Freedmen." Probably the descendants of Jews

of the Cyrenians,<sup>1</sup> of the Alexandrians,<sup>2</sup> and of Cilicia<sup>3</sup> and Asia.<sup>4</sup> At first they tried to silence Stephen by argument, but failing in this, they betook themselves to the familiar method of stirring up opposition against him. The chief priests and the scribes were already only too bitterly hostile to the Apostles and their teaching; now it was found possible to enlist also the opposition of the common people, who had formerly sided with the disciples. Stephen's clear insight perceived that the religion of Jesus was essentially spiritual, and was therefore superior to, and must in the end reach beyond, the ritualistic and legalistic system of Judaism. His opponents represented this as blasphemy against God and against Moses. We can understand how anything that seemed to threaten the destruction of the Temple—the admiration and pride of every Jewish heart—could easily be used to inflame the prejudices of the populace. All that was needful, therefore, was to do in the case of Stephen what had been done so successfully in the case of Jesus<sup>5</sup>—set up men who would testify that this was the purpose of his teaching.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly this was done. He was arraigned before the Council. Men were brought forward who swore that they had heard him teach that

who had been carried captive to Rome by Pompey (B.C. 63), and had been there set free. Eighteen years before this these Jewish freedmen had been banished from Rome, and many had returned to Palestine. After their return to Jerusalem they formed one congregation, and used one synagogue specially

<sup>1</sup> **Cyrenians.**—Cyrene was in Africa, about half-way between Carthage and Alexandria. It is said that about one-fourth of its population were Jews. We find Simon, a Cyrenian, living in Jerusalem at the time of the Crucifixion (Matt. xxvii. 32).

<sup>2</sup> **Alexandrians.**—Natives of Alexandria in Egypt, where in the time of Christ, and long before, there was a large Jewish population.

<sup>3</sup> **Of Cilicia.**—Cilicia was at the south-east corner of Asia Minor. One of its principal towns was Tarsus, the birthplace of St. Paul, so that he would probably belong to this synagogue.

<sup>4</sup> **Asia.**—Throughout the Book of Acts Asia signifies the Roman province of Asia, comprising Mysia, Lydia, and Caria, with Ephesus for its capital.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xxvi. 61.

<sup>6</sup> **False witnesses.**—Their falsehood consisted in the perverted turn they gave to Stephen's words.

Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the Temple<sup>1</sup> and abolish the customs given them by Moses.

Nothing more was needed. The people who had formerly been ready to stone any one who should attack the Apostles<sup>2</sup> were now as ready to stone Stephen and his fellow-disciples. Surely the Sanhedrin might have been satisfied now! Yet, as they looked at that gentle prisoner, standing in their midst so calm, so undismayed, so confident in his cause, with a look of heaven's peace resting upon him, it seemed as if they were looking on an angel face, and still they were not satisfied.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR

**Stephen's Defence** (chap. vii. 1-53).—At length the high priest calls upon Stephen to answer the charges laid against him, and amidst stillness and attention he stands forward to do so. His clear voice was heard in the silent council hall. So important was the speech he delivered that Luke reports it at greater length than any other speech in the Book of Acts. It has been styled "the Apology to the Jews for the Universalism of Christianity." To understand it we must bear in mind the charge made against Stephen, viz. that he taught a faith which implied the breaking down of the exclusiveness of the Temple worship and the passing away of the Mosaic ritual. In his defence Stephen practically admits this charge, but he defends it by a double argument. He shows that, so far from *dishonouring Moses or God*, he

<sup>1</sup> Shall destroy this place.—See chap. vii. 48: "The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." In the estimation of the Jewish people of that time to dissociate worship from Jerusalem would be practically to destroy the Temple.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. v. 26.

recalls God's dealings with Abraham and Moses, and grounds his teaching upon these; and so far from *dis-honouring the Temple*, he recalls its wonderful history and the sayings of the prophets respecting it. He points out that in time past the worship of Jehovah had not been confined to the Temple at Jerusalem, for:—

(a) God had been with Abram in Mesopotamia, and had been worshipped by him there (2-8).

(b) God had been with Jacob, Joseph, and Moses in Egypt, and was worshipped by them there (9-24, 30-38).

(c) God had been with Israel in the wilderness during all the wanderings of the Tabernacle, and had been worshipped by their fathers there (44-46).

(d) Even at the dedication of the Temple Solomon in his prayer had said that the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands, but in the words of the prophet, "Heaven is His throne, earth His footstool, and no one spot His place of rest" (47-50).

Thus from the patriarchal, the Mosaic, the kingly, and the prophetic periods of their own history he adduced evidence to prove that God was not the God of the Jews alone, and that the worship of the Most High was not restricted to any one particular spot.

**Resisting God's Purpose.**—Along with this line of argument Stephen interwove another, which led him to bring against his accusers the very charge they were bringing against him. Ever and again, he said, it could be seen in the history of their nation that the rulers of the people had misunderstood the revelation of God's purpose, and had resisted and persecuted those who had pointed it out to them. He adduces three instances of this:—

(a) The Hebrews misunderstood Moses in Egypt, and said, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge?" (25-29).

(b) The Israelites at Sinai thrust aside Moses and made themselves a molten calf (39-43).

(c) Their fathers had persecuted the prophets, and their nation had betrayed and murdered the Messiah. And just as their fathers had done they were now doing

—stiff-necked and hard of heart, they were resisting the Holy Ghost (51-53).

**A Gleam of Heaven.**—At this point the speech was rudely interrupted. The rage of his accusers had reached a pitch of frenzy, and, irritated beyond endurance, they gnashed their teeth at him. It was a wild, passion-swept scene, but in the midst of it the speaker, still glowing with the vehemence of his fervid appeal, stood calmly looking away beyond them and their angry threatenings up into God's quiet heaven, when lo! there opened out before him a heavenly vision, in which he beheld the brightness of God's glory<sup>1</sup> and the Son of man standing<sup>2</sup> on the right hand of God—a visible Presence for the comfort and help of His suffering servant. While the glow of that vision still shone on his face there came from his trembling lips a cry of ecstasy, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man<sup>3</sup> standing on the right hand of God." Jewish rage could stand no more. With a wild, passionate rush they seized him violently and swept him from the judgment hall. They dragged him to the place beyond the city wall<sup>4</sup> where the execution of malefactors usually took place, and there, casting him headlong over the rock, they stoned him to death. It was probably the work of the infuriated mob, no legal condemnation having been passed, but there was a general concurrence in what was done, and the Sanhedrin, the elders, and the people were all responsible. Strange to say, in all that tumultuous mob we learn the name of but one individual—a young man,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **The glory of God.**—Some visible sign of God's presence, such as the Shechina had been to the Jews of old.

<sup>2</sup> **Jesus standing, etc.**—The attitude of *standing* instead of *sitting*, as described elsewhere, may have been to indicate the readiness of Jesus to succour His suffering servant.

<sup>3</sup> **The Son of man.**—This title, often used by Jesus Himself, is never used of Him by another except here. Probably there is a reference to His own promise (Matt. xxvi. 64).

<sup>4</sup> **Out of the city.**—To comply with the law, Lev. xxiv. 10-16. Though engaged in a shameful murder, they are scrupulous about observing the letter of the law.

<sup>5</sup> **A young man.**—The phrase used implies a man between thirty and forty years of age.

named Saul, who was consenting<sup>1</sup> to the deed, and at whose feet the witnesses<sup>2</sup> laid their garments in order that they might, according to the law, cast the first stones. Of that young man we shall hear more. He had cause to remember that day's work! At length, with the light of heaven still suffusing his face, and a prayer that sounds like an echo of that of his dying Lord upon his lips,—“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!”—the weary servant of God sank in his last sleep<sup>3</sup>—the faithful witness had gained the martyr's crown.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PERSECUTION AND ITS RESULTS

**Persecution** (chap. viii. 1-4).—A little band of devout<sup>4</sup> men carried the dead Stephen to his burial amid great lamentation; and so ended a short, bright Christian career. Yet in the hand of God that end was in reality a beginning. How often do we see it so! “God buries His workmen but carries on His work.” When night grows darkest, day dawns. In this case, however, the night was to grow darker still, for that outburst of bloodthirsty violence proved the beginning of a reign of terror in Jerusalem. The rage of the Sanhedrin and the fury of the populace increased. The death of Stephen had not

<sup>1</sup> **Consenting to his death.**—The word expresses far more than mere passive consent. *Took* pleasure in his murder (see chap. xxii. 20; Rom. i. 32).

<sup>2</sup> **Witnesses.**—By the Mosaic law the witnesses had to cast the first stones (Lev. xvii. 7).

<sup>3</sup> **He fell asleep.**—The early Christians called their burial-places *sleeping-places* (“*koimeteria*”)—hence our word “cemetery.”

<sup>4</sup> **Devout.**—This word occurs only three times elsewhere in the New Testament (chap. ii. 5; xxii. 12; Luke ii. 25), and each time it is applied to Jews. It is concluded, therefore, that *Jews* as well as Christians took part in the burial. Had it been Christians alone, the word “disciples” or “brethren” would probably have been used.

by any means stopped the progress of the new teaching, and now Sadducees, Pharisees, and common people all united in their hostility to the Christians. Not content with prohibiting them from meeting, or with violently dispersing their gatherings when they met,<sup>1</sup> the persecutors raided the homes of the Christians by night, and men and women were dragged forth<sup>2</sup> and thrust into prison, to be afterwards brought for trial before the elders of their synagogue. Every possible means was tried to compel them to disown their faith in Jesus, but, to the surprise and chagrin of the zealots, many refused, though for that refusal they were scourged, beaten, wantonly outraged. In some instances they were even done to death<sup>3</sup> as Stephen had been. Foremost in all this brutal and deadly work, the most unwearied in determination and most relentless in persecution, was the young man who had attracted notice by the part he took in the execution of Stephen—Saul of Tarsus, the pupil of Gamaliel.<sup>4</sup> For weeks this state of things went on. Jerusalem seemed given over to fanaticism; scourging, outrage, death became the daily portion of the poor unoffending followers of Jesus. Little wonder if the steadfastness of some gave way and they purchased relief by denying their Christian faith. Multitudes, however, rather than do this fled from the city, seeking refuge among the smaller towns throughout Judæa and Samaria, and carrying with them as their most cherished possession their Christian faith. The result was that, like wind scattering seed, the fierce persecution carried the faith of Jesus Christ everywhere. The fire was not extinguished; it was

<sup>1</sup> **Made havock of the church.**—St. Paul himself says (chap. xxii. 4), "I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women."

<sup>2</sup> **Haling, i.e.** "hauling," dragging (compare Luke xii. 58).

<sup>3</sup> Acts xxvi. 11.

<sup>4</sup> **Saul.**—How active and bitter he was in the persecution he tells us himself (see chap. xxii. 4; also chap. xxvi. 10, 11): "Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."

scattered abroad, and every flaming faggot helped to kindle a new flame somewhere else. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

**The Gospel in Samaria** (chap. viii. 5-13).—The Apostles themselves did not leave Jerusalem. Why they were not killed by the persecutors it is difficult to understand, but they were able to remain at their posts, and from Jerusalem as a centre to give guidance and help to new and rising Christian communities elsewhere. Many of the refugees had gone to Samaria,<sup>1</sup> among them being Philip,<sup>2</sup> who, like Stephen, was one of the seven deacons and a Greek-speaking Jew. Stephen had taught that the Gospel was not for the Jews only, but for the whole human race. Philip puts that doctrine into practice by going and preaching Christ to the Samaritans. In Samaria he was safe, for there the power of the high priest and the Sanhedrin could not reach him. Moreover, the Samaritans readily welcomed him, and while preaching Christ he confirmed his message by many miraculous signs. Crowds gathered to hear his words.<sup>3</sup> His message and his miracles alike impressed the people, and many were converted to the Christian faith. In Samaria, however, Philip met the first of those subtle opponents with whom the Gospel has ever had to contend—men who did not directly oppose the truth, but who corrupted its pure morality and its simple faith by a human admixture which deteriorated and poisoned its doctrine. Before his arrival the Samaritans were being

<sup>1</sup> **Samaria.**—The province lying between Judæa and Galilee. Its capital was the city of Samaria referred to here. Most of the inhabitants of that region had been carried away captive by Shalmanezar, 721 B.C. (2 Kings xvii. 6), and at a later period by Esarhaddon, who replaced them by settlers from Babylon, Hamath, etc. (2 Kings xvii. 24). The mixed race which grew up were called Samaritans, and were regarded by the Jews with a peculiar hatred (see John iv. 9).

<sup>2</sup> **Philip.**—The deacon—not Philip the apostle, otherwise the mission of Peter and John (vv. 14-17) would have been unnecessary. He is also called "Philip the evangelist" (chap. xxi. 8).

<sup>3</sup> **The people with one accord.**—Multitudes. The words in the original imply that crowds of people accepted the new teaching and confessed their faith.

carried away<sup>1</sup> by the teaching and wonder-working of one Simon,<sup>2</sup> a magician or sorcerer.<sup>3</sup> Such, however, was the effect of Philip's preaching that not only did the multitude believe and were baptized, but Simon himself was among the number. He professed a like faith and received baptism with the others. Alas! how shallow and perverted that faith was the sequel showed.

**Doubts and Inquiry** (chap. viii. 14-17).—Meantime tidings reached Jerusalem of the wonderful work going on in Samaria, and that numbers of the Samaritans had received the Gospel and been baptized. By many the news would be received with something of a shock, for the strict Jewish feeling, which regarded the grace of God as limited to the Jews only, naturally viewed the Gospel offer in the same light. The Apostles themselves, however, though probably surprised, do not seem to have raised any objection as they did later when Peter baptized Cornelius the Gentile.<sup>4</sup> The Samaritans were a people kindred to the Jews, and in a sense were the descendants of Abraham. Immediately on hearing the news, however, the Apostles sent two of their number—Peter and John<sup>5</sup>—to inquire into and supervise the work. Those two proceeded to Samaria, and being satisfied that it was a work owned of God, they completed it by the laying on of hands, with prayer that the new converts might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. That prayer was answered by an outpouring of the Spirit, accompanied by some of those manifestations which marked His coming at Pentecost.

<sup>1</sup> "Bewitched," "amazed." The same verb is used in ver. 13 of the feeling produced in Simon by sight of Philip's miracles, and is there translated "wondered."

<sup>2</sup> **Simon Magus**, or Simon the sorcerer.—There are many legends about this man, but nothing is really known of him.

<sup>3</sup> **Used sorcery**.—The Greek has "using magian lore"—exercising magic arts such as were then common in the East. The "Magi" were the priestly class under the empire of the Medes and Persians, and their influence was very great. <sup>4</sup> See chap. xi. 3.

<sup>5</sup> **Peter and John**.—So Jesus sent out the Apostles "two and two" (Mark vi. 7), and also the seventy (Luke x. 1). So also we find Barnabas and Saul (chap. xiii. 2), Judas and Silas (chap. xv. 22), Paul and Silas, Barnabas and Mark (chap. xv. 39).

**Judged by the Spirit** (chap. viii. 18-25).—That Divine presence soon began to winnow the Church, and the first revelation made was in the case of Simon the sorcerer. Observing the spiritual gifts bestowed through the laying on of the hands of the Apostles, he recognised a wonder greater than any with which he had been able to amaze the Samaritans, and he longed to possess the power which these Apostles had. As a professional wizard such a power would be worth a great deal to him, so he proposed to buy it with money.<sup>1</sup> Could any clearer evidence be given of a heart as yet unenlightened by God's Spirit? Again we note on Peter's face the stern look we saw once before, and we hear from his lips words of terrible doom: "Thy money perish with thee!"<sup>2</sup> Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter. Thy heart is not right in the sight of God." Presently through the sternness of denunciation we mark a tone of almost affectionate appeal, begging the poor old sorcerer to repent and pray God to grant him forgiveness even for this which came so perilously near that unpardonable blasphemy against the Holy Ghost of which the Saviour had spoken. But Simon's reply reveals a graceless heart. He has no word of sorrow for the evil of his thought; he shows no trace of an awakened conscience or sign of repentance. All he asks is that Peter will pray that those terrible things may not come upon him. Dreading the punishment, he has no thought of the sin. Painfully impressive must have been the effect of all this. It was a sorrowful passage amidst the joy that filled the city. It showed judgment alongside of mercy, and the Church in Samaria must have rejoiced with trembling.

<sup>1</sup> **Money.**—The character of the man is shown by his request. He desired the Holy Ghost, as it seemed a higher power than his own magic, and as he offered to buy it with money, so he probably thought to make money by it. Hence comes our word *Simony*, which means buying, selling, or bargaining for spiritual functions.

<sup>2</sup> **Thy money perish, etc.**—Thy silver be with thee for perdition. Thy money perish, as thou art now in the path to perishing or perdition. Still there was left to Simon a place of repentance (ver. 22).

After this incident Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel by the way in many of the Samaritan villages through which they passed. Thus was the circle of Christianity widening.

**Changed Plans** (chap. viii. 26).—While Philip was still busied with the work in Samaria, God, through an angel messenger,<sup>1</sup> directed him to leave the city and journey southward, taking the desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza,<sup>2</sup> in the extreme south-west of Palestine. This must have seemed to him like turning away from a hopeful field of work at the very time when it most needed attention, for in Samaria multitudes were eager to hear the Gospel, while the road to Gaza was lonely and desert. Philip, however, obeyed, and experience soon showed the advantage of following implicitly the guidance of God, for on that lonely road he found that which most rejoices the heart of an evangelist—a soul seeking God—a heart longing to be taught the way of life.

**An Eventful Meeting** (chap. viii. 27-40).—Walking along this road, Philip noticed a large company of travellers behind him. Soon they overtook him, and he learned that it was a high official of Ethiopia<sup>3</sup>—the treasurer at the court of Queen Candace—travelling with a large retinue of servants and an armed escort. On such a road a solitary traveller not unusually sought protection by attaching himself, when opportunity offered, to a large company, and when Philip did so now it was not regarded as an intrusion. By and by the evangelist learned that, though living so far from Palestine, this Ethiopian was of the Jewish faith. He was reading the

<sup>1</sup> Probably in a vision, as in the case of Cornelius (chap. x. 3), and of Peter (chap. xi. 5).

<sup>2</sup> Gaza, the most southerly of the five cities formerly belonging to the Philistines, was on the route which a traveller from Jerusalem to Egypt would take. There were two roads from Jerusalem to Gaza. The "desert" road was probably the one by Hebron, which passes through the desert hills of Southern Judæa.

<sup>3</sup> Ethiopia.—The country in Northern Africa lying south of Egypt, now the Soudan. Its northern portion was the great kingdom of Meroë, which for a long period was ruled by a succession of queens, all of whom were called Candace, just as the successive kings of Egypt were called Pharaoh

Jewish Scriptures. Possibly he may have been of Jewish descent, but it is more likely that he was a proselyte.<sup>1</sup> As a Jew he had been on a visit to Jerusalem, and was now returning home. During his visit to the holy city many things must have impressed him,—the Temple services with their strange symbolism—the teaching of the scribes and doctors; but perhaps most of all he would be struck by the excitement then filling the city regarding the new teachers who persisted in declaring that the long-promised Messiah had come in the person of one Jesus of Nazareth. It may be that he had seen or heard some of the Apostles, and so gained some idea of what their teaching was. Certain it is that sitting there in his chariot, reading the Scriptures<sup>2</sup> aloud, after the manner of orientals,<sup>3</sup> he was perplexing himself as to the meaning and application of the passage he was reading—the familiar chapter in Isaiah which says of the Messiah, “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.”<sup>4</sup>

Prompted by the Spirit of God, Philip approached the chariot, and noticing the passage read, he asked the stranger whether he understood it. Too painfully conscious of his own ignorance, and too eager in his search after the truth to resent the question, the Ethiopian acknowledged his ignorance and expressed a wish that he could have some teacher to enlighten him, at the same time inviting Philip to come up into the chariot beside him. Ethiopia was holding out her hands to God!<sup>5</sup> The invitation was readily accepted, and for a long distance on that desert road the eager evangelist

<sup>1</sup> **Proselyte.**—Literally, “one who has come over,” generally applied to converts from heathenism to the Jewish faith.

<sup>2</sup> **The Scriptures.**—He probably used the Septuagint (The LXX.), or ancient Greek translation of the Scriptures. That translation was made in Egypt, and its use in that country was almost universal. Philip, too, who belonged to the Grecians, would be most familiar with the Greek translation.

<sup>3</sup> **Reading aloud** was common among orientals, and was specially the practice of the Jews, who accompanied the reading with a good deal of bodily motion, this being considered helpful to study.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah liii.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm lxxviii. 31.

and the earnest seeker after God talked together of the things of the Kingdom. The Ethiopian himself opened the conversation by asking of whom the Prophet spoke—whether of himself or of some other man. Then, beginning with this significant prophecy, Philip “preached unto him Jesus”—the fulfilment of prophecy—the Christ of God. That they travelled some distance together we may gather from the fact that during their journey Philip had time not only to show how prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus, and to tell of the resurrection and ascension of the Saviour, but also to teach him how believers were admitted into the Christian Church through the rite of baptism. All this he did with such effect that when the Ethiopian expressed a desire to be baptized, Philip was satisfied that he had attained a knowledge of the truth sufficient to warrant this.<sup>1</sup> Presently, as they drove along, they came to a stream or pool of water, and there the chariot was stopped. In presence of the whole retinue, the teacher and the new convert—following Jewish custom—stepped down together into the water,<sup>2</sup> and the dark-skinned representative of far-off Ethiopia was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ. Tradition says that when he went home he laboured to evangelise his countrymen, and thus a ray of Gospel light was carried into African darkness. Philip’s obedience was rewarded; the desert had been a fruitful field, and the soul seeking God had learned that God Himself is ever seeking such. A further step had been taken in spreading the faith of Jesus. Immediately after the baptism Philip departed as suddenly and mysteriously as he had appeared, and soon he was found at Azotus<sup>3</sup> doing the work of an evangelist and journeying northward till he reached Cæsarea, where for a time he made his home.

<sup>1</sup> Verse 37 is not in the oldest MSS., and so is omitted in the Revised Version.

<sup>2</sup> In this instance immersion was practised.

<sup>3</sup> Azotus or Ashdod, one of the five cities of the Philistines.

## CHAPTER IX

## THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL

**A Persecutor** (chap. ix. 1, 2).—Another traveller now claims our attention. From the desert road on the south Luke leads us to another desert road on the north—from Gaza, “the gateway to Egypt,” to Damascus, “the gateway of the East.” First, however, he gives us a glimpse of what has been going on in Jerusalem. There the fires of persecution are still burning, and if less fiercely than before, it is only from want of fuel wherewith to feed them. In one sense the persecution had been successful, for it seemed to have almost cleared Jerusalem of Christians, very few except the Apostles remaining there. At first the refugees sought shelter in the towns and villages of Judæa and Samaria, but by and by they travelled farther, going as far as Phœnicia and Syria. After all, however, the success of the persecution was doubtful, for, as the disciples carried their Christian faith everywhere with them, the result had been to spread Christianity throughout the whole land, and the persecutors were beginning to realise that either they would be foiled in their purpose, or they must follow the fugitives to those strange cities. One of those persecutors—the most bitter of all—Luke sketches for us in a single phrase. He is yet to fill a large place in the Book of Acts, so we pause a moment to note what manner of man he is. One glimpse of him we had before, for he was the young man of whom we read as standing by at the murder of Stephen,<sup>1</sup> holding the clothes of the murderers and approving their deed. Saul of Tarsus is his name. He was a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, his parents being Jews of the tribe of Benjamin, who adhered strictly to the Jewish faith and customs. Thus by birth he was

<sup>1</sup> Chap. vii. 58.

a Hellenist or Greek-speaking Jew, but though Greek was his native language, he was familiar also with Hebrew.<sup>1</sup> At the time of Stephen's death he was probably about thirty-three years of age, and early writers describe him as of short stature, with a high forehead and a winsome, attractive expression of countenance. Quick and energetic, intensely zealous, and of great earnestness of purpose, he was one who never could be lukewarm in his religion. After being educated at Tarsus, he was sent to Jerusalem to study in the Rabbinical schools, and there had for his teacher Gamaliel, the most celebrated of all the Rabbis.<sup>2</sup> Teacher and pupil were destined afterwards to meet in strange places, where doubtless both would recall the intercourse of those student days. His father and his teacher both being Pharisees, Saul naturally grew up a Pharisee also,<sup>3</sup> and from his father he inherited the privilege of being a Roman citizen.<sup>4</sup>

In those days it was customary for Greek Jews to have, in addition to their Jewish name, another, which was either Greek or Roman, and so this man is known to us by two names—the one, Saul, being Jewish, and the other, Paul, Roman. While he laboured among the Jews, Luke calls him by his Jewish name; when his

<sup>1</sup> See chap. xxi. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Gamaliel.—See page 35, note 2.

<sup>3</sup> A Pharisee.—See chap. xxiii. 6; xxvi. 4, 5.

<sup>4</sup> A Roman citizen.—Roman citizens enjoyed great privileges. To scourge one was illegal (see chaps. xvi. 37, 38; xxii. 26-29; xxiii. 27). If one was unjustly treated in a criminal trial he had a right to appeal direct to the Emperor himself. Thus Paul when tried before Festus appealed to Cæsar (chap. xxv. 11, xxvi. 32). This privilege of Roman citizenship might be obtained in several ways: (1) by birth in a Roman colony; (2) by inheritance; (3) by its being conferred as a reward for some special service rendered to the state; (4) by purchase (chap. xxii. 28). Paul could not be entitled to it from his being born in Tarsus, for, although a free city, Tarsus did not possess the free citizenship. He inherited it, he tells us, from his father (chap. xxii. 28). It had been conferred upon his father in one of the above ways, probably as a reward for service to the state, and so had descended to Paul. In the reign of Augustus—the period in which Paul was born—it was a privilege highly prized and jealously guarded.

labours extended to the Gentiles he calls him by his Roman name.

This, then, is the man who now arrests our attention as a leader among the persecutors in Jerusalem. Luke describes him as positively "breathing<sup>1</sup> out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord."<sup>2</sup> He was "exceedingly mad against them,"<sup>3</sup> and, enraged at finding that the persecution had only spread the Christian faith, he determined to follow some of the fugitives to the strange cities where they had found shelter. The Sanhedrin had authority over all foreign synagogues, and it was now proposed to bring back the fugitives for trial before the supreme court itself. For this work Saul volunteered his services. He went to the high priest and requested that he might be furnished with letters to the synagogues in Damascus,<sup>4</sup> giving him the necessary authority. Having obtained these, and secured an escort and a guard of soldiers for his protection, he prepared to start.

**Journeying towards Damascus** (chap. ix. 3-9).—Perhaps no journey was ever undertaken in which so much interest centres as this one. The distance from Jerusalem to Damascus was about 140 miles, and there were two roads, by either of which the journey would

<sup>1</sup> **Breathing out.**—Perhaps better "breathing." He seemed to live in an atmosphere of threatenings and slaughter.

<sup>2</sup> **The disciples of the Lord.**—We are not told of any other executions besides Stephen's in which Saul took part, but from his own words we learn that there were others. In chap. xxvi. 10 he says, "When they were put to death, I gave my vote against them." It has been suggested that his zeal in connection with the death of Stephen led to his being elected a member of the Sanhedrin, and so in the later stages of the persecution he took a judicial part and gave his vote against them. There are no fewer than eight different passages in which Paul refers with feelings of keen remorse to the part he took in this persecution.

<sup>3</sup> See chap. xxvi. 10, 11.

<sup>4</sup> **Damascus**, one of the oldest cities in the world, is situated on a singularly fertile plain watered by the river Abana. From a very early period it was associated with the history of the Jews, and at this time it was ruled by a governor under Aretas (see 2 Cor. xi. 32), an Arabian prince tributary to Rome. In 634 A.D. it was taken by the Mohammedan Arabs, and became the capital of the Mohammedan world. It is still a city of 150,000 inhabitants.

occupy about five or six days. Three distinct accounts of the journey are given—one the narrative by Luke in this chapter, and two by Paul himself.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is surprising how little we know of the details of its circumstances. We know enough, however, to enable us to picture to ourselves the scene in Jerusalem as he set forth. Amidst the clattering of horses' feet, the ringing of armour, and the shouting of the rough soldiers, the cavalcade rode out of the city; a crowd of onlookers watching the start, some of whom looked grave as they thought of the errand on which Saul was bent. It does not appear that he had any companion with whom he could talk confidentially as an equal by the way. Between the learned Rabbi and the coarse, rude soldiers there could not be much in common, so that for nearly a week, while crossing the open country, he would have a monotonous ride with his own thoughts for his company. These can hardly have been very cheerful. From time to time the party passed through scenes associated with the name of that Jesus whose followers he was persecuting. This itself must have wakened thoughts of the faith he was trying so unsuccessfully to uproot; for he knew he had not succeeded. He had tortured and killed the Christians, yet the Christian faith was spreading. If such thoughts came to him he crushed them down and hurried on. Day after day it was the same. He had been "exceedingly mad" against those Christians before he left Jerusalem, and his excitement does not seem to have lessened during his ride. Impatiently he pressed forward, till at length they reached an eminence, when suddenly Damascus in its marvellous beauty lay before them. Its gray houses, with towers and spires, glittered in the sunshine, all set in the rich green of the surrounding country, where the gardens and vineyards were kept fresh and bright by the clear waters of the Abana and Pharpar,<sup>2</sup> those rivers of Damascus. It was high noon, and in the

<sup>1</sup> Chap. ix. 1-9; xxii. 6-10; xxvi. 12-19.

<sup>2</sup> See 2 Kings v. 12.

cloudless Syrian sky the sun shone fiercely overhead. It was usual for travellers to stop and rest during the mid-day heat; but it was Saul who directed the movements of this company, and Saul would not—perhaps could not—rest. Suddenly a startling blaze of light, more brilliant than that noon-day sun,<sup>1</sup> shone round them and they all fell to the ground. The soldiers quickly rose to their feet, partially recovering themselves, but Saul lay prostrate, stricken blind. Presently a sound like the rumbling of far-off thunder was heard. All of them heard it, but Saul, filled with terror and amazement, recognised in it a voice speaking directly to him, and calling him by name. Before his soul there shone the glory of a heavenly vision, in the midst of which he beheld the risen Jesus,<sup>2</sup> from whose glorified lips he heard the startling question, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" From his stricken soul he answers, "Who art thou, Lord?" and receives the reply, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."<sup>3</sup> In that terrible moment the heart of the proud Pharisee waked to a new conviction; his strong, determined will was subdued, and the relentless persecutor of the disciples of Jesus, lying in the dust and looking up to that same Jesus, acknowledges Him, saying, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" "Arise," was the answer; "go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." Trembling with excitement, Saul rose from the ground. What had happened to him his companions could not comprehend. They too had been startled by the light, and had heard the

<sup>1</sup> **There shined, etc.**—In chap. xxii. 6 we are told that the time was "about noon," and in chap. xxvi. 13 Paul says that "at mid-day he saw a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun."

<sup>2</sup> **The risen Jesus.**—In the midst of this glory Saul saw Jesus, and therefore he afterwards included himself among those who were Apostles and had seen Jesus after His resurrection. See 1 Cor. ix. 1; xv. 8.

<sup>3</sup> **It is hard . . . said unto him** (vv. 5 and 6).—These words are not given in the Revised Version, as they are not found in the oldest manuscripts. They have probably been supplied by an ancient copyist from chap. xxvi. 14.

rumbling sound, which they took for thunder; but Saul himself knew that he had passed through the great crisis of his life. The risen Christ had spoken to him, and a change, sudden and complete, had come over him. Never again in thought or deed would he wrong the disciples of Jesus, for Saul of Tarsus was converted! Jesus was now *his* Lord! His companions, however, knew nothing of this. They saw only a feeble, broken man, groping helplessly in his blindness, and in pity they took him by the hand and led him to the city. Slowly the cavalcade moved forward, and the entry into the city was very different from what had been intended. Instead of coming as the distinguished commissioner of the Sanhedrin, Saul was led through the city gate, blind, tottering, dejected. He who had come to drag Christians to prison now prayed that even the humblest of those Christians would teach him the truth as it is in Jesus. Like the Ethiopian treasurer on the southern road, this traveller now also longed to be taught regarding Him who was "led as a lamb to the slaughter."

They led him to the house of one Judas, in the long, straggling street which leads through Damascus from its eastern to its western gate, and which is still called the Straight Street.<sup>1</sup> There, in blindness and remorse, in suffering of body and agony of soul, unable to eat or drink, he lay for three days, during which time no visitor or friend entered the house. What passed in his soul during these days none can tell. God was dealing with the stricken sinner. At length, struggling through the spiritual crisis, he sought and found relief in prayer, and arose from his knees a changed man. Henceforth Saul of Tarsus was the **servant of Jesus Christ**.

**Welcomed as a Brother** (chap. ix. 10-19).—On the third day a visitor came. It was Ananias, one of the Christians of Damascus, whom the Lord had directed

<sup>1</sup> **The street called Straight.**—The thoroughfares in Eastern cities do not change much. A long street called "Straight" still runs through Damascus from east to west, and quite probably is the same in which Ananias found Saul in the house of Judas.

to come. Not without some hesitation had the good man undertaken the commanded duty, but when he came he found Saul engaged in prayer, and at once addressed him as a Christian brother, who, though he had been a persecutor, was now a chosen vessel of the Lord. Laying his hand on the beclouded eyes, and speaking in the name of that Jesus who had appeared to him in the way, he bade the blind man "Arise and see, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales,<sup>1</sup> and he arose and saw. At the invitation and by the hands of Ananias, he received the sacrament of baptism,<sup>2</sup> and so the bitter persecutor was numbered among the disciples of Jesus. Making public acknowledgment of his faith, he gave such a testimony in the synagogues that even the Christians themselves were amazed. One wonders what he did with his commission from the Sanhedrin and with the letters he got from the high priest! His companions, too, and the soldiers—what became of them? What sort of a report did they carry back to Jerusalem of these strange doings? We can only wonder. One thing, however, we do know. During those days of fellowship with the brethren it became more and more clear to Saul that "God had chosen him to know His will . . . and to be a witness unto all men of what he had seen and heard." In this we have the key to his future life.

**Visit to Arabia** (chap. ix. 20; compare Gal. i. 15-19).—If we had only the Book of Acts to guide us, we might suppose that Saul at once plunged into the work of preaching, but when we turn to his own Epistle to the Galatians we find that the events of three years have been compressed into as many verses. We there learn that after a short period of fellowship with Ananias and the brethren in Damascus he retired into Arabia,<sup>3</sup> where he had opportunity for much-needed quiet thought and

<sup>1</sup> Scales.—Many believe that this blindness left permanent effects on Saul, and that his eyesight was weak during the rest of his life.

<sup>2</sup> Baptism.—See chap. xxii. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Into Arabia.—See Gal. i. 16-19.

meditation, as well as for prayer and devotion. How long he remained there we do not know, but he tells us that it was not till three years after his conversion that he went up to Jerusalem, and probably the greater part of that time was spent in Arabia. There he received those revelations which fitted him to be the Apostle of the Gentiles and the most remarkable teacher of Christianity. He received the Gospel, he says, not from the older Apostles or from those who were disciples before him, but by direct revelation from Jesus Christ, and probably much of it came to him in Arabia.

**Damascus revisited** (chap. ix. 20-22).—In due time Saul returned to Damascus fully equipped—able to preach the Gospel in its fulness and with power. In the **synagogues** he came into frequent contact with the unbelieving **Jews**. With his learning and the knowledge of Scripture he had acquired in the school of Gamaliel he was more than able to meet them in argument, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. The elders of the synagogue became alarmed, opposition deepened into hatred, and before long they began to take counsel how they might kill him. Warned by a friend, Saul might have escaped; but the Jews had gone to Aretas, the Governor, and lodged a charge against him, and already guards were set to watch the city gates with a view to his capture. The disciples, however, conveyed him to one of the houses on the city wall, and from there, when night had fallen, he was let down in a basket and escaped. It was a sad leave-taking. Without a word of farewell he disappeared in the darkness, and by lonely paths through the gardens and vineyards he got clear away from the city ere the watchers at the gates learned that their prey had escaped. Strange thoughts must have been in his heart as he walked hurriedly under the glittering stars. Three years before he had ridden towards Damascus, the representative of the Sanhedrin, with soldiers behind him, and yet withal a miserable man. Now he is escaping from it—a hunted disciple of Jesus of Nazareth,

and yet with joy thrilling in his heart. Can this be the eager young Pharisee whom we saw urging on the murderers of Stephen? We look at him tramping along in the moonlight, and we feel how wondrously the faith of Jesus is spreading.

**Back to Jerusalem** (chap. ix. 23-31).—All night through, the solitary traveller walked on in the direction of Lebanon, leaving Damascus rapidly behind him. He made up his mind that he would return to Jerusalem, but it was a long journey, and several days must elapse before he could reach it. At length, however, its walls and towers appeared. Three years ago with his cavalcade he had passed out through those gates; now he is entering them alone, an altered man. He does not think of seeking Gamaliel and the chief priests, but turns rather to the company of the disciples. They, however, regard him with suspicion, and are afraid of him. Is it any wonder? They had had bitter experience of Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor, and they do not seem to have heard what had taken place in Damascus. Barnabas,<sup>1</sup> however, cordially received him, and introduced him to Peter and James, the Lord's brother, the former of whom invited him to his home, where he remained as a guest for fifteen days.<sup>2</sup> In that home the young Pharisee who had sat at the feet of Gamaliel now sits at the feet of the fisherman of Galilee, learning from him the story of Jesus. During those days, too, he visited many of the synagogues in Jerusalem, testifying to the truth of the Gospel. It would almost seem as if the spirit of the martyred Stephen now animated him. He visited the same synagogues, disputed with the same opponents<sup>3</sup>—

<sup>1</sup> It is probable that Saul and Barnabas had been intimate in earlier years. The culture of which Tarsus was the seat would naturally attract a student like Barnabas from Cyprus. The eagerness of Barnabas afterwards to have Saul's co-operation in the work at Antioch (chap. xi. 25) affords confirmation of this view. Barnabas knew enough of his friend to believe every word of what he told him as to his conversion.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 18.

<sup>3</sup> **Disputed against the Grecians.**—Those Greek Jews who had urged the death of Stephen. It is interesting to note that the

those Hellenistic Jews at whose instigation Stephen had been put to death,—and with the same result, for very soon “they went about to slay him.” News of their plotting reached the disciples, however, and they urged Saul to depart. They conducted him to Cæsarea, on the coast, whence he sailed home to Tarsus in Cilicia, and here for a little we lose sight of him. It was four years at least—possibly much longer—since he had left it, a bigoted Pharisee; what reception he got from his family and friends when he returned a humble Christian we do not know. Probably he resumed his old occupation as a tent-maker. He remained in Tarsus for several years,<sup>1</sup> and from that city as a centre he did the work of an evangelist<sup>2</sup> in the surrounding districts of Cilicia.<sup>3</sup>

**Peter’s Visitation of the Churches** (chap. ix. 31-35).—Meantime the attention of those persecuting priests and elders at Jerusalem was otherwise occupied. They were engaged in trying to save their Temple from a terrible desecration that threatened,<sup>4</sup> and for a time the poor persecuted followers of Jesus were let alone. The Churches had rest, and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, their number was multiplied. Our thoughts are now turned from Saul to Peter, who was being prepared for a wider

word here used, “disputing,” is the same word as was used to describe the work of Stephen, and it is used nowhere else, only the attack is now reversed. Formerly the Jews “disputed” with Stephen; now Saul disputes with them.

<sup>1</sup> Probably from 40-42 A.D. Of this period Luke tells us nothing. It was not till sixteen years later that he met Paul. Besides, the purpose of the two writers is different. Luke is recording the *outward* facts connected with the spread of the Gospel. Paul in his Epistle is explaining the *inward* facts of his own spiritual history.

<sup>2</sup> Later on we find that when Paul and Barnabas came here on their first missionary journey there were already organised churches which must have been founded at an earlier period—probably by Saul (chap. xv. 41).

<sup>3</sup> Gal. i. 21.

<sup>4</sup> In the year 40 A.D. the new Emperor, Caligula, ordered a brass statue of himself to be erected in the Temple at Jerusalem. This caused great consternation among the Jews, and all their energies were occupied in endeavouring to prevent this desecration of the holy place. In these efforts they were ultimately successful.

development of Christianity than he had anticipated. He had been labouring among the churches of Judæa and Samaria, and we find him on a tour of visitation through Judæa. During this tour two striking incidents occurred. At Lydda<sup>1</sup> he found among the believers a paralytic named Æneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, and, touched with compassion,<sup>2</sup> he healed him, making it clear, however, that he himself was but a servant, and that it was in reality Jesus, the Divine healer, whose power had performed the mighty work. A profound impression was created by the miracle, not only in Lydda, but throughout the whole district of Saron,<sup>3</sup> and with many this deepened into conversion, and they became followers of Jesus.

**Raising the Dead** (chap. ix. 36-43).—While thus engaged at Lydda, Peter received an urgent message from Joppa—probably the next of the churches in his proposed tour, for it was only nine miles off—telling him of the death of one of its most devoted and zealous workers, a woman named Tabitha or Dorcas,<sup>4</sup> who had been conspicuous for her charitable and kindly deeds, and begging him<sup>5</sup> to come there at once. Doubtless in their grief the believers longed for his presence, but it would seem that they hoped for some greater thing from his coming; for, instead of burying the remains at once, as is the custom in the East, they laid them in an upper chamber and waited his arrival. Instantly obeying the call, Peter accompanied the messengers on their return, and, entering the death-chamber, he found those

<sup>1</sup> Lydda.—The Hebrew Lod, a large village near Joppa, a day's journey (30 miles) from Jerusalem. It afterwards became the important town of *Diosopolis*.

<sup>2</sup> As in the case of the cripple at the Temple gates (chap. iii. 6).

<sup>3</sup> Saron or *Sharon*.—The plain of Sharon, a beautiful and fertile district extending along the Mediterranean coast from Joppa to Cæsarea.

<sup>4</sup> Tabitha or Dorcas.—“Tabitha” is the Aramaic or corrupt Hebrew form of a proper name signifying *gazelle*, as does also the Greek word “Dorcas.”

<sup>5</sup> Desiring him, etc. (ver. 38).—The best manuscripts read “entreat him, delay not to come on to us.” So also in the R.V. This makes it more graphic.

who had been associated with Dorcas in her deeds of charity weeping beside the dead. It must have recalled to his memory a similar scene long ago at which he himself was present—when Jesus restored the daughter of Jairus to life.<sup>1</sup> As his Master had done that day, he now put forth all the mourners. Then, after kneeling<sup>2</sup> in prayer, he spoke to the dead in words that sound like an echo of those his Master had used—“Tabitha, arise.”<sup>3</sup> The sheeted dead heard the call, the colour came to the pallid cheeks, the closed eyes opened, and Tabitha looked in the face of him who had recalled her from the grave. Again doing as he had seen his Master do, the Apostle took the maiden by the hand and raised her from the couch of death. Then, calling those who were waiting sorrowfully in another chamber, he presented her to them alive. This miracle also created a solemn impression, and many were won to the faith of Christ. For some time after this Peter remained in Joppa, lodging with one Simon, a tanner. The very fact that he lodged with such a one showed that his Jewish scruples and prejudices were becoming less.<sup>4</sup> Very soon God was to lead him further in that direction.

## CHAPTER X

### PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO GENTILES

**The Roman Soldier and the Church of Christ** (chap. x. 1-8).—We meet a wonderful variety of people as we follow the progress of Christianity. Now we are

<sup>1</sup> See Mark v. 37-43.

<sup>2</sup> **Kneeled down.**—Kneeling in prayer was a customary and appropriate religious form among the Jews.

<sup>3</sup> **Tabitha, arise.**—If Peter spoke in the Aramaic dialect—as is most probable—his words would be nearly the same as those of our Lord: *Tabitha cumi*, instead of *Talitha cumi*.

<sup>4</sup> **A tanner.**—So disgraceful was this occupation considered among the Jews that it is said a wife could claim a divorce if her husband became a tanner.

led away to Cæsarea, a sea-coast town at the northern end of the Plain of Sharon. Cæsarea, which was the Roman headquarters, was usually the residence of the procurators or Roman governors.<sup>1</sup> In the barracks there five cohorts of Roman soldiers were stationed, and from among these Luke selects the one to whom he next introduces us. He is an officer named Cornelius, a centurion,<sup>2</sup> commanding a cohort which, from the fact of its consisting mainly of Italian soldiers, was known as the Italian Band. This Cornelius was a devout man—one of those who had so benefited by their association with the Jews as to become convinced that Israel's God was the true God, and who accordingly worshipped in the synagogue, read the Jewish Scriptures, and observed Jewish customs, although not going so far as to become regular proselytes. By the care with which he instructed his household, and by his liberality in almsgiving, Cornelius gave proof of his piety. While engaged in devotion one afternoon about three o'clock<sup>3</sup> he beheld in waking vision<sup>4</sup> an angel, who, after assuring him that his prayers and his alms had come up as a memorial before God, directed him to send to Joppa for Peter, who at that time was staying with one Simon, a tanner,<sup>5</sup> whose house was by the seaside, and who would instruct him in the will of God.<sup>6</sup> Immediately Cornelius called a soldier who was like-minded with himself in religious matters, and dispatched him to Joppa with the message.

<sup>1</sup> See chap. xxiii. 23-26; and chap. xxv. 1-4.

<sup>2</sup> A centurion, *i.e.* an officer commanding a "century," one of the oldest divisions of the Roman army, numbering 100 men. Six centuries made a "cohort," and ten cohorts a "legion," so that the nominal strength of a legion was 6000 men. Several Roman centurions are mentioned in the New Testament, and all of them in a favourable light. See chap. xxvii. 3; Matt. viii. 5; Luke vii. 2; xxiii. 47.

<sup>3</sup> The ninth hour, *i.e.* 3 P.M.

<sup>4</sup> Evidently.—"Openly" (R.V.), *i.e.* he was not in a trance, as Peter was afterwards, but while he was praying the heavenly visitor approached and spoke to him.

<sup>5</sup> Simon would dwell outside the town and near the sea because of his trade.

<sup>6</sup> He shall tell . . . to do.—These words are not in the oldest manuscripts, and so they are omitted in the R.V. See chap. xi. 14.

While he and his companions are on their way thither Luke leads us on before, that he may tell us of another Divine vision which was preparing their way before them. Let us try if we can picture it to ourselves.

**Noontide at Joppa** (chap. x. 9-16).—It is high noon, and the little town of Joppa, lying close by the sea, is bright in the sunshine, picturesque and oriental-looking, its low, flat-roofed houses interspersed with the green patches of gardens and trees. Beneath the town stretches a narrow strip of sandy beach, beyond which the blue tideless Mediterranean sparkles in the sunlight, its waves breaking into shining foam over the jagged reefs which make this roadstead so dangerous to shipping. A hot stillness rests over the place, for few people are to be seen moving about at this hour, and all is quiet. At the south-west corner of the town is the house of Simon, the tanner, low and flat-roofed like those around it, and probably then, as now,<sup>1</sup> overshadowed by a branching fig-tree. On its flat roof is a man who has retired there for his mid-day prayer.<sup>2</sup> After kneeling for a little time he seats himself under the shade of the fig-tree and gives himself up to meditation. It is Peter, whom we saw but lately in the death-chamber of Dorcas. On his brown, sunburnt face there is a tired, perplexed look, for questions that are pressing themselves upon the attention of the Church cause him anxiety. One question in particular makes him anxious. It concerns the Gentiles, so many of whom desire to become Christians. Must they be made to comply with all the legal forms and requirements of the Mosaic law before they can be admitted to membership in the Christian Church? He had great difficulty as to this, and he longed and prayed for God's guidance. While he sat meditating he was conscious of beginning

<sup>1</sup> It is far from improbable that the house may have been on the very spot where the one pointed to by tradition now stands.

<sup>2</sup> The roofs were flat, and as access to them could be obtained from outside without passing through the house, the house-top formed a convenient place of retirement and was often used as a place of devotion (see Jer. xix. 13; Zeph. i. 5).

to feel hungry, but the mid-day meal was only then being prepared, and while he waited it seemed as if his hunger, his perplexity, and his prayer for Divine guidance combined to present to him a curious vision. Half-waking, half-dreaming in the heat and the stillness, he fell into a trance,<sup>1</sup> in which he saw a great white sheet, knit together at the four corners, being let down from heaven close beside him, and containing, like some great ark, animals of every sort, clean and unclean, with birds also and reptiles, while a voice beside him said to him in his hunger, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." All his life, however, he had been careful in observing the ceremonial law regarding meats, and even hunger would not lead him to break it now. "Not so, Lord," he replied, "for I have never eaten anything unholy or unclean." But again that mysterious voice spoke to him, "What God hath declared clean, call not thou common."<sup>2</sup> Thrice was this repeated; thrice were the same words spoken, and then the sheet was drawn up to heaven, and the vision vanished. The trance was over. Peter was again alone with his own thoughts. All around him was hushed and still, but in the quiet there kept ringing in his ear that heavenly message, "What God hath cleansed, call not thou common!" What could it mean? That he was being taught some Divine lesson he felt sure, but how or to what it was to be applied he knew not.

**The Vision interpreted—Prayer answered** (chap. x. 17-48).—As he sat wondering, Peter heard the sound of voices in the courtyard below. Three men—one of them in the garb of a Roman soldier—had come and were inquiring for him. It was the deputation sent from Cæsarea by Cornelius. Prompted and directed by

<sup>1</sup> A trance, *i.e.* an ecstasy, so that the vision was seen by him only mentally as in a dream.

<sup>2</sup> The heaven-sent voice revokes the command of the ceremonial law, as Jesus had indicated would be the case. Compare Matt. xv. 11, "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man." Also Mark vii. 18, 19. Mark (who is said to have received much of his information from Peter) adds the significant commentary, "This he said, making all meats clean." See R. V.

the Holy Spirit, Peter at once descended and announced himself to them, and as soon as they had delivered their message he acceded to the request they brought and agreed to accompany them, at the same time offering them the simple hospitality of the East. It was too hot, and they were too tired, to start immediately on their homeward journey, so they rested in Simon's house till the following morning. Peter fully realised that important consequences might result from that journey, and with a caution unusual in him he asked six<sup>1</sup> of the Jewish<sup>2</sup> brethren in Joppa to accompany him, so that if occasion should arise they might be able to testify of all that might take place. The journey from Joppa to Cæsarea occupied them two days;<sup>3</sup> and on their arrival they found that Cornelius had been so confident that Peter would come that he had already assembled his household and friends to receive him. At the threshold the Roman soldier himself met them, and prostrated himself at the Apostle's feet.<sup>4</sup> Peter, however, gently raised him, and, doubtless to the amazement of those who accompanied him,—perhaps almost to his own surprise,—walked side by side with him, conversing<sup>5</sup> freely as together they went into the house where the Gentile friends of Cornelius were assembled. They mutually explained how each in seeking the other had been following the direction of God, and then the Apostle addressed the gathering, telling how he had been led to believe that God no longer desired the Gentiles to be regarded as unclean. He was now satisfied that “in every nation he that feareth God

<sup>1</sup> Six.—See chap. xi. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Jewish.—See ver. 45, “They of the circumcision.”

<sup>3</sup> The morrow after.—Their road lay along the coast, and as the town of Apollonia was situated just about half-way between Joppa and Cæsarea, it is most likely they would pass the night there.

<sup>4</sup> Worshipped him.—Cornelius was a Roman and a soldier—not an oriental. This act of prostration, therefore, implied in his case religious reverence, and marks his sense of Peter being God's messenger. Peter clearly regarded it as implying worship, and declined it. Jesus *accepts* such worship (see Matt. viii. 2).

<sup>5</sup> Talked with him.—The Greek word used indicates a conversation of some length which took place outside the house.

and worketh righteousness will be accepted." He was then proceeding to recall to them what they had already heard of Jesus and the Gospel when suddenly—even while he was speaking—the Holy Ghost came upon those unbaptized Gentiles, even as He had come upon the Jews and the Apostles themselves. They began to speak with tongues, praising God as if it were another Pentecost. Peter's Jewish companions were amazed and impressed, while the Apostle himself—already partly prepared for something like this by his vision—boldly asked whether any could forbid the waters of baptism to men so manifestly baptized with the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> None cared to offer objection, and Peter, following the usual Apostolic practice of committing the administration of baptism to others,<sup>2</sup>—perhaps also thinking it would be well to have the concurrence and co-operation of those Jewish brethren,—directed them to baptize Cornelius, with his household and friends. Thereafter he accepted an invitation to tarry with them certain days, thus still further breaking through his former rigid observance of the ceremonial law.<sup>3</sup>

## CHAPTER XI

### THE DEVELOPMENT AND SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

**The Problem of the Gentiles** (chap. xi. 1-18).—The Christian Church had taken a great step forward. Hitherto all who were baptized into its membership had been Jews. The Apostles did not forget the command of their Master that they should be witnesses for Him to

<sup>1</sup> **Baptized.**—It will be noticed that although the bestowal of God's Spirit had been made so apparent, yet Peter does not omit the outward sign which Christ had ordained (Matt. xxviii. 19) for the admission of members into His Church.

<sup>2</sup> Compare 1 Cor. i. 14-17.

<sup>3</sup> Peter, however, afterwards wavered in this, and was rebuked for it by Paul. See Gal. ii. 11-13.

the uttermost parts of the earth, and they knew that one day the Gentiles would receive the Gospel; but they interpreted that to mean that the Gentiles would become proselytes to the Jewish faith, receiving circumcision and conforming to the observances of the Mosaic law, and that thereafter they would as Jews be received by baptism into the Church of Jesus Christ. But Peter had now gone a long way beyond that. Not only had he associated with and preached to Gentiles, but he had through baptism admitted some of them to the membership of the Christian Church on equal terms with the Jews. Tidings of these doings reached Jerusalem before Peter's return, and caused something like consternation among many of the disciples, even some of the Apostles being shocked. As soon, therefore, as he got back, he was taken to task for what he had done, and especially for having eaten with the uncircumcised,<sup>1</sup> as if there were no difference between them and the children of Abraham. Peter's defence was that in all these things he had followed the leading of God. He therefore rehearsed the whole matter in order. He told them of the vision which taught him he must not make distinctions where God had made none, and then of the Spirit's bidding him go with the messengers whom Cornelius by Divine direction had sent for him. Finally he told how the Holy Ghost had fallen upon those Gentiles even as He had come upon themselves at Pentecost. These things, he said, convinced him that God was leading him, and "What was I," he asked, "that I should withstand God?" In that question he summed up his argument. When he had finished, a silent stillness rested on the gathering. If any still had doubts they held their peace, and presently all united in praising God that He had granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life. Thus it was that the great forward

<sup>1</sup> **Men uncircumcised.**—The expression used shows the strength of feeling against what Peter had done. Those with whom he had associated are not called Gentiles but "men uncircumcised," the word of greatest reproach that could be used by a Jew.

step was formally taken. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem acknowledged the Gentiles as Christian brethren; and that had come to pass to which Stephen the martyr had pointed:

**The Problem solved at Antioch** (chap. xi. 19-21). — We have just seen Christian ideas expand so as to acknowledge Gentiles as Christian brethren. We are now to see the Christian Church extend so as to include Gentiles in a way unknown before. By the persecution which followed the death of Stephen many of the disciples were driven out of Palestine altogether. Some of them crossed the Galilean hills into Phœnicia;<sup>1</sup> others crossed the Lebanon to Damascus; not a few found refuge in Cyprus and other islands of the Levant, while some undertook a journey of over three hundred miles by road to go to Antioch,<sup>2</sup> the splendid capital of Syria. Already there were many Jews in Antioch, for one of the kings of Syria had induced Jews to settle there by giving them equal rights with the Greeks. But, indeed, almost wherever they went those fugitive disciples found Jews and synagogues, and everywhere they spoke to their fellow-countrymen about the faith of Jesus; but, keeping to the exclusive spirit and custom of their Jewish religion, they preached the Gospel to none but Jews only. In Antioch, however, some Greek-speaking Jews who hailed from Cyprus and Cyrene,<sup>3</sup> yielding to the impulse of their Christian hearts, broke through the restraints of Jewish ceremonial and boldly preached the Gospel, not only to the Jews in the synagogue, but also to the Gentiles<sup>4</sup> in the city. This boldness was soon justified,

<sup>1</sup> Phœnice or Phœnicia (R.V.), the district north of Palestine in which were situated the towns of Tyre and Sidon.

<sup>2</sup> Antioch, the capital of Syria, situated on the Orontes, about fifteen miles from the sea, its seaport being Seleucia, was one of the most important cities of antiquity. It was wealthy and notoriously profligate, yet we shall see it become a great centre of Gentile Christianity. Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, was one of "the seven" (chap. vi. 5).

<sup>3</sup> Cyrene. — A fertile district in the north of Africa, now Tripoli. Simon, a Cyrenian, is mentioned in Matt. xxvi. 73.

<sup>4</sup> Unto the Grecians = "unto the Greeks also," as in R.V. The best manuscripts have "Greeks."

for God's blessing was so manifestly on the work that many of those Gentiles became disciples of Jesus. To the more strict of the Jewish Christians, however, this gave offence, and they informed the Apostles in Jerusalem of what was going on. It is curious to look back now and notice that, while in connection with the case of Cornelius the Apostles were discussing whether the Gentiles might be admitted as disciples or not, God had in another way settled the same question in the far-off city of Antioch, and a great number of them had believed.

**The Cradle of Gentile Christianity** (chap. xi. 22-30).—The news of the great work going on in Syria excited much interest, not unmixed with apprehension, in Jerusalem, and the Apostles resolved to send some one to inquire into the matter. For this mission they made choice of Barnabas, and no fitter man could have been found. Himself a Hellenistic Jew and a native of Cyprus, he was generous in disposition and spiritually-minded, with a keen insight and a sound judgment, which admirably fitted him for the duty. The arrival of a man like Barnabas at such a time was an unspeakable blessing to Antioch, for he immediately recognised that the grace of God was at work among those people, and he was glad. Satisfied of their genuine conversion, he exhorted them to continue steadfast in the faith. Realising the critical value of such an opportunity, he stayed on in Antioch, and through his ministry new converts were won in still larger numbers. So greatly did the work increase under his care that by and by he felt the need of a colleague to share it with him. Immediately he bethought him of one—a friend of his early years—who was richly gifted for such work, and who, if he could secure him, would be able to help him as perhaps no other man could. This was Saul of Tarsus. Barnabas remembered how Saul had come to Jerusalem fired with the memory of a vision and filled with a conviction that one day he was to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. His reception had not been over cordial then, even among the disciples; afterwards he had been obliged to escape for his life, and now he was

living in obscurity somewhere away in the wilds of Cilicia. Barnabas, therefore, set out for Tarsus to seek Saul. Apparently it was with some difficulty that he found him, but when he succeeded, Saul readily complied with his request and returned with him to Antioch. There for a whole year these two missionary brethren laboured together with much success and encouragement. Their success was marked by the coinage of a new word, a name which the world has cherished ever since, for it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.<sup>1</sup>

Still more clearly was the success manifested, however, by the fact that Antioch soon became the great centre of Gentile Christianity and the headquarters of missionary activity. It was from Antioch that Paul and Barnabas, the first Christian missionaries to the Gentile world, were sent forth,<sup>2</sup> and it was to Antioch they returned as each missionary tour was completed. While this work was going on among the Gentiles in Antioch, a prophet named Agabus, who came from Jerusalem, predicted the occurrence of a great famine in Judæa.<sup>3</sup> The Christians of Antioch, hearing this, at once proposed to send a contribution for the relief of their needy brethren in Judæa, and this they did, sending the gift to the elders<sup>4</sup> by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

<sup>1</sup> **Christians.**—This is an interesting name. It was not used by the Christians of themselves, being found in the New Testament only here, in chap. xxvi. 28 (where it is used contemptuously), and in 1 Peter iv. 16. They called themselves "the disciples," "saints," "the faithful," and "the brethren." It certainly would not be given them by the Jews, who would not call them "the followers of *the Messiah*." They called them "Nazarenes" (chap. xxiv. 5) or "Galileans." It is a remarkable word, for it refers to the Hebrew belief in the Messiah who was to come. The word itself is Greek, and the termination Latin, meaning "the followers of," as the partisans of Herod were called the "Herodians." Thus, like the inscription on the Cross, it is written in "Hebrew and Greek and Latin."

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xiii. 2-4.

<sup>3</sup> From the historian Josephus we learn that such a famine took place in the reign of the Emperor Claudius in the year 44 A.D.

<sup>4</sup> **The elders.**—In the Greek, "presbyters." This is the first mention of these office-bearers in the Christian Church.

## CHAPTER XII

## MORE PERSECUTION

**An Apostle martyred** (chap. xii. 1-3).—While there had been success and encouragement in Antioch, it was otherwise with the Christians at Jerusalem. For nearly five years they had enjoyed a time of peace, but at the end of that time a terrible change came. The Emperor Caligula had been slain, and Claudius, his successor, had come to the throne. At the time of Caligula's death it chanced that a Jewish prince—Herod Agrippa by name<sup>1</sup>—was in Rome and rendered signal service to the new emperor. For this he was publicly thanked, and appointed to rule over all the country formerly governed by his grandfather, which included Judæa, Samaria, Abilene, and the district of Lebanon. Though not a good man, Herod Agrippa called himself a Pharisee, and paid great outward respect to the Mosaic law. His appointment, therefore, caused much rejoicing among the Jews. He was eager to stand well with them, and especially with the Pharisees, and he knew that nothing would tend more to secure their favour than to revive the persecution against the Christians. Accordingly, he caused the Apostle James<sup>2</sup> to be imprisoned and beheaded.<sup>3</sup> We can well understand what a blow this was to the Church. It was the first break in the Apostolic band. James was one of the three favoured disciples who had been most intimate with the Lord when He was on earth—those who had been allowed to be present with Him at the

<sup>1</sup> He was the son of Aristobulus, and grandson of Herod the Great.

<sup>2</sup> James, the son of Zebedee, and brother of John.

<sup>3</sup> With the sword.—This was the third of the modes of execution appointed among the Jews. These were stoning, burning, beheading, and strangulation.

raising of Jairus's daughter,<sup>1</sup> at the Transfiguration on the Holy Mount,<sup>2</sup> and at the agony in Gethsemane.<sup>3</sup> He is the only Apostle whose death is mentioned in the New Testament; yet not a single detail is given us regarding his martyrdom, not a syllable as to his testimony, his demeanour, or his parting words. We know only that he was slain with the sword, and when Herod saw how in this he had pleased the Jews he proceeded to take Peter also. But it was the Feast of the Passover, and Herod, who was a rigorous observer of Jewish ceremonial, would not execute a prisoner during the feast; Peter therefore was cast into prison till the seven days' festival should be completed, when he would be brought forth and put to death with full publicity. So Herod proposed, but God planned otherwise. Herod fancied he had numbered Peter's days; God had numbered Herod's; and long after Herod was laid in the dust Peter was doing God's work of building up the Church of Christ.

**Prison Doors opened** (chap. xii. 3-19).—Once before Peter had been arrested, and he had got out of prison in some mysterious way.<sup>4</sup> This time no precaution was neglected which would ensure his safe keeping. Four quaternions of soldiers—that is, four sets of four soldiers each—were told off to guard him, relieving each other in turn. Two of the soldiers were with him in the cell, their prisoner being chained to them;<sup>5</sup> two kept guard outside, one at the inner and the other at the outer door,<sup>6</sup> while the other twelve were resting. Day after day the Apostle remained in this close custody while the services of the Temple feast were counting out the days allotted to him on earth. For the members of the Church it was a trying time. Well did they know how terrible to them would be the loss of such a champion of the faith, and so with one heart they prayed to God for his deliverance.<sup>7</sup> Slowly

<sup>1</sup> Mark v. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Mark ix. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Mark xiv. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Chap. v. 18, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Verse 6.

<sup>6</sup> Verse 10.

<sup>7</sup> Without ceasing = "earnestly" (compare Luke xxii. 44, where the same Greek word is used).

the days passed. At length the last night of the feast came, and with the dawn of morning Peter would be led forth to die. Oh, how those sad hearts prayed! Truly God answers prayer, for lo! that very night deliverance came. The condemned man was sleeping calmly between the two soldiers, when suddenly the dark dungeon glowed with the brightness of an angelic presence. Waking Peter with a touch, the angel visitor raised him from the ground, and bidding him gird up his long tunic, put on his sandals, and wrap his *abba* or loose cloak about him, led him through the two prison doors, with a sleeping sentry at each, and then through the great iron gate of the prison—which opened for them of its own accord—out into the street. There the angel vanished, and Peter found himself standing alone, free, but dazed and wondering whether it was not all a dream. Presently he came to himself and realised that it was no mere vision, but a glad reality, and with a grateful heart he gave God thanks. After thinking what it would be best to do, he made his way to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Her house was a frequent resort of the disciples, and that night a gathering of them had assembled to spend the night in united prayer for his deliverance, when lo! he stood knocking at the door, God's answer to their prayer. The maid Rhoda,<sup>1</sup> who cautiously<sup>2</sup> answered the midnight knock, recognised his voice, and was so startled and delighted that instead of opening the door she rushed in to tell the gladsome news. It was received with incredulity by the gathering, who said it must be his angel.<sup>3</sup> At length Peter's continued knocking gained him an

<sup>1</sup> Rhoda.—The name means *Roses*.

<sup>2</sup> A damsel came to hear.—Perhaps we have in this a trace of the danger which surrounded the disciples at this time from the zeal of Herod. Saul had entered into every house and carried off men and women to prison. There was danger of the like being done again, so Rhoda would not open till she knew who was seeking admission.

<sup>3</sup> His angel.—It was a popular belief among the Jews that each man had a guardian angel assigned him (compare Heb. i. 14; Matt. xviii. 10).

entrance, when to a company of astonished listeners he told the story of his escape. Then bidding them tell those things to James, the brother of the Lord, and to their fellow-believers, he withdrew for a time into safe retirement, while Herod wreaked his vengeance on the unconscious quaternion of soldiers, whose real offence was that they could not any more than Herod himself resist the purpose of God.

**The Death of Herod Agrippa** (chap. xii. 20-25). —While these things had been going on in Palestine, the Roman Emperor Claudius, who had been away on an expedition to the far West, returned to Rome announcing the conquest of a new province in the far-off islands of Britain. In honour of the event great rejoicings, with triumphal processions, public games, and gladiatorial exhibitions, were ordered to be held, not only in Rome but throughout the empire. Agrippa, always eager for such spectacles, dropped for a time his work of persecuting the Christians in Jerusalem and hastened to Cæsarea — the Roman capital — that he might make elaborate preparations for a festival there. From that journey he never came back; and neither disciple nor apostle ever fell again by his hands.

The people of Tyre and Sidon, who had no agricultural land of their own, were dependent on Judæa for their food supply, and lately there had been strained relations between the two. Desirous, therefore, to establish more friendly relations with Judæa, they seized the opportunity afforded by this visit to Cæsarea on so joyful an occasion to send an embassy to interview Herod, having previously taken care to secure a friend at court in the person of Blastus, the king's chamberlain. On the second morning of the great festival Herod received this embassy.<sup>1</sup> At daybreak he entered the crowded theatre arrayed in a robe of shining silver, and seating himself on the *bema* or throne, delivered a set address to the Phœnicians. Presently as the sun's

<sup>1</sup> Josephus gives a full and detailed account of this festival and the death of Herod, which strikingly agrees with Luke's narrative (Jos. *Antiq.* xviii. 8).

rays fell on his silvery robe he seemed as if enwrapped in glittering splendour. The people were inspired with awe, and here and there a flatterer's voice was heard shouting that he was a god and not a man. Pleased with the flattery, Agrippa had not a word of remonstrance or rebuke. Almost immediately, however, there arose a cry of alarm. The king had been seized with a violent and severe pain. They carried him from the theatre to the palace, where it was found that he was stricken with a loathsome and painful disease, and after enduring five days of continuous agony he expired. Thus died the last Jewish prince that ruled over Jerusalem. A Roman governor succeeded him, and again the Christians had peace. Once more the hand of God had brushed aside the persecutor, and the Word of God grew and multiplied. Barnabas and Saul had been to Jerusalem with the gift from the Christians of Antioch, and they may possibly have seen some of these things either in Jerusalem itself or in Cæsarea on their way back. On their return they took with them to Antioch one who was by and by to be the cause of a sad chapter in the history of them both. This was John Mark, a near relative of Barnabas, and the son of that Mary whose house in Jerusalem was frequently a resort of the Christians.

Here Luke concludes the first portion of his Book of Acts, and as it closes we note that it shows us a growing Christian Church spreading not only in Jerusalem, Judæa, and Samaria, but also away beyond the confines of Palestine altogether.

## CHAPTER XIII

### PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

**A New Section.**—The Book of Acts divides naturally into three sections. The first of these—which we have just finished (chaps. i.-xii.)—has traced the spread

of Christianity mainly among the Jews in Judæa, Samaria, and beyond Palestine, but has at the same time indicated God's purpose of calling the Gentiles also into the Church of Christ, and furnished instances in which this was actually done, as in the case of Cornelius and his Gentile friends. The second section (chaps. xiii.-xxi. 19) now opens by showing us a strong centre of Gentile Christianity established at Antioch, and fast becoming a centre of missionary activity from which the Gospel was spread throughout the Gentile world. This result was accomplished mainly by means of three great missionary journeys undertaken by Paul and his companions. The record of those three journeys is largely the history of the founding of the Christian Church, and Luke therefore gives it in considerable detail. Each journey started from Antioch and ended with a visit to Jerusalem. The work done in the course of the journeyings, and the methods employed by the missionaries in presenting the truth, he illustrates by reporting for us three great speeches delivered by the Apostle—one during each of the journeys,—the first<sup>1</sup> being addressed to Jews, the second<sup>2</sup> to Gentiles, and the third<sup>3</sup> to Christians. The third section of the book (chaps. xxi. 20-xxviii.) records, as we shall presently find, the events which ended in bringing Paul, the Christian missionary, to Rome, and closes with a picture of the Apostle of the Gentiles in the capital of the world preaching the Gospel with all boldness, no man forbidding him. On the second of these three divisions we now enter.

**Ordination of the First Foreign Missionaries** (chap. xiii. 1-3).—On their return to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas found the Church there increased in numbers and still actively interested in the spread of Christianity, a little group of specially gifted men taking in different ways a prominent part in its work. Some of these were prophets inspired with a special message from God, while others acted as teachers in-

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xiii. 16-41.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xvii. 22-31.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xx. 18-35.

structing the believers. Five of their names<sup>1</sup> are given, and among them we note those of Barnabas and Saul. One day while these were worshipping together a striking intimation was made to them—probably through the instrumentality of one of the Prophets, and through them to the Church,—to the effect that God desired Barnabas and Saul to be set apart for the work to which He had specially called them—the work of carrying the Gospel to those outside the Church, whether Jew or Gentile. In other words, they were to be set apart as missionaries. In obedience to this Divine intimation, a solemn service of prayer and fasting was held, and the two missionaries were in God's name ordained to this work.

**Missionary Visit to Cyprus** (chap. xiii. 4-12).—The task of attempting to convert the vast heathen world to the faith of Jesus Christ was a boldly magnificent one; but the elders of the Church in Antioch do not seem to have hesitated about obeying the Divine call and sending forth these two brethren to begin it; and so Barnabas and Saul were sent forth as the first Christian missionaries. The journey, which was probably planned by Divine direction, was to extend over two years, and they took with them as an attendant<sup>2</sup> or helper John Mark, a relative<sup>3</sup> of Barnabas. Whether they quite realised the greatness of the task on which they were entering, we do not know, but they were calmly conscious that they were going at the bidding of God. They knew that they were “sent by the Holy Ghost,” and the remembrance of that would be a strength

<sup>1</sup> It is worth while to note the nationalities and connections of the men who are here named. One was from Cyprus; another a Cyrenian from the north of Africa; the third was a Jew; one was a connection (foster-brother) of Herod, and the last was Saul, the divinely chosen “Apostle of the Gentiles.” Thus the little group was in a manner representative of “the whole world” into which the Gospel was now to be carried. “Brought up with” (verse 1) = “foster-brother,” as in R.V.

<sup>2</sup> Minister = “as their attendant” (R.V.).

<sup>3</sup> By some supposed to be his nephew, by others his cousin. See Col. iv. 10.

to them in times of difficulty. They began their work by a visit to Cyprus. Their reasons for that choice we are not told; but Cyprus was not far from Antioch, and was in frequent communication with it. Christianity had already obtained a footing in the island, for among those who first brought the Gospel to the Gentiles in Antioch were some men of Cyprus; and Barnabas was himself a native of Cyprus. Possibly these circumstances may have influenced them. Certain it is that they set out from Antioch with their faces westwards. Travelling sixteen miles down a steep and rocky road to Seleucia,<sup>1</sup> the seaport of Antioch, they there obtained a sailing-boat to convey them across, and in due time they reached Salamis, on the eastern side of the island, and spent some days there. Cyprus was at that time a populous country, with a number of flourishing cities, in which the Jews formed an important element of the population. Of the work done in Salamis we are told nothing except that "they continued preaching the word in the synagogues of the Jews." After a short stay they started on a missionary tour across the island, preaching by the way to their Jewish countrymen wherever they could find them.

**A Contest with a Magician** (chap. xiii. 6-12).—The distance across is about a hundred miles, and it must have taken some considerable time to accomplish, but not one incident of the journey is recorded for us until they reached Paphos, the capital, one of the wickedest cities in the Roman world. Here Sergius Paulus, the proconsul or Roman governor, had his official residence. He is described as being a "prudent,"<sup>2</sup> or shrewd, sensible man, evidently one of the many Gentiles who in those days were inquirers after truth. In his company—perhaps residing in his house—he had a Jewish magician called Bar-jesus, but known also by the Arabic name of Elymas, or "the wise man,"—not improbably a self-

<sup>1</sup> **Seleucia.**—The seaports are mentioned according to Luke's usual custom. See chaps. xiv. 25; xvi. 11; xviii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> **Prudent, i.e.** "a man of ability."

assumed title. Sergius Paulus had heard of the visit of the Apostles to the island, and he expressed a desire to meet them and hear something of the new doctrine which they taught—the Word of God. At this the fears of the magician were aroused lest he should lose his influence over the proconsul, and when they came he determined by all means to withstand the Apostles and prevent the deputy from embracing the new faith. Realising this, and acting under a strong Divine impulse, Paul sternly rebuked him, calling him a “child of the devil,” an “enemy of all righteousness,” and by a startling miracle inflicted upon him the punishment of temporary blindness. Hardly were the words spoken by the Apostle when the poor stricken man felt himself enveloped in darkness, and, stretching out his helpless hands, implored his friends to lead him away. The deputy, deeply impressed, became convinced of the truth which Paul had declared, and professed his faith in Jesus as the Christ. Thus the man who had set himself to withstand the Gospel proved in God’s hands the means of the governor’s conversion. Doubtless the good impression thus made on the mind of the deputy would help the missionaries among the people by securing for them a respectful hearing.

**Saul (who is also called Paul)** (chap. xiii. 9).—Up to this point Barnabas has been the leader of the missionary party and Saul has been called by his Jewish name. Luke has always spoken of them as Barnabas and Saul. From this time onward, however, there is a change. Hitherto Saul has been among the Jews “as a Jew.”<sup>1</sup> Here, however, he is in different surroundings. He stands in the hall of a Roman proconsul, and he answers the questions of a Roman official by announcing himself not as Saul, a Jew from Tarsus, but as Paul, a Roman citizen, which would secure for him a respectful hearing. He thus steps forward into the leading place, and Luke, recognising that henceforward the history of

<sup>1</sup> See 1 Cor. ix. 20.

Paul is to be his chief theme, begins to speak of Paul and Barnabas.

**At Perga—Disappointment** (chap. xiii. 13).—After having spent some months in Cyprus, Paul, with his companions,<sup>1</sup> Barnabas and John Mark, prepared to leave the island and continue their missionary tour. At Paphos they found a coasting vessel, in which they embarked, and after sailing north-westwards for two days and a night, they entered the river Cestrus, and sailing up for seven miles, landed at the town of Perga, the capital of the province of Pamphylia. Here they were again on the mainland of Asia Minor, and only about a hundred miles from Paul's native province of Cilicia.

We do not read of their having made any missionary effort at Perga, but their stay there was marked by a disappointing and disheartening incident, which awakened painful feelings at the time, and was attended by serious consequences afterwards. John Mark deserted the missionary cause, and, forsaking them, went home to Jerusalem. What induced him to do so we are not told,<sup>2</sup> but whatever his reasons he left them in circumstances which made a deep and painful impression on Paul, and remained rankling in his mind for years.<sup>3</sup> Although Barnabas did not take quite so seriously his kinsman's defection, it must have been a very real misfortune to the mission. Mark could ill

<sup>1</sup> Paul and his company.—Literally, "those around Paul." Henceforth Paul is now the central figure of the narrative.

<sup>2</sup> It has been suggested that John's departure was in some way connected with the change of plan which led them, instead of evangelising, as they originally intended, the Roman province of Pamphylia, to go direct over the mountains and on to Antioch in Pisidia, in the province of Galatia, postponing the preaching of the Gospel in Pamphylia till a later stage. This change of plan may probably have been due to the serious illness of Paul. In his Epistle to the Galatians he states that it was by reason of physical infirmity that he preached to them at the first. For a serious attack of illness in the enervating atmosphere of Perga, the natural treatment would be to go up to the higher ground of the interior, and the situation of Antioch (3600 feet above the sea), as well as the number of Jews resident there, would mark it out as a suitable place. (See Professor Ramsay's *Paul, the Traveller and Roman Citizen*, p. 89 f.)

<sup>3</sup> See chap. xv. 38.

be spared at the time, and it was impossible to fill his place. So keenly did Paul feel it that long after, when Barnabas wished to take Mark with them again on another journey, Paul, rather than have him, parted with Barnabas also.

**Antioch in Pisidia** (chap. xiii. 14).—Thus weakened, the mission party started on their difficult journey northward towards the interior. A rough, toilsome road it was, through a rugged, mountainous country infested by robbers; but after a journey of a hundred miles, which would probably occupy them about a week, they reached the flourishing commercial town of Antioch in Pisidia. Situated on the highway leading through the mountains into the country beyond, Antioch was a busy city, and in summer, when the people from the hot, low-lying districts near the coast came up to the hills to escape the great heat, it was crowded. Probably it was so at this time, and the first care of the Apostles would be to repair to the Jews' quarter and find a lodging.

**A Sabbath in the Synagogue** (chap. xiii. 15).—When the Sabbath came round they followed their usual custom, and went to the synagogue to worship with their fellow-countrymen; for we must not forget that along with their Christian faith the Apostles retained their Jewish worship. There was but one synagogue in Antioch, so it must have been of considerable size. A Jewish synagogue is much the same everywhere, and its arrangements would be almost identical with those of any of the synagogues throughout the East at the present day. Paul and Barnabas on entering would find themselves in a large square building, low-roofed, and dimly lighted, the windows being small to keep it cool. At one side is a lattice-work screen, behind which the women sit, veiled and silent, while the men join in the service. In the centre stands the reader's desk, and near it, facing the congregation, are several raised seats, where the elders of the synagogue sit—those "chief seats" which the Rabbis and the Pharisees loved.<sup>1</sup> This, then, is the place where Paul and Barnabas

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiii. 6.

have come to worship. Every Jew on entering the synagogue takes in his hand a sort of broad scarf made of white wool, with blue fringes, and having tassels at the four corners. This, which is called the *tallith* or fringed garment, is very sacred in Jewish eyes. Wrapping it round his head, the worshipper immediately begins to join in the prayers which are being recited by the congregation. This, no doubt, Paul and Barnabas do like the others. After the prayers are ended the clerk of the congregation brings forward with much ceremony the *Torah* or sacred roll—the Scriptures of the Old Testament—and hands it to the reader, who takes his place at the desk. Two lessons are read, one from the Law and another from the Prophets,<sup>1</sup> and thereafter there is an address or sermon, generally founded on something in one or other of the passages read. This address, however, is not given by one set minister, but any distinguished stranger present, or indeed any one likely to do it with profit, may be asked to address the congregation. It was in this way that the ruler of the synagogue at Nazareth called upon Jesus<sup>2</sup> to speak there; and in the same way the rulers of the synagogue at Antioch, noticing the presence of Paul and Barnabas, sent a courteous message inviting them to address the congregation—“Brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.” Ever ready to seize an opportunity, Paul

<sup>1</sup> Biblical scholars have been able to trace out what most probably were the two lessons read in the synagogue that day, viz. Deut. i. and Isaiah i. In verses 17 and 18 Paul uses two words in an unusual sense, viz. “suffered” and “exalted,” and a similar uncommon use of these words is found in Deut. i. 31 and Isaiah i. 2. Further, it is found that in the Jewish Lectionary, or Order for the Reading of the Scriptures in the Synagogue, which is very ancient, these two chapters are combined for reading on the same day. Moreover, a consideration of Paul’s sermon shows that the point which he emphasises in his review of Israel’s history, viz. God’s special care over Israel, is just that which is insisted on in Deut. i., while the burden of his argument through the whole sermon, the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, is the subject spoken of in Isaiah i., “Come now, and let us reason together,” etc. (See Farrar’s *Life of St. Paul*, vol. i. p. 368 f.).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Luke iv. 16.

instantly accepted the invitation, and rising in his place, with outstretched hand,<sup>1</sup> addressed the expectant throng.

**The First Recorded Sermon of St. Paul** (chap. xiii. 16-41).—It was a memorable occasion. The address which he delivered is the first of Paul's sermons of which we have any record, although he had been preaching Christianity for over ten years. The congregation was, of course, composed mainly of Jews, but there were present also some proselytes—Gentiles who had accepted the God of Israel and become Jews,—and possibly also some Gentiles. By his first sentence Paul showed that his address was intended for all of them. "Men of Israel," he said, "and ye that fear God, hearken." The sermon itself was probably based on words which the congregation had just heard in the two lessons from Scripture, but it recalls in several respects that address of Stephen which Paul had heard years ago, and by which he had evidently been greatly impressed. Like Stephen, he appeals to Jewish history, pointing out that God through a long series of special dealings had shown marked goodness to His chosen people, delivering them from Egypt, settling them in Canaan, and giving them first judges and then kings to rule over them (vv. 16-22). In like manner, as the greatest of those special dealings, God sent to Israel the promised Saviour, Jesus (ver. 23), and now, he says, the message of that salvation is sent to you all, Jews and Gentiles (ver. 26). The Jews in Jerusalem did not recognise Jesus as the Messiah, and they crucified Him, as the Prophets had foretold they would. God, however, had vindicated His claim by raising Him from the dead (vv. 27-30). Of that fact he says we (the Apostles) are witnesses, and to-day we preach in your hearing the forgiveness of sins for all who believe in Jesus as the Messiah (vv. 31-37), and we warn you against the danger of neglecting our message and rejecting the Saviour (vv. 38-41).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. chaps. xii. 17; xxi. 40; xxvi. 1.

This is a bare summary of what the Apostle said. Even Luke's account is only an outline, but we can understand what it would be when spoken with the fire and fervour of a preacher like Paul. When he sat down his audience were thrilled and astonished. Could it be true, as he said, that the Christ had come? A deep impression was produced by the discourse, even the Jews being impressed; and as they streamed out of the synagogue, Jews and Gentiles alike begged that the Apostles would come again the following Sabbath and speak further of those things.

**Missionary Experiences** (chap. xiii. 42-49).—After the congregation had broken up, a number of inquirers followed Paul and Barnabas as they walked homewards, asking about the new faith. Throughout the week there was much talk and discussion about the sermon, and the next Sabbath the doors of the quiet synagogue were thronged by a vast crowd—Jew and Gentile—of all nationalities and of all classes. It seemed as if the whole city had come together to hear the Word of God. Doubtless Paul rejoiced at such an opportunity of preaching the Gospel, but by this time the haughty, exclusive Jews had grown jealous and alarmed. They were indignant because Paul had said that the Gentiles might become Christians as well as the Jews. The ruler of the synagogue again invited Paul to speak, but on this occasion he met with a very different reception. Hardly had he commenced his address when the Jews began to call out, interrupting and contradicting him. The sight of the Gentiles gathered to hear him filled them with bitterness. They protested vehemently against what he was saying, and blasphemed the name of Jesus. In vain did Paul try to answer them: they only became the more excited and shouted the louder. At length the Apostles saw it was time to end the scene. They recognised that a crisis had come, and they must meet it. Paul therefore, standing erect and boldly facing the angry Jews in front of him, pointed to the door, where the people of the city were crowding, eager to hear the Word,

and exclaimed : " It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken unto you : but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles : for so hath God commanded us." With these words the two missionaries walked together out of the synagcgue, leaving the enraged and excited multitude. We can well understand that now there was a wider breach than ever between the Jews and the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Very gladly, however, did the Gentiles on their part welcome both the Apostles and their message. Many among them believed, and the Gospei spread rapidly, not only in the city, but throughout the whole region.

**Banished from the City** (chap. xiii. 50).—This success was like a gleam of sunshine to the Apostles, but very soon the clouds gathered again. Those angry Jews of the synagogue were not to be easily defeated in their purpose. Among the proselytes who worshipped with them were the wives of several of the principal men in the city, and they induced these to influence their husbands against Paul and Barnabas, with such success that finally they got them banished from the city. The Apostles, as they left, shook off their feet the dust of the city " as a testimony against them,"<sup>1</sup> and passed on to Iconium, a town fifty miles off. The church of Gentile believers, however, which they were thus compelled to leave in Antioch, was not destroyed, as might have been expected. On the contrary, the faith of its members increased, and they were filled with the brightness of spiritual joy.

<sup>1</sup> See Matt. x. 14.

## CHAPTER XIV

## MISTAKEN FOR GODS

**At Iconium** (chap. xiv. 1-5).—Thus were the two missionaries compelled to extend their tour, and so carry the Gospel farther. Expelled from Antioch, they proceeded to Iconium, where they remained probably several months. Here, as elsewhere, they went on the Sabbath to the synagogue, where on several occasions they were invited to speak, and did so with such fervour and power that they won many converts both among Jews and proselytes. Ere long, however, some of the unbelieving Jews began to stir up opposition to them and incited the Gentiles against them; but encouraged by the manifest blessing of God resting on their labours, the Apostles held their ground, confirming their preaching by striking miracles which arrested the attention of the whole community. Of the townspeople some sided with the Apostles<sup>1</sup> and some with the synagogue Jews, till the whole city was troubled. At length so great did the excitement become that the embittered Jews and the unbelieving Gentiles combined together in a plot to murder Paul and Barnabas, and so end the trouble; but of this the intended victims in some way got timely notice, and made their escape. They took the road leading across the plains, and journeying on, at length reached the town of Lystra, in Lycaonia. Thus was their work in Iconium suddenly ended, and a second time they were compelled when persecuted in one city to flee to another. Again, too, it was their own countrymen who instigated

<sup>1</sup> **The Apostles.**—Paul and Barnabas are so called here for the first time. To be an apostle of Jesus it was necessary—(1) To hold a commission direct from Him; and (2) to have seen the risen Saviour.

the persecution. Well might Paul say, "I was in peril by mine own countrymen."<sup>1</sup>

**At Lystra and Derbe** (chap. xiv. 6-21).—There does not appear to have been a synagogue at Lystra, but both there and in the villages round about the Apostles preached with much success in the bazaars and market-places, as is done still by missionaries in the East. One day an incident occurred which led to an extraordinary scene. While Paul was addressing a crowd near the temple of Jupiter, he noticed among his hearers a lame man,<sup>2</sup> whose eager look showed that he was believing what was said. Paul perceived in him tokens of a very real faith, and so acting on an impulse of the Divine Spirit, he fixed his gaze upon the poor man and cried in a loud voice, "Rise! Stand upright upon thy feet!" Instantly the cripple leaped up and began to walk. A murmur of astonishment passed through the crowd. There was an old tradition in Lystra that once upon a time two of the gods had come down to earth in this very neighbourhood, and now the crowd concluded that this had happened again, and they shouted in the rude, native dialect of Lycaonia, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men." The tall, handsome Barnabas, they said, must be Jupiter,<sup>3</sup> and Paul, to whose words they had just been listening, must be Mercury, who was an eloquent speaker. The Apostles themselves, being ignorant of the Lycaonian dialect, did not understand what was being said, and withdrew to their lodging. Meanwhile the report spread, and the people thronged together in great excitement. The white temple of Jupiter stood before the gate of the town, and its priest at once prepared to offer sacrifice to these two gods. He procured bulls

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Note the physician's minute description of the case. The man's feet were powerless; he had been born so, and he never had walked.

<sup>3</sup> Jupiter was the king of the gods, and of stately and commanding presence. Mercury was the messenger of the gods, and the inventor of speech; hence the god of eloquence.

and garlands and the other accessories of a great procession, and, accompanied by the jubilant crowds, marched through the streets to the gates, intending to slay the animals and offer them in sacrifice to the two deities. When Paul and Barnabas learned of all this they were greatly shocked. They rent their clothes and rushed out among the people, imploring them to desist from such folly, and to believe that they were only men of like passions with themselves. They assured them that the very purpose of their visit was to beg them to turn away from such vanities and idolatry and learn to worship the living God who created all things. With great difficulty they succeeded in restraining the crowd, and there was disappointment in many hearts when the bulls, with their flowery garlands, were led back to their stalls in Jupiter's temple, and the people had to go to their homes. For some time Paul and Barnabas stayed in Lystra and preached, but the shadow of that disappointment never altogether wore off. Its effect was felt when by and by a company of Jews came all the way from Iconium and Antioch seeking to stir up the people against the Apostles. The fickle, disappointed mob fell an easy prey to their malicious falsehoods, and it was not long till those who were with difficulty restrained from worshipping Paul as a god stoned him till they thought him dead, and dragging his senseless body through the dusty street out by the city gate, left him lying there. He was not, however, dead. His friends, who had followed timidly, unaware whether he was dead or not, gathered round the body. It was with sad hearts they saw the messenger of Jesus lying in the dust bruised and bleeding, and to all appearance dead; but while they stood around, the Apostle recovered consciousness, and soon, to their great joy, he opened his eyes and spoke to them. After a little while he was able to be moved, and by the help of his friends he was brought back to the city. Alas! what it meant in those days to be a missionary of the crucified Jesus! After such a warning it was impossible to remain longer in Lystra, so next morning, although

little able to travel, bruised and sore as he was, Paul, and his faithful companion Barnabas, started to make their way from Lystra to the town of Derbe, some twenty miles off. There they were allowed to rest unmolested, as the Jews, believing perhaps that Paul was dead, did not follow them thither. A little time of rest and peace they sadly needed, but they found time and strength to preach also ; and their work seems to have been blessed, for they made many disciples.

**The Return to Antioch in Syria** (chap. xiv. 21-28).—Surely the time had now come when these two missionaries might think of returning home. It was a long time since they had left Antioch, and very trying had been the experiences through which they had passed since the day they were ordained in the church at Antioch and sent forth by the brethren. Accordingly they now turned their steps homeward, though not by the nearest way. At Derbe they were in the neighbourhood of a well-known pass in the mountains called the Cilician Gates, through which they might have proceeded to Tarsus, Paul's native city, and thereafter a short voyage would have brought them to Antioch. They preferred, however, to return by the way they had come, so that they might visit the various churches they had founded. It was no light thing to resolve again to face what might await them in Lystra, Iconium, or Antioch, but they do not seem to have hesitated. They visited all three places, confirming the believers, exhorting them to constancy, and warning them to be prepared for the tribulations through which they must enter into the kingdom of God. Before they left they ordained elders in each of the churches, men who should have the care and oversight of the affairs of the Church.

From Antioch in Pisidia they travelled back to Perga, where they had formerly landed on coming from Cyprus. On that occasion they had merely passed through it, but now they remained some time and preached. Possibly they could not find a ship at Perga, so after a short

stay they continued their journey by road sixteen miles farther, and came to the seaport of Attalia. Here they got a coasting vessel which carried them to Seleucia, the seaport of Antioch. They had then only to toil up the sixteen miles of rocky pathway through the wide glen down which they had come at the first, and they stood once more in the streets of Antioch whence the Church had sent them forth. Thus ended the first missionary journey. Toilsome and eventful enough it had been. For nearly three years the missionaries had been away, and during that time they had preached the Gospel in the island of Cyprus and in three provinces of Asia Minor—Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia. They had founded four Christian churches, namely those in Pisidian Antioch, in Iconium, in Lystra, and in Derbe. Of the fatigues, the perils, and the terrible experiences they had undergone they bore unmistakable traces. Twenty years afterwards the memory of those hardships and afflictions was still fresh when Paul wrote of “the persecutions and afflictions which came upon him at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra.”<sup>1</sup> But more notable than all else was the deep-rooted conviction he brought back with him that the work of his life—that to which God had called him—was to be “the Apostle of the Gentiles.” His experience in every town in which he preached had been that, while Jewish pride and national exclusiveness stood in the way of the Jews receiving the universal Gospel, the Gentiles everywhere were ready to welcome it. After their return the Christians of Antioch held a large missionary meeting, at which the two Apostles gave a report of their travels and experiences, and bore testimony to the great fact that God had indeed “opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles.”

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 11.

## CHAPTER XV

## THE FIRST COUNCIL OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

**How may Gentiles become Christians?** (chap. xv. 1-5).—For some time the wearied missionaries rested after their hardships and fatigues, enjoying the peaceful ministrations of the Church in Antioch, where they found a quiet, restful community, Jew and Gentile living together in unity, waiving their differences, and, with mutual forbearance, treating each other as brethren in Christ. By and by, however, that peace was broken. Certain men came down from Judæa—claiming to have come with the authority of the Apostles—and urged that Gentile converts should not be received as Christians unless they had first become proselytes and been circumcised. Circumcision, they maintained, was essential to salvation. This Paul stoutly opposed, and by the controversy which arose the peace of the Church was destroyed. Some of the Jewish converts in Antioch agreed with those teachers, while, on the other hand, the faith of some of the Gentile Christians was shaken. Paul viewed with anxiety and indignation this attempt to lay on the Gentiles a burden which Jesus had not imposed. It would, if accepted, sweep away the results of all the missionary work he and Barnabas had been doing among the Gentiles in Asia Minor. So keen was the controversy and so important the question, that it was ultimately determined that Paul and Barnabas should go up to Jerusalem to lay the matter before the Apostles and elders and obtain an authoritative decision regarding it. Several members of the Church in Antioch accompanied them, and Paul also took with him Titus, a Greek,<sup>1</sup> who had been converted to Christianity during their visit to Cyprus, and who

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii. 3.

was a living instance of an uncircumcised Gentile who had unmistakably received the gift of the Holy Ghost. From Antioch to Jerusalem was a long journey, and it would occupy them about six weeks, travelling by the landward route through Phœnicia. On their way they halted at the important towns of Tyre and Sidon, and then passed southward through Samaria. Everywhere they told the Christian brethren their experience of the conversion of the Gentiles, and everywhere they were encouraged by expressions of approval and joy. On arriving at Jerusalem they were cordially received by the Church as well as by the Apostles and elders.<sup>1</sup> A meeting was held, at which they narrated their experience of preaching among the Gentiles, and explained the question that had arisen out of it. Immediately some of the Christian Pharisees<sup>2</sup> got up and formally protested against those things, insisting that before being received as Christians the Gentiles must accept the entire law of Moses and be circumcised. The question was too serious, and the results depending on it too far-reaching, to be decided by an immediate vote, so it was left for settlement at a future meeting. During the interval Paul and Barnabas had the opportunity of a private interview with the three great leaders of the Church—Peter, James the Lord's brother, and John. To them Paul gave a full account of the nature of the Gospel he had preached to the Gentiles, and of his reasons for not demanding of them observance of all the rites of the Mosaic law. So clearly and with such force did he put the case, that the three Apostles were entirely gained over to his view. They immediately offered to him and

<sup>1</sup> **The Church and the Apostles and elders.**—The words imply a general gathering of the Church, members of the different synagogues coming together with the elders who presided over them.

<sup>2</sup> These Pharisees were of course Christians. While on this occasion they were silenced, they became bitter enemies of Paul, and on many occasions afterwards they tried to injure and discredit his teaching.

Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, thereby acknowledging them as called of God to be Apostles to the Gentiles, even as they themselves were Apostles to the Jews. With what feelings of profound thankfulness Paul and Barnabas would return that night to their lodging, we can well understand. They had convinced the three most powerful leaders of the Church, and a great point was gained.

**A Great Debate** (chap. xv. 6-21).—Shortly thereafter the Assembly—or, as it is usually called, the Council—of Jerusalem met. Not only the Apostles and elders, but apparently the whole Church was represented, and in it the great debate came on. Intensely interesting it must have been to one who, like Paul, realised how much depended on it for the cause of the Gospel and the salvation of the world. There was much eager and vehement discussion, not without angry feeling. The Judaising party had their supporters in the Assembly, and these demanded that Titus should be circumcised.<sup>1</sup> Paul, however, felt that this would be to give up the whole point, and he would not listen to it. By and by, after the subject had been discussed at considerable length, Peter arose. There could be little doubt as to which side he would take. His address took the form of an appeal to history. He reminded them that this question had really been decided long ago, for had not God directed him to go to Cæsarea and preach the Gospel to the Gentile household of Cornelius? And was not God's approval of his doing so attested when the Holy Spirit came upon those Gentiles, even as He had come upon themselves at the beginning? Why, he asked, should they lay upon the Gentiles a yoke which God had not imposed upon them? Even the Jews, he argued, must be saved, not by observance of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. If circumcision was necessary, then faith was insufficient; but seeing they all believed that the grace of Christ was sufficient for salvation, it would not be reasonable—nor could it be God's

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii. 3-5.

will—that they should fetter that grace by superfluous and vexatious conditions. If the Gentiles had faith in Christ, which manifested itself in a holy life, why impose upon them the observances of the law, which could not justify in the sight of God? Thus did he argue for complete freedom to the new converts. The address produced a marked effect upon the Assembly. The excitement calmed down. No reply was made by the Judaising party, and Barnabas and Paul were invited to address the Council. Barnabas, who was better known in Jerusalem than Paul,—and perhaps more acceptable to the Christian community from the memory of his former gifts and generosity,<sup>1</sup>—spoke first, the only time we find him put first since their visit to Cyprus. Neither of them argued the question. They contented themselves with relating their own experience as missionaries among the Gentiles, showing how God had answered the prayers of the Jerusalem Church<sup>2</sup> in a manner they had not thought of, and had testified the Divine approval of their ministry among the Gentiles by “signs and wonders,” the miracles at Paphos and Lystra, no doubt, being mentioned among them. Their addresses were listened to with the deepest attention, and when they had finished, James, the Lord’s brother, who presided over the Assembly, rose to speak. Every one felt that what he might say would really settle the question. He summed up the debate, and concluded by commending to the Assembly a decision of the question. That decision he based on two grounds: (1) That a Divine revelation had been given to Peter directing him to admit Gentiles; and (2) that this was exactly in accordance with Old Testament prophecy.<sup>3</sup> “Wherefore,” he said, “my judgment<sup>4</sup> is, that we do not place obstacles<sup>5</sup> in the way of those who from among the Gentiles are turned to God.” With a view, however, to

<sup>1</sup> Chap. iv. 36, 37.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. iv. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Amos ix. 11, 12.

<sup>4</sup> My sentence, *i.e.* “judgment” (R.V.).

<sup>5</sup> Trouble not them.—The verb is only found here in the New Testament, and signifies to trouble by putting obstacles in the way of another.

the peace and good of the Church, he added a proposal that they should enjoin those Gentiles, seeing that they were freed from legal observances, to be considerate of the feelings and scruples of their Jewish brethren, and, in particular, to "abstain from all meats offered to idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood." He pointed out also that this Christian liberty allowed to the Gentile meant no disparagement of the law of Moses still to be observed by the Jew, as "in every synagogue that law was read every Sabbath day." Thus did he also give his voice in favour of the free admission of the Gentiles. This address of James ended the debate. His proposal was unanimously adopted, and became the judgment of the Assembly.

Paul had gained his case. Yet the conclusion was to a certain extent of the nature of a compromise. Three of the four restrictions proposed were a concession to the feelings and practice of the Jews. In future Jew and Gentile would be associated together in the Christian Church, and each must avoid giving offence to the other. The conditions named were those which the Jews required of a proselyte of the gate before he could be admitted to the synagogue; so that while on the one hand they would not be a grievous burden on the Gentile, on the other the Christian Pharisees could not well refuse admission to those who fulfilled the conditions on which a proselyte was admitted to their own synagogue. It only remained now that steps should be taken to communicate the decision to those immediately concerned. For this the Assembly selected two of their number, prominent men in the Church, Judas Barsabas and Silas by name, and appointed them to accompany Paul and Barnabas and their fellow-deputies back to Antioch, bearing with them a pastoral letter from the Assembly intimating the decision.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This was the earliest circular letter in the Christian Church of which we have any record. In later years these became common, and the most important of them were some of Paul's own Epistles.

**Announcing the Decision** (chap. xv. 22-29).—

Furnished with this letter<sup>1</sup> Paul and the others left Jerusalem without delay, and after six weeks' travelling reached Antioch. There they were cordially welcomed by the Christians who had been anxiously awaiting the result of the appeal. A large gathering assembled to receive them, the Assembly's letter was presented and read, and the decision it announced was hailed with acclamation. There was rejoicing as if a threatened calamity had been averted, and Luke, with a reference perhaps to the meaning of Barnabas's name,<sup>2</sup> says, "they rejoiced for the consolation" thus brought to them. Judas and Barsabas, who possessed the prophetic gift, delivered addresses tending to confirm the faith of the Christians and quicken their zeal. The long time of excitement and anxiety in the Church at Antioch was now ended, and its members once more settled down quietly to prosecute the work of God in peace. Alas! however, it was only for a time. Those Judaising Christians from Jerusalem would come to them again.

Thus a great step was taken in the founding of the Christian Church. The story of this great debate so long ago has more than a passing interest for us. We see those men into whose hands was committed the guidance of the Church of God divided in opinion, eager in debate, the sparks of passion sometimes flashing from the anvil of controversy, yet all of them in the end guided to what is the will of God, and we learn a lesson as to God's method of guiding His Church through the ages. He dwells in His Church by His Holy Spirit, and amidst all the errors and frailty of erring and sinful men He will fulfil His purpose and perform His promise.

**A Sad Parting** (chap. xv. 36-41).—After a brief stay in Antioch, Judas and Silas prepared to return home. On Silas, however, the spell of Paul's in-

<sup>1</sup> The decree was the voice of the whole Church, and the letter is written in name of the "apostles, elders, and brethren."

<sup>2</sup> "Son of consolation."

fluence seems to have fallen, and either he did not go away at all, or he soon returned to Antioch and cast in his lot with the Apostles who remained there teaching and preaching the Word. After some months spent in this work the old mission-hunger kindled again in the heart of Paul. His thoughts went out to the churches he had planted in other places, and he longed to know how it fared with them. Now that peace reigned once more in the Church at Antioch and other teachers were labouring there, he felt that he might be spared, so he proposed to his old friend and missionary colleague Barnabas that they should go off together again and visit all the cities where they had founded churches on their former journey. Barnabas readily acceded to the proposal, and suggested that they should, as formerly, take his kinsman John Mark as their companion and attendant. To this, however, Paul strongly objected. Mark had forsaken them on their former journey, leaving them in the midst of their difficulties at Perga, in Pamphylia, and he urged that it would not be right to take such a one again. Each was so firm in his own determination that neither would give way. Barnabas would not go without Mark, Paul would not go with him, and a sharp contention arose between them. There is little doubt that sharp words were spoken, till in the end the dispute became so hot that the only course open to them was mutual separation. And so they parted. There is something touchingly sad in such a parting of two good Christian men. They had been friends probably from boyhood. When Paul came back to Jerusalem from Damascus a Christian, it was Barnabas who welcomed him and took him by the hand. It was Barnabas, too, who had gone to Tarsus to seek out Paul and lead him into missionary work. Since that day both of them had been devoted missionaries, and together they had shared the hardships and the joys of the missionary calling. And now they parted in anger—never to work together again. It is doubtful if they ever even saw each other again; but

though they might differ in their estimate of Mark they were at one in devotion to the work of the Gospel. Mercifully their friendship was not altogether broken. At this point both Barnabas and Mark drop out of the Book of Acts, but Paul mentions both in his Epistles, and always in terms of kindly regard. From certain of these notices<sup>1</sup> we learn that Paul and Mark met during the former's first imprisonment at Rome, and the Apostle found him one who was "profitable for the ministry," and whom he desired to have with him at the last.

It must have been a sad parting to both, but God can overrule evil for good, and the result to the Church was two missions instead of one, so that more countries were visited, and the Gospel was more widely proclaimed. Barnabas was the first to take his departure. Taking Mark as his companion, he sailed away to Cyprus to preach the Gospel to his own countrymen. Paul, on the other hand, chose Silas as his companion, doubtless on account of the special fitness he had shown for the work. It would appear that Silas took the place of Barnabas rather than Mark, who had been only an attendant, and together they went northward through Syria and Cilicia. The people of Antioch seem to have sympathised with Paul in the matter, for while Barnabas and Mark left quietly without any special expression of sympathy or approval, a valedictory meeting of the Christians was held in connection with the departure of Paul and Silas—a meeting at which, with earnest words and prayers, they were commended to the grace of God.

<sup>1</sup> See Col. iv. 10; Philemon 24; 2 Tim. iv. 11.

## CHAPTER XVI

## PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

**A New Companion** (chap. xvi. 1).—Thus Paul started on his second missionary journey with a new fellow-labourer in place of the friend who had been so constantly with him before, and bearing in his heart an unhappy remembrance of the sad quarrel. Silas, it will be remembered, was one of the two deputies sent to Antioch to announce the decision of the Church at Jerusalem regarding the admission of the Gentiles. Even before that he had held a prominent place among the brethren in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> He was associated with Paul in the writing of several of his Epistles, being mentioned under the Latin form of his name, Silvanus, from which it has been concluded that he was one of the Greek-speaking Jews so often referred to in the Book of Acts. Like Paul himself, he appears to have been a Roman citizen.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding the sad circumstances which brought it about, it was a happy providence that furnished the Apostle with a companion so valuable and helpful. Paul's first object on this journey was to visit and confirm the churches formerly founded,<sup>3</sup> and a beginning was made with the churches in Syria and Cilicia. Barnabas had gone to his native island, Cyprus; now Paul goes to his native province of Cilicia, doubtless visiting his native city of Tarsus. What a home-coming it would be! He made but a short stay, however, for soon we find him and his companions toiling up through one of the passes in the great Taurus range of mountains—probably through the pass known as the Cilician Gates, so famous in history,<sup>4</sup>—till they reach the bleak table-land of

<sup>1</sup> See chap. xv. 22.

<sup>2</sup> See chap. xvi. 37.

<sup>3</sup> And so carry out the intention expressed in chap. xv. 36.

<sup>4</sup> **The Cilician Gates.**—One of the routes traversed by the armies of the Crusaders.

Lycaonia, whence they make their way down to the town of Derbe. This was the farthest point Paul and Barnabas had reached on the former journey. This time, however, Paul, travelling by a different route, approached the town from the opposite direction. With glad surprise the Christians of Derbe welcomed him. Surely they must also have inquired about Barnabas. Did they ask why he had not come too? Perhaps we can understand something of how Paul would feel if they did. If he had erred in the dispute, he would almost certainly find that question meet him awkwardly in almost every city he revisited.

**A True Son in the Faith** (chap. xvi. 1-5).—From Derbe they passed on to Lystra. Only one incident of their visit is recorded, but it is one which had a happy influence on the whole future of the Apostle. Among those converted to Christianity during the former visit was a lad named Timothy, and it was probably to the house of his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, that Paul and Silas were invited on this occasion. Both were devout Jewesses who had accepted the Christian faith, and by them Timothy had been trained from his childhood in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> As he grew up he became conspicuous for his devotion and his unfeigned faith, while at the same time he was so attractive in character and so blameless in life that the Christians of his native town bore willing and hearty testimony to his worth. In spite of his youth, and also of a natural shyness and timidity, he was very zealous for the furtherance of the Gospel, and already he had been called to service in the Church there. To this young man Paul was greatly attracted. Silas had taken the place of Barnabas, but the want of some one to fill the place of John Mark was still felt, and Paul invited Timothy to share their missionary labours. This the youthful disciple readily agreed to do. It is believed that his father was already dead, and, if so, it says much for the self-sacrificing spirit of

<sup>1</sup> See 2 Tim. i. 5; iii. 15.

the widowed Eunice that she seems to have offered no objection when the missionary call came to her only son. It was indeed a happy day for Paul, for Timothy's gentle spirit and affectionate devotion soon made him very dear to him. He is mentioned in nearly all Paul's letters. He was his companion in many a toilsome journey, and his comfort in the time of imprisonment and approaching death.<sup>1</sup> Although Timothy's mother had been a Jewess, his father had been of Gentile birth.<sup>2</sup> The work to which the missionary band were now going would lie among Jews as well as Gentiles, and Paul was well aware that to travel among the synagogues accompanied by one who, though entitled on his mother's account to be regarded as a Jew, was yet uncircumcised, would be a great hindrance to their success. Therefore, although he strongly maintained that circumcision was not necessary for the salvation of the Gentiles, yet as a matter of prudence, and to avoid giving unnecessary offence and so hindering the work, he had Timothy circumcised. Thereafter the young missionary was formally ordained by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery<sup>3</sup> as well as the hands of the Apostle himself,<sup>4</sup> and he went forth with them, the consecrated companion of their wanderings and their work.

**Through Phrygia and Galatia** (chap. xvi. 6-8).—Thus reinforced, they went through the cities of Phrygia and Galatia. In each Christian community they read the circular letter from the Church at Jerusalem, and Silas, as one of the deputies sent by the Apostles, would explain that the Gentiles were all welcome to enter the Church of Jesus Christ, at the same time urging them, in the interests of peace and unity, to observe the four points of conduct mentioned in the decrees. Everywhere this was a cause of rejoicing, and the churches visited were confirmed in their

<sup>1</sup> See Phil. ii. 20-22 ; 2 Tim. iv. 9-13.

<sup>2</sup> A Greek.—Whether a proselyte of the gate or not we are not told.

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Tim. iv. 14.

<sup>4</sup> See 2 Tim. i. 6.

Christian faith. Under the constraining guidance of God's Spirit the travellers followed a route different from that which they themselves had intended, till finally, after long journeying, it brought them to the town of Troas,<sup>1</sup> on the shores of the Ægean Sea, near the entrance to the Dardanelles. An important seaport and a Roman colony, Troas was a busy town, and people of many nations would be found thronging its streets. Yet the missionaries do not seem to have preached there at all. During their short stay they met Luke, the beloved physician, the writer of the Book of Acts. How they met we do not know. Whether Paul had to consult the physician about his health, or whether he made his acquaintance simply as one of the little group of Christian converts in Troas—for Luke was a Christian—we cannot tell, but, from the day they met, those two servants of Jesus felt drawn to each other, and when Paul and his companions left Troas, Luke accompanied them.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter they were much together, and of all the Apostle's fellow-workers none—except Timothy—was a more intimate friend and congenial companion than Luke.

**Europe for Christ** (chap. xvi. 9-12).—The party rested in Troas, waiting for further guidance from God. During those quiet days we can fancy Paul, as he walked by the shore, looking across the blue Ægean towards the scattered islands glowing purple in the sunset,—with the mist-clad mountains of Europe behind them on the dim horizon,—his thoughts wandering the while away to the world beyond. Later in life he tells us that often his thoughts had turned towards Rome. Was he thinking now as he looked over the sea that away beyond those mountains lay Rome—that capital of the world which he longed to see,—and that over all that land there hung spiritual darkness and the shadow of death?

<sup>1</sup> **Troas.**—Its full name was Alexandria Troas, so called in honour of Alexander the Great. It was situated on the sea-coast, about four miles south-west of the site of Troy.

<sup>2</sup> This we learn from the sudden adoption of the pronoun "we" in verse 10. See Introduction, p. 3.

One thing we know : the great question occupying his thoughts was, Where should he next preach the Gospel? That inquiry found daily expression in prayer till at length God's answer came. With the thought of Europe and its darkness in his heart, he one night lay down to rest, and it scarcely seemed strange when in a vision of the night a man from that far-off land appeared standing beside him with outstretched hand appealing to him—"Come over into Macedonia, and help us!" Next morning, when he told this to Silas and Timothy and Luke, all were agreed that this was the answer to their prayers. God was calling them to go over to Macedonia and preach the Gospel to the people there. Immediately, therefore, they put themselves in line with what they took to be the purpose of God. Repairing to the crowded harbour, they found a ship, and with as little delay as possible embarked. It was not long till the little coasting vessel with its high-peaked sail was speeding before the southerly breeze over the hundred miles of sea that had to be crossed. Little did those boatmen think that they were bearing the richest treasure ever borne to the shores of Europe—the message of eternal life! They were but a group of humble-looking men they had on board, but the purpose of their journey was to claim Europe for Christ. So favourable was the weather that they accomplished in two days the passage which we are told took them five days on their return.<sup>1</sup> The first night saw them anchored off the island of Samothracia, and on the evening of the second day they reached the busy seaport of Neapolis, the port of Philippi. As soon as the vessel was anchored in the roadstead they went ashore—the first Christian missionaries that ever set foot on the soil of Europe. If they could only have known the marvellous fruit that was to grow for the world from the seed they were so patiently sowing, how their hearts would have been cheered! But God's servants have to work as well as to walk by faith, not by sight.

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xx. 6.

**Happy Days in Philippi—First-fruits** (chap. xvi. 12-15).—Twelve miles distant was the town of Philippi, which is described by Luke as the first city of that district of Macedonia.<sup>1</sup> It was a historic spot. In commemoration of the victory that ended the Roman Republic, the Emperor Augustus raised it to the rank of a Roman colony. To us, however, it has happier memories as the first city in Europe in which Paul preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Being not a commercial city but a military colony, it had but few Jewish residents—so few indeed that there was no synagogue, and the pious Jews who wished to worship God retired to a quiet spot on the river-bank, a short distance out of the city, where there was a place of prayer.<sup>2</sup> When the Sabbath came the missionaries went to this place, but to their surprise they found only a few women assembled there.<sup>3</sup> They sat down, however, and joined these in their worship, and Paul soon found an opportunity of speaking to them of Jesus. The women listened attentively, and the words spoken were so blessed by God that one of the little group of listeners was converted and became a Christian. By and by both she and her household were baptized. Thus the first convert received into the Christian Church in Europe was a woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, who had come from the city of Thyatira, in Asia. Apparently she was a woman of influence and position, and in her gratitude she begged Paul and his companions to make her house their home while they remained in the city. So earnestly did she press her offer of hospitality that

<sup>1</sup> **The chief city, etc.**—Better, “which is a city of Macedonia, the first of the district, a colony” (R.V.). Luke probably meant that it was the first city of Macedonia proper at which Paul arrived.

<sup>2</sup> **A place of prayer.**—In cities where the Jews were few in number, or where they were not allowed to have a synagogue, they had commonly places of prayer which they called *proseuchai*. These were enclosures open to the sky, and usually near a river or on the shore, for the ceremonial washings.

<sup>3</sup> Claudius had banished the Jews from Rome, and therefore from the colonies, so there were only Jewish women and women proselytes.

Paul accepted it, and they remained with her for several weeks. Very encouraging and happy weeks they must have been. Every Sabbath they went to the Jews' place of prayer by the river-bank, and there Paul preached to all who came, with the result that a church of Christian believers was formed, including both Jews and Gentiles. By and by, however, this bright, glad time had a dismal ending.

**Popular Violence** (chap. xvi. 16-23).—One day on their way to the river-side the missionaries were met by a poor slave-girl, who was possessed by a spirit of divination,<sup>1</sup> and who, it was said, could in her wild ravings reveal by mystical words and signs things that were to come. She was greatly run after as a fortune-teller and diviner by the ignorant and credulous people of the town, and thus she was a source of much profit to her masters. How she had heard of the Apostles and their teaching we do not know, but she took to following them daily towards the river-bank, calling out, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, and they have come to show us the way of salvation." This she did day after day for some time, but one morning Paul turned round, and addressing the spirit by which she was possessed, said, "I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." The calm, authoritative word produced an immediate effect. The wild paroxysms were stilled, and the girl was restored to her right mind. Her masters, realising that their gains were gone, were furiously indignant. They seized Paul and Silas, and, aided by the crowd that had gathered, dragged them into the market-place before the sitting magistrates, shouting out loudly, "These men, who are Jews, are greatly troubling our city, and teaching customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to receive or observe." The careless magistrates, without inquiring into the case, handed the two despised Jews over to the "lictors" or sergeants to be scourged; and so, before they could utter a word

<sup>1</sup> A spirit of divination.—Literally, "a spirit, a python." She was a sort of ventriloquist.

in their own defence, Paul and Silas<sup>1</sup> were seized and dragged to the public whipping-place in the middle of the market square. They were stripped to the waist, their garments being rudely torn off their backs; their hands were tied to the post, and amidst the jeers and insults of the crowd they were ignominiously and brutally flogged with thick birch rods<sup>2</sup> till the blood streamed from their scarred and lacerated backs,<sup>3</sup> the magistrates in the distance quietly looking on. Then, faint and bleeding from the rods, they were cast into prison, and the jailor strictly charged to "keep them safe," a charge which he fulfilled with rigorous and conscientious cruelty. He thrust them into the innermost prison,<sup>4</sup> a damp, cold, pestilential hole, and forced their bleeding limbs into a cramped and painful position by means of the stocks, an instrument employed to confine and torture the worst malefactors. Such was Europe's welcome for the Gospel and the messengers who brought it!

**Midnight in the Prison** (chap. xvi. 25-34).—Faint, bleeding, sick with suffering, the poor innocent missionaries were left for the night in this dank, loathsome place. To them sitting in the stocks, racked with pain, sleep was impossible, and the weary night moved slowly on. But in their distress they prayed to God, and soon a strange calm—the very peace of God—came into their hearts. By and by they began to sing together some of the old Hebrew psalms. It was midnight, and the other prisoners, hearing them, wondered. Probably such singing was never

<sup>1</sup> **Paul and Silas.**—Luke and Timotheus escaped probably as being less prominent.

<sup>2</sup> **Commanded to beat them.**—The Greek verb gives the special Roman form of punishment, that of being beaten with the rods of the *lictors*. This, therefore, takes its place as one of the three instances to which Paul refers in 2 Cor. xi. 25.

<sup>3</sup> **Many stripes.**—The words imply a punishment of more than usual severity, such as would leave their backs lacerated and bleeding.

<sup>4</sup> **The inner prison.**—Those who have seen an Eastern dungeon, or even the Mamertine Prison at Rome, can form some idea of the damp, dark, foul den underground into which the two missionaries were now thrust. And as if this were not enough, their feet were made fast in the stocks.

before heard in that dungeon. Suddenly a strange, rumbling sound interrupted the singing. A crash followed. The foundations of the prison seemed to rock, the walls tottered, the doors burst open, and the prisoners' chains were loosened from their fastenings in the wall. It was an earthquake! Awakened by the noise, and startled at seeing the doors open and the prisoners, as he thought, escaped, the jailor was in a state of terrible consternation. Specially charged as he had been to keep them safe, he knew that his own life would be the penalty for their escape,<sup>1</sup> and in his despair he drew his sword to kill himself. Suddenly he was arrested by a calm, clear voice from the inner prison. It was Paul's voice calling, "Do thyself no harm! We are all here." Yet more startled, and more strangely impressed than ever, the jailor called for lights, and springing down into the dark dungeon, flung himself at the feet of the Apostles, crying out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" It was the cry of a stricken soul, and Paul met it with the memorable answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Then, weak and ill as they were, Paul and Silas explained to him the wonderful meaning of these words, and spoke of Jesus Christ as the Saviour from sin. Afterwards the jailor, moved with pity for their condition, took them to his house and washed their wounded backs, which had been left bleeding and uncared for when they were thrown into the dungeon. But there was a holier washing in the prison that night,<sup>2</sup> for after learning the Gospel from Paul and Silas the jailor and all his house believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and were baptized. So the two persecuted Apostles, even in that awful night, had the joy of seeing souls brought to Christ. It made them almost forget their sufferings. They had not thought of food or rest; but now the jailor, his soul filled with a new joy, set meat before them. They may well have been in need of it, for if the tumult

<sup>1</sup> Cf. chap. xii. 19; also chap. xxvii. 42.

<sup>2</sup> "He washed them from their stripes, and was washed from his sins."—Chrysostom.

began, as is likely, when they were going to the river-side for morning prayer,<sup>1</sup> they had probably been fasting for nearly twenty-four hours.

**The Tables turned** (chap. xvi. 35-40).—Next morning brought a great change. The magistrates were troubled and unhappy. Doubtless the earthquake had alarmed them. Possibly they had also heard something of the startling events of the night. Certain it is that they sent the "lictors" or sergeants—probably the very men who had inflicted the flogging—with a message to the keeper of the prison bidding him let those men go. Very gladly the now kind-hearted jailor hastened to deliver so welcome a message, and bade the Apostles go in peace. How surprised and alarmed he must have been when he saw how Paul received the message! Both Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, and Paul well knew that in scourging and imprisoning them these magistrates had committed a grave offence against the Roman law—an offence for which, if reported, they were liable to be punished with death. Accordingly, when he received the message he replied, "No, indeed! They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned,—men who are Roman citizens! They have cast us into prison, and now they would thrust us out secretly! No, indeed! Let them come themselves and take us out." The startled lictors quickly bore this message to the magistrates, who were greatly alarmed. Aware of the serious offence they had committed, they immediately hastened to the prison and entreated the prisoners to pardon them. With their own hands they brought them out into the street, and begged as a favour that they would quietly leave the city at once. This, however, Paul and Silas would not do. They went back to the house of Lydia, where they had been so happy before this outbreak occurred, and there they waited some time,—probably till they were recovered sufficiently to travel farther. Meanwhile they met with and instructed the Christians. Then they left

<sup>1</sup> At 9 A.M.

the city of Philippi, taking Timothy with them, but apparently leaving Luke behind.<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER XVII

### PERSECUTED FROM CITY TO CITY

**Thessalonica** (chap. xvii. 1-9).—Leaving Philippi, Paul, accompanied by Silas and Timothy, travelled westwards to Thessalonica,<sup>2</sup> the capital of Macedonia, passing on their way through Amphipolis<sup>3</sup> and Apollonia.<sup>4</sup> In Thessalonica there was a large colony of Jews, and the finest synagogue in the country was there. On three successive Sabbaths the missionaries went to this synagogue and preached about Jesus. Some of the Jews believed, and a still larger number of the proselytes, and also many of the leading women of the place, became Christians. Soon, however, the unbelieving Jews, envious and enraged at this success, stirred up the idle rabble against the preachers, and a great disturbance arose. The house in which they were living was attacked, and Jason, their host, was dragged before the rulers of the city,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> They departed.—“They,” not Luke. Note the pronoun.

<sup>2</sup> Thessalonica.—From very early times this had been an important city. Its old name “Therma” was changed to *Thessalonica* in honour of the sister of Alexander the Great. Paul afterwards addressed two of his epistles to the Thessalonians. It is now called *Saloniki*, and is the second city in European Turkey, having a population of about 100,000, of whom more than half are said to be Jews.

<sup>3</sup> Amphipolis.—A town 33 miles from Philippi. Its name was given to it because it was as nearly as possible enclosed by the winding stream of the river Strymon.

<sup>4</sup> Apollonia.—About 30 miles farther on than Amphipolis, and 37 from Thessalonica, so that in going from Philippi to Thessalonica the missionaries travelled 100 miles.

<sup>5</sup> Rulers of the city.—The title here used—“Politarchs”—is found nowhere else in literature, but the word itself and the verb formed from it have been found in inscriptions, most of them recently discovered. There are, according to Professor Burton, Chicago, seventeen—perhaps nineteen—inscriptions which attest the office of “Politarch” in ancient cities, and those referring to Thessalonica afford striking confirmation of the truthfulness of the account here given.

charged with sheltering men who sought to overthrow the dominion of Cæsar. So great was the excitement that the Christians were thankful to get Paul and his companions sent off out of the city by night.

**Berœa** (chap. xvii. 10-13).—Making their way in the darkness out into the country, the expelled Apostles continued their course westwards, and after two days came to Berœa. Here also there was a large number of Jews, and when the Sabbath came round, the Apostles went as usual to the synagogue and spoke of Jesus Christ. The Jews here were less bigoted than those of Thessalonica, and they got quite a respectful hearing. Moreover, those Berœans, when they went home, carefully searched the Scriptures to see whether what had been said by the Apostles was true. We are not surprised, therefore, that a good many converts were made here. By and by, however, news of this reached Thessalonica, and some of the bigoted Jews there hurried down to Berœa, and did what they had done so successfully at home—stirred up the idle rabble to make a disturbance and attack the Apostles. In this they succeeded so well that Paul was again compelled to flee, although Silas and Timothy were able to remain and set in order the affairs of another newly-formed Christian church.

**At Sea again** (chap. xvii. 14).—It would appear that Paul, by reason of his infirmities, could not well travel alone. Perhaps it was, as some think, owing to his defective eyesight, or, as others suggest, owing to his being liable to fits of epilepsy. In any case it is noticeable that his movements were almost always directed by others. In this instance, as Silas and Timothy remained behind, some Christian friends from Berœa accompanied him. They brought him down to the sea-coast, and soon we find the little party on board a vessel sailing southwards down the Gulf of Thessalonica and over the Ægean Sea, past the islands of Negropont and the Cyclades, till, rounding Cape Sunium, they sailed up the Gulf of Ægina and entered the great harbour of Piræus, the seaport of Athens. Paul was to

remain at Athens till Silas and Timothy should come, and once he was settled there the Berean friends left him and returned home, bearing with them an urgent message to Silas and Timothy to come on with all speed.

**Paul at Athens** (chap. xvii. 16).—It was no ordinary city in which Paul now found himself. Though not what it had once been, Athens was still the centre of Greek culture—the home of art, poetry, and philosophy. For these things, however, Paul cared little then. What impressed him was that the city was manifestly a stronghold of idolatry. Temples crowned every height; idols and shrines were seen on every hand; statues of gods and goddesses—masterpieces of Greek art—were in every street. Indeed, so numerous were these that it had become quite a proverb that in Athens it was easier to find a god than a man! Left alone<sup>1</sup> amidst such abounding evidences of idolatry, Paul was far from happy. A sense of depression and loneliness came over him. Week after week passed, and yet Silas and Timotheus did not come. He had intended to rest till they came, but, surrounded by such idolatry, rest was for him impossible. His spirit was stirred within him, and he could not restrain himself. One day in particular, as he walked along reading the inscriptions, he noticed an altar inscribed “To the unknown God.”<sup>2</sup> These words impressed him, and he remembered them. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue and spoke of Jesus to the Jews and devout proselytes. On other days he walked in the *agora*, or market-place,—a beautiful open space with fountains, and surrounded by pillared colonnades, in which men gathered to gossip and discuss various questions. Here he came in contact with some of the Greek philosophers—particularly with two sets named the Epicureans and the Stoics.<sup>3</sup> Joining in their discussions, he spoke to

<sup>1</sup> See 1 Thess. iii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Or “To an unknown God,” as in R.V.

<sup>3</sup> The Epicureans and the Stoics.—These were at that time the two most prominent systems of the world. The *Epicureans*—so called from their founder Epicurus, who taught at Athens—con-

them with great earnestness about Jesus and the Resurrection, but all the impression he made was that some of them said, "What is the babbler<sup>1</sup> trying to say?" while others replied, "He seems to be setting forth some strange gods." One day, however, some of them led him away from the noisy market-place up a flight of steps hewn out of the solid rock to a level place on the summit of a hill close by, called Areopagus, or Mars' Hill—the place where the Supreme Council or Senate of Athens met, and which, taking its name from the hill, was also called The Areopagus. It was a grave and venerable court. At its meeting the members sat in the open air with their heads uncovered, each wearing a white robe with a border of purple, or blue, or red. We are not told whether the Council was actually sitting at this time or not. Certainly no formal charge was made against Paul, but as he was supposed to be introducing strange gods, and the Areopagus was the court in which such a charge, if made, would be tried, it is possible that the philosophers and people may have taken him there as a convenient spot where he might give some explanation of his teaching. When they had reached the summit they said politely to him, "May we know, then, what this new doctrine of yours is? We hear that you teach strange things: we should like to know what these things mean." There was nothing these Athenians loved so much as to hear or to tell something new! In

sidered that the great aim of life was *pleasure*, and they believed that the soul perishes with the body. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." The *Stoics* were founded by Zeno. They taught that the highest duty of the philosopher was to practise virtue, and be indifferent to all other things, such as pleasure, pain, health, wealth, etc. They taught that only material things were real, and were thus materialists. They also taught that the care of Providence was for the universe as a whole, and only indirectly concerned itself with individuals. Thus they were also fatalists. So unimportant was the individual that suicide was held to be lawful, and sometimes praiseworthy. The Stoic trained himself to bear pain, evil, or misfortune with perfect indifference.

<sup>1</sup> Babbler.—This Greek word is not used elsewhere in the New Testament. It means originally "a picker-up of seed," "a rook," or "crow"; hence "a man who hangs about the market-place to pick up anything he can."

answer to that request, Paul delivered one of his most celebrated addresses. From where he stood, some of the most splendid temples in all Greece were in sight. High above him was the great statue of Athena, the guardian goddess of Athens, and down below in the city every street had its statues and its altars. Turning from all these, however, Paul stepped forward, and earnestly looking straight into the faces of those who were so eager and curious to hear him, he began his address with these words: "Ye men of Athens, I notice that in every respect you are very religious;<sup>1</sup> for as I passed along your streets, looking at the objects of your worship, I noticed one altar bearing this inscription: '**To the unknown God!**' It is of the God whom you do not know, and whom you worship in ignorance, that I come to speak." They were pleased that the stranger had noticed how religious they were. Then he told them of the Almighty God who made all things, and whose children all men are; and again he pleased them by quoting from one of their own poets some words expressing the same idea: "For we are his offspring."<sup>2</sup> If, then, he argued, God is our Father, we ought not to think of Him as being like anything made of gold, or silver, or stone, such as those beautiful idols. Men who have thought that have been mistaken. But now there is no need that men should any longer be ignorant of Him, for He has revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ, and He is calling men everywhere to repent of their sins, for He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world by this Son of Man whom He raised from the dead.

The philosophers and the crowd had listened atten-

<sup>1</sup> **Too superstitious** = "somewhat superstitious" (R.V.), or perhaps better, "very religious," or "very God-fearing." Paul would not begin by giving offence, and would be more likely to use this word in a complimentary sense.

<sup>2</sup> **His offspring.** — The words are a quotation from an astronomical poem called *The Phenomena*, by Aratus, a Cilician. They are also used by Cleanthes, a Stoic philosopher, in a hymn to Jupiter. Paul may have quoted from Aratus, his countryman.

tively up to this point, but when he spoke of some one having risen from the dead, some of them laughed and began to mock him. That was enough for them! Others said it was enough for that day; they would hear more about it some other time. So Paul was dismissed. Disappointed—perhaps vexed—he left them and made his way down those sixteen steps which led to the market-place again. He did not remain long in Athens after that. We do not read that any Christian church was formed there. Yet his address had not been altogether in vain. There were a few people who believed, among them being a man named Dionysius, a member of the Council of the Areopagus,<sup>1</sup> and a woman named Damaris, probably a Jewess. After all, however, we cannot help feeling that the result of Paul's effort was disappointing, and we notice that he never once notices Athens in any of his epistles.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY ENDED AND THE THIRD BEGUN

**Paul at Corinth** (chap. xviii. 1-11).—At length, though Silas and Timothy had not come, Paul could wait no longer. Though little able to travel alone, he crossed the Gulf of Athens to Corinth, the capital of Southern Greece, forty miles distant. Here he found himself in an entirely different atmosphere. Athens was a seat of learning and leisure; Corinth was a busy commercial centre. Situated on the isthmus separating two seas, with a harbour on the shores of each, it was exceptionally fitted to attain commercial importance, and its population were

<sup>1</sup> Dionysius —He must have been a man of position and influence, for no one could be a member of this council unless he had filled some high office of state and was above sixty years of age

a busy, wealthy, and luxurious people ; a strange mixture—Greeks and Romans, merchants and traders, slaves and freedmen. It was a wicked, licentious place, and into the midst of its busy, profligate people Paul now came alone. There were many Jews in Corinth, and he would be received by his fellow-countrymen. Among these he was fortunate enough to find a Christian Jew named Aquila, who, with his wife Priscilla, had been compelled to leave Italy and come here, in consequence of the decree of Claudius expelling all Jews from Rome. Paul and they soon became great friends. Like himself, they were tent-makers, so he lodged with them and worked at his trade to maintain himself. Night and day he toiled ; yet after all he was sometimes so hard pressed as to be in want.<sup>1</sup> He would never take anything from the Christians of Corinth, lest any one should say that he was seeking his own gain. When the Sabbath came round he went as usual to the synagogue and spoke of Jesus Christ. So the days passed, till at length Silas and Timothy came. It was a comfort to him to see them, and still more to hear the favourable report they brought of the churches in Macedonia. They also brought him a generous gift from the Christians in Philippi—a contribution that was a valued help in his pressing need. Cheered and refreshed, he turned with fresh vigour to his work among the Jews in the synagogue, but the more he urged them the more determinedly they opposed him. At last one day, as they resisted and blasphemed, he shook the dust off his garments<sup>2</sup> at them, and said that henceforth he would leave them and go to the Gentiles. From that time he preached no more in the synagogue, but held his meetings in the house of one of the Christian converts, a man named Justus, who lived close by, and there, amidst changing experiences, he continued till he had been in Corinth for a year and a half. Many of the people believed, and joined the Christians, among them

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 9 ; 1 Cor. iv. 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Shook, etc.—See chap. xiii. 51.

being Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, Erastus, the city chamberlain, and also Gaius and Stephanas.

**A Roman Magistrate** (chap. xviii. 12-17).—While Paul was in Corinth an untoward incident occurred. A new Roman Governor—Gallio by name—had come as Proconsul of Achaia. He was an amiable, good-natured man, and the Jews, who hated Paul, thought they might take advantage of Gallio's good-nature and inexperience, and get him to condemn this troublesome preacher. They therefore dragged the Apostle before his judgment-seat, accusing him of persuading men to worship God contrary to the law. They had, however, miscalculated. Gallio saw at once that this was not a question of crime, or of any offence against the Roman law, but merely a dispute among the Jews about their own religion. He would therefore have nothing to do with it, and drove the whole set of accusers from the judgment-seat. Thus the Roman Government protected Paul in preaching the Gospel. As Gallio's lictors cleared the court, the crowd outside, realising the situation, laid hold of Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue,—probably the spokesman for the accusers,—and beat him before they had got beyond the precincts of the court. From where he sat, Gallio could see them, but he paid no heed. He merely went on with the next business of the court.

**Cenchreæ and Ephesus** (chap. xviii. 18-21).—After this Paul remained unmolested at Corinth probably for some months. He then resolved to revisit Jerusalem, from which he had now been absent for nearly three years, and he planned to be there in time for the feast of Pentecost, which was approaching. Accordingly, he left Corinth, accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla, and travelled down to Cenchreæ, the eastern harbour of Corinth. What Silas and Timothy did we are not told. At Cenchreæ there was a small Christian church, which Paul or some of his companions had planted, and in which Phœbe, the deaconess, of whose devoted labours Paul speaks so gratefully, was a worker.<sup>1</sup> Here he performed

<sup>1</sup> See Rom. xvi. 1, 2.

the ceremony of shaving his head, in connection with a vow which he had taken, thus showing his personal obedience to Jewish law and custom. Finding a ship preparing to sail for Syria, they embarked in her. Calling at Ephesus the ship remained there a few days, and Paul had an opportunity of visiting the Jewish synagogue, where he met with a more favourable reception than usual, the Jews even pressing him to remain longer. This he was unable to do, as he was anxious to reach Jerusalem in time for the feast, but he promised that he would come again.

**Back to Jerusalem and Antioch** (chap. xviii. 22, 23).—Aquila and Priscilla remained in Ephesus, while Paul proceeded with the ship, and in due time was landed at Cæsarea, whence he went up to Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> This was his fourth visit to Jerusalem since his conversion, and it seems to have been but a short one. There does not appear to have been any very cordial welcome offered him. All that Luke says of it is that “he saluted the Church.” Then he proceeded to Antioch—the place from which he had set out on his missionary journey, and where, no doubt, a cordial reception would be given him.

**End of the Second Missionary Journey.**—Thus ended Paul’s second missionary journey. In the course of it he had travelled many a weary mile, and endured many a shameful wrong and outrage, trying faithfully to fulfil that word of Jesus which charged His Apostles to be witnesses for Him “to the uttermost ends of the earth.” He had visited the churches formerly planted in Cilicia and Pisidia; he had preached the Gospel in Phrygia and Galatia; he had crossed the sea to Europe, and planted Christianity in at least four cities, Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroëa, and Corinth, if not also perhaps in Athens. He had been away for fully three years, one half of which time was spent in Corinth.

**Paul’s Third Missionary Journey** (chap. xviii. 23).—After but a short period of rest at Antioch we

<sup>1</sup> The journey from Cæsarea to Jerusalem is related by Luke in a single word: “When he had landed at Cæsarea, and *gone up.*”

find the enthusiastic Apostle starting again for another missionary tour. This time he took with him Timothy and Titus, and probably also Gaius, Aristarchus, and Erastus. Following the same route as last time, he went to Seleucia, and thence sailed across to Tarsus, his native city, after leaving which he proceeded up by the mountain pass of the Cilician Gates, and so through Galatia and Phrygia, where he visited the churches formerly founded, and then went down to Ephesus to pay the visit he had promised. Here, most likely, he stayed with his old friends Aquila and Priscilla, the tent-makers. Since his last visit the truth had been spreading in that region. Some things he noticed were most encouraging, but some, alas! were disappointing.

**An Imperfectly-instructed Preacher** (chap. xviii. 23-28).—One or two incidents of his visit Luke has preserved for us. For instance, among those who had come to live at Ephesus was a Jew named Apollos, from Alexandria in Egypt,—a man with a profound knowledge of the Scriptures and a wonderful gift of eloquence. He knew something of Jesus as the Messiah, but only to the extent of what John the Baptist had preached. Even with this imperfect knowledge, however, he spoke in the synagogue in a way that attracted the attention and interest of Aquila and Priscilla. They could see that, although very earnest, he was imperfectly instructed in the truth he was trying to preach. Instead, however, of criticising and finding fault with him, these good Christians invited him to their home, and taught him the full Gospel as they had heard Paul preaching it. Shortly afterwards Apollos proposed to go over to Corinth, and they gave him letters of commendation to the Christians there. In Corinth his preaching produced a deep impression, and when arguing with the Jews in the synagogue he seemed almost irresistible, so that he became a great strength to the Church.

## CHAPTER XIX

## PAUL AT EPHEBUS

**Times of Blessing in Ephesus** (chap. xix. 1-12).

—Apollos had just left for Corinth when Paul returned to Ephesus. On his arrival he found several others who, like Apollos, knew Christianity only as the Baptist had preached it. These he took and instructed fully, afterwards admitting them into the Church by baptism. During the first three months of his stay in Ephesus he went regularly to the synagogue and tried to persuade the Jews to believe in Jesus; but so bitter was their opposition, that at last, as at Corinth, he withdrew from the synagogue altogether. He hired the lecture-room of a Greek teacher<sup>1</sup> named Tyrannus, and held his meetings in it. This he continued for two years, and so great was the change that perhaps there was no city where his labours were so greatly blessed as they were here. God wrought wonderful signs and miracles by him, and “a great door and effectual was opened to him.”<sup>2</sup>

**Spiritual Pretenders** (chap. xix. 13-20).—Another incident made a great impression in Ephesus. Some strolling Jews, who pretended to have the power of casting out evil spirits, began to try whether they could not do this by calling out the names of Paul and Jesus over persons who were possessed. Among those who tried this were seven brothers, the sons of a Jew named Sceva, a prominent priest. These men attempted it in the case of a wild lunatic, but the man answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?” Then turning upon them with the superhuman strength of madness, he tore their clothes off their backs, and inflicted

<sup>1</sup> Some, however, think that Tyrannus may have been a Jew. It is uncertain.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 9.

on them such injuries that they were glad to escape stripped and wounded. The report of this spread, and produced such a wonderful effect that many of the Christian converts who formerly dealt in such arts confessed their evil practices, and having brought their magic books together, made a great bonfire and publicly burned them, the value of the books so destroyed being estimated at over £2000.<sup>1</sup> Such are only some of the incidents of a movement by which Christianity was spread throughout that whole district.

**A Violent Outbreak** (chap. xix. 21-41).—After a stay of nearly three years in Ephesus, Paul prepared to depart. He proposed going back to Jerusalem, that he might take with him a sum of money which the Gentile Christians had contributed for the relief of their distressed Jewish brethren. His intention was to sail over to Corinth and visit the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, and thereafter to go by sea direct from Corinth to Jerusalem, after which he hoped to be able to go and see Rome, the capital of the world.<sup>2</sup> He sent on Timothy and Erastus in advance of him, for he had heard a sad account of the state of things in the church at Corinth.<sup>3</sup> Before however he was himself ready to leave, a violent outbreak occurred, which made him change his plans. In Ephesus there was a magnificent temple of Diana, which was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the world. It had 120 pillars of Parian marble; its doors were of carved cypress-wood; paintings and sculpture by the greatest Greek artists adorned it within; but the most precious and valued of all its treasures was an image of the goddess which it contained. A very ugly-looking thing it was, but it was said to have “fallen down from heaven,” and so was peculiarly sacred. Vast

<sup>1</sup> 50,000 pieces of silver.—As the incident occurred among a Greek population, it is almost certain that it is in Greek coinage that the reckoning is made, and that a “piece of silver” means an Attic drachma, the value of which was 9½d., so that 50,000 would amount to £2030.

<sup>2</sup> Comp. Rom. i. 15; xv. 23-28.

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Cor. v. 9; 2 Tim. iv. 20.

numbers of people came to Ephesus to worship in this temple, so that it was a source of great revenue to the city. Especially was it profitable to the workmen who made shrines—little models of the temple and the idol, which were sold to the pilgrims to carry away as mementoes of their visit. Now the preaching of Paul had produced such an effect that many were turning from idolatry altogether. The tradesmen about the temple began to notice that their trade was falling off. One of their number, a silversmith named Demetrius, summoned a meeting of the various craftsmen who earned a living in this way, and made an incendiary speech to them, telling them that not only was their trade being ruined, but the great goddess Diana and her magnificent temple were likely to become despised, and for this Paul was to blame. At once the excited craftsmen made a rush for the house of Aquila and Priscilla to seize the Apostle; but even at the risk of their own lives the good tent-maker and his wife protected him. The crowd, however, caught two of his companions—Gaius and Aristarchus—and dragged them through the streets to the great theatre of the city—a vast building, whose ruins still stand, and which was capable of holding 30,000 people. By this time the crowd had swelled to enormous proportions, and a scene of indescribable confusion took place. Some shouted one thing and some another, the greater part, however, not knowing what it was all about. Paul would have gone to the theatre and faced them all, but his friends prevented him. The Jews put forward one of their number, a Jew named Alexander, to make some explanation in their favour,<sup>1</sup> but whenever he appeared, and the crowd saw by his face that he was a Jew, they would not listen to him. In vain he attempted by signs and gestures to gain a hearing. They only shouted the more vehemently, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians! Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”

<sup>1</sup> The Jews putting him forward.—The Jews were anxious to make it clear to the multitude that they had no connection with the Christians.

The more he tried to speak, the more the noise and tumult increased. For two weary hours this uproar went on. At the end of that time, when the storm had spent itself and it had become possible to get a hearing, the town-clerk and keeper of the city records—a person of great importance in the Greek free cities—stepped forward to speak, and the people, knowing him, listened. “Is there any man here,” he asked, “who does not know that the city of Ephesus is the temple-keeper of the great goddess Diana,<sup>1</sup> whose image fell down from heaven? Those facts cannot be gainsaid.<sup>2</sup> You ought, therefore, to be calm, and to do nothing rashly. These men—Gaius and Aristarchus—are not criminals. If Demetrius wishes to make charges against any one, the law courts are open to him, and the Roman magistrates are ready to judge. If, on the other hand, you wish investigation into other matters, let that be done properly in a regular assembly of the people. This is an uproar likely to do us harm. We may be called in question for it, and it may even cost us some of our privileges.” Thus, with words of warning spoken by the voice of authority, he stilled the tumult and dismissed the assembly.

## CHAPTER XX

### MACEDONIA, TROAS, MILETUS

**A Visit to Macedonia** (chap. xx. 1-6).—So the crowd dispersed and the riot ended. Doubtless the affair would cause much talk, but Demetrius had not succeeded in his attempt to stop the preaching of Christianity, for no one took the town-clerk’s advice to bring

<sup>1</sup> **Worshipper**, or “temple-keeper” (R.V.), *i.e.* guardian of the temple. It was an honorary title granted by the Emperor to various cities in Asia, and appears on coins.

<sup>2</sup> **Spoken against**, or “gainsaid” (R.V.).

the matter for trial in the law courts. It was now, however, impossible for Paul to remain in Ephesus till Pentecost, as he had intended, so, summoning a meeting of the Christians, he bade them farewell, and started to go into Macedonia.<sup>1</sup> At this point a gap occurs in the Book of Acts, the labours of nine months—perhaps among the most active in Paul's life—being summed up in a single sentence. From his epistles, however, we learn some particulars of the journey. Being very anxious over the state of matters in the Church at Corinth, he had intended to go there direct,<sup>2</sup> but afterwards, changing his plan, he went instead to Troas,<sup>3</sup> where he expected he would meet Titus with news from Corinth. Here he laboured and founded a Christian church, but all the time he was oppressed by anxiety about Corinth. Titus did not come, and the suspense told upon Paul's health so seriously that he became ill and even despaired of his life.<sup>4</sup> At length, unable longer to endure it, he took ship and crossed over into Macedonia, probably to the town of Philippi, the place where, six years before, he had been publicly beaten in the market-place. He had many friends here, among them being Luke, the beloved physician, and here he was at length joined by Titus, who brought from Corinth a report in some respects comforting, but in others distressing. On receiving it Paul wrote his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, sending it by Titus, who was returning thither, accompanied perhaps by Luke; but the Apostle judged it wiser to wait yet a little before he himself should go there.<sup>5</sup> The next six months he spent in revisiting the churches of Macedonia, including, besides that of Philippi, the churches of Thessalonica, Berea, and perhaps also Illyricum,<sup>6</sup> and thereafter he went to Corinth, where he remained for three months. He then proposed to sail for Syria, carrying with him the contributions

<sup>1</sup> In fulfilment of his purpose mentioned in chap. xix. 21.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 18, 19.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 12, 13.

<sup>4</sup> See 2 Cor. ii. 12; i. 8; iv. 10, 11; xii. 7.

<sup>5</sup> See 2 Cor. ix. 5.

<sup>6</sup> See Rom. xv. 19.

made by the Macedonian churches for the poor saints at Jerusalem. At his own suggestion each church appointed a delegate to accompany him,<sup>1</sup> and these joined him at Corinth. Just as they were about to sail, however, it was discovered that the Jews had formed a conspiracy to kill Paul as soon as he had gone on board. While, therefore, his friends embarked at Corinth, he, in order to elude the conspirators, travelled overland to Philippi. This had the further advantage of affording him an opportunity of joining his fellow-countrymen there in keeping the Passover. Immediately thereafter he and Luke went by sea to Troas, where they found their companions who had sailed from Corinth waiting for them, and together they spent a week there.

**A Lord's Day in Troas** (chap. xx. 7, 8).—It had by this time become customary for the Christians to observe the first day of the week in commemoration of our Lord's resurrection, and to have on that day<sup>2</sup> special gatherings for religious purposes. Paul spent a "Lord's Day" with the Christians in Troas, and thus we get a glimpse of their manner of observing it. The Jewish Sabbath ended at six o'clock, and later in the evening we see the Christians assembling in an upper room—a bright-looking place lighted by a large number of lamps, and crowded, for the news of Paul's arrival had spread. The windows with their wooden lattices were open; yet, owing to the crowd and the many lamps, the place soon became close and warm. The service was a long one, consisting of praise and prayer, the preaching of the Word, the dispensation of the Lord's Supper,<sup>3</sup> and the *Agape* or love-feast.<sup>4</sup> Paul, who was to leave the following morning, discoursed

<sup>1</sup> These delegates were Sopater from Beroëa, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timotheus from Lystra, Tychicus and Trophimus from Ephesus.

<sup>2</sup> See 1 Cor. xvi. 2; Rev. i. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Had broken bread, ver. 11, *i.e.* the bread of the Communion Service.

<sup>4</sup> And eaten, ver. 11, *i.e.* partaken of the *Agape*, a meal which in the early Church the Christians partook of together after the Communion.

earnestly to them on many points, the people listening, and asking questions from time to time; and so deeply interested were they that all unheeded the time passed till it was midnight.

**An Accident** (chap. xx. 9-12).—Suddenly a cry was heard, and the meeting was thrown into confusion. A boy had fallen from one of the windows! A lad named Eutychus had climbed up, and was sitting on the broad sill, where he would get the cool breeze; and owing to the lateness of the hour, the heat, and Paul's long-continued speaking, he was gradually overcome with sleep, till at length, overbalancing himself, he fell through the open window into the court below. The people rushed down into the courtyard, where, to their dismay, they saw the lad taken up dead. Paul, however, immediately threw himself upon the body, and, embracing it, restored the youth to life.<sup>1</sup> Then, calming the excitement of the people, he led them back to the upper room, where in the early morning the service was completed by the observance of the Communion and the *Agape*, after which he continued with them in friendly intercourse until daybreak.

**A Journey on Foot** (chap. xx. 13-15).—Next day they resumed their journey, Luke and the delegates sailing round the promontory of Lectum, while Paul walked across the base of the isthmus and joined them at Assos, a seaport twenty-four miles distant. Luke minutely traces for us the course the vessel took after leaving Assos, telling how it touched at Mitylene,<sup>2</sup> Chios,<sup>3</sup> Samos, and Trogyllium,<sup>4</sup> each night being probably spent in some harbour, till at length they reached Miletus,<sup>5</sup> the capital of Ionia.

<sup>1</sup> Compare 1 Kings xvii. 21; 2 Kings iv. 34.

<sup>2</sup> **Mitylene** was the capital of the island of Lesbos.

<sup>3</sup> **Chios** and **Samos** are islands off the coast of Asia Minor.

<sup>4</sup> **Trogyllium**, a seaport on the mainland opposite the island of Samos.

<sup>5</sup> **Miletus**, a seaport on the coast of Caria, about twenty or thirty miles south of Ephesus.

**A Tearful Farewell** (chap. xx. 16-38).—Paul had thus sailed past Ephesus. Being anxious to reach Jerusalem in time for Pentecost, he could not visit that city, but as the vessel was to remain a few days at Miletus, he sent a message to Ephesus asking the elders of the Church to come there and see him, which they did. It was probably on the Lord's Day that they arrived, and he and they spent it together. A year had passed since the time when he had hurriedly to leave Ephesus after the uproar which Demetrius, the silver-smith, had made; and they had much to tell him of the progress of the Gospel there. He, too, had much to say to them, and very touching was his word of farewell.<sup>1</sup> He recalled his faithful and fearless labours among them; then he spoke of the future. For him it was very dark. He was going up to Jerusalem, he said, not knowing what would befall him, except that everywhere bonds and imprisonment awaited him. Of one thing, however, he felt certain—they would see his face no more! He called them to witness the faithfulness of his three years' ministry among them; he warned them that trying times were coming, and charged them to be faithful in watching over and feeding the flock of God; and finally he commended them to God and to the word of His grace. Then they knelt together and he prayed earnestly for them all. It was a solemn and affecting scene. While he prayed, tears began to course down their cheeks, and when at the close they rose from their knees and came one by one to bid him farewell, all were weeping—saddest of all for this, that they should see his face no more. Then the sorrowful group accompanied him to the ship.

<sup>1</sup> This is the only speech recorded in the Book of Acts which we can be sure Luke heard Paul deliver. It is not only given in considerable detail, but we are struck by the many distinctly Pauline expressions contained in it.

## CHAPTER XXI

## THE RETURN TO JERUSALEM

**Miletus to Tyre** (chap. xxi. 1-6).—At Miletus Paul parted with several of his companions,<sup>1</sup> and only Luke, Trophimus, and Aristarchus<sup>2</sup> accompanied him when he resumed his journey. Sailing by Coos<sup>3</sup> and Rhodes<sup>4</sup> to Patara, they there left the small coasting vessel and embarked in a large sea-going ship, which, sailing direct across the Levant, brought them in four days to the famous seaport of Tyre. Here there was a Christian church,<sup>5</sup> and as the vessel had to discharge her cargo, Paul sought out the disciples, and was able to spend a week with them; and so greatly was his visit appreciated that when he was leaving, the whole Christian community—including the wives and children—accompanied him to the ship, and there, kneeling together on the shore, they parted, commending each other to God in prayer.

**The Last Stage of the Journey** (chap. xxi. 7-14).—After sailing from Tyre to Ptolemais—now Acre—they left the ship, and travelled overland to Cæsarea. In this city there were many Christians. It was the place where the Gospel had been first preached to the Gentiles when Cornelius was converted, and here Philip the Evangelist, aided by his four daughters, laboured.<sup>6</sup> As Paul had still some time to spare be-

<sup>1</sup> Were gotten from them, *i.e.* "had torn ourselves away from them." "Parted" in R.V.

<sup>2</sup> See ver. 29; also chap. xxvii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Coos.—Rather "Cos," a small island on the coast of Asia Minor.

<sup>4</sup> Rhodes.—An island off the coast of Caria, famous in Greek history.

<sup>5</sup> Having found disciples = "having found the disciples" (R.V.). Probably a church was founded here by those who were scattered by the persecution in Jerusalem. See chap. xi. 19; xv. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Four daughters, etc.—In the Apostolic Church women were admitted into the service or ministry of the Church. Phœbe was a deaconess of the church at Cenchreæ. See Rom. xvi. 1.

fore Pentecost, he remained as the guest of Philip for several days. Between these two there were many ties of sympathy, and for Paul this must have been a time of congenial intercourse. Alas! these were the last happy days of freedom he was to have for many a day—a gleam of sunshine before the closing in of a dark and stormy night.

Those Cæsarean Christians were greatly concerned at the risk Paul was running by going to Jerusalem at that time; and their anxiety was increased when one Agabus, a Christian prophet just arrived from Jerusalem, specially warned the Apostle against going. Both his Cæsarean friends and his travelling companions implored him not to go, but he was immovable. "What mean ye," was his reply, "to weep and to break my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." They saw that their entreaties only vexed him, so, wiping away their tears, they said, "The Lord's will be done." Paul's was indeed a wonderful character—so gentle in affection, yet so unyielding in determination!

**Jerusalem at last** (chap. xxi. 15, 16).—At length Pentecost drew near. It was only three days off, and there still remained sixty miles to travel to Jerusalem, so the missionaries, packing up their baggage,<sup>1</sup> and accompanied by some of the Cæsarean disciples, set out for the Holy City. Among the friends who thus accompanied them was one Mnason, a Christian of Cyprus, who had been a disciple from the beginning.<sup>2</sup> This man had a house in Jerusalem, and the brethren had arranged that Paul should stay with him, thinking that there, if anywhere, he would be safe. This was Paul's fifth visit to Jerusalem since his conversion, and it was to be his last. He well knew the prejudice against

<sup>1</sup> **Took up our carriages.**—Literally, "packed up our baggage" (R.V.). In the days when the A.V. was translated, the English word "carriage" meant what had to be carried. Comp. 1 Sam. xvii. 22; Isaiah x. 28.

<sup>2</sup> **An old disciple.**—"Early" (R.V.), a disciple from the beginning

him in that city, and he had again and again received warning of impending evil awaiting him there. No wonder if it was with a grave, anxious look that he entered the city. Four years he had been away on this third missionary journey. During that time he had visited the provinces of Galatia, Proconsular Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia; he had spent nearly three years of his time in Ephesus, which had been his headquarters, while six months had been passed in Macedonia, and three months in Corinth. As we sum up the list we realise how widely the Gospel was spreading,—how steadily the planting of the Christian Church was proceeding.

**Reception by the Church at Jerusalem** (chap. xxi. 17-19).—Paul and his companions were welcomed on their arrival by a few Christian friends in the house of Mnason, and next day they were formally received at a gathering at which all the elders of the Church in Jerusalem were present, and over which James, the Lord's brother, presided. The first business of the meeting was to hand over the contributions sent by the Gentile churches. One by one Paul would introduce the delegates of those churches, and each would present the gift of which he was the bearer. Then the Apostle himself delivered an address, telling of the work done and the churches visited during this third journey, and recounting the wonders which God had wrought among the Gentiles. The address was well received, and any feeling of doubt in the minds of the elders was removed. As on the former occasion, Paul quite won them over,<sup>1</sup> and at the close "all the elders glorified God."

**The Third Section of the Book.**—We now enter on the third section of the Book of Acts—the record of the events which ended in bringing Paul the Christian missionary to Rome, the capital of the world.

**An Attempt to remove Prejudice** (chap. xxi. 20-40).—The elders in Jerusalem could not altogether rid themselves of anxiety as to what the multitude might say. The public mind had been poisoned against Paul.

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xv. 6-29.

A report had been circulated that he despised the law of Moses, and taught the Jewish Christians abroad neither to circumcise their children nor to keep those ceremonial observances which the law required. Thousands of Christians, it was said, believed these reports, and as there would certainly be a gathering of the people when they heard of Paul's arrival, something must be done. The elders advised, therefore, that in order to remove all suspicion, Paul should publicly do something which would show that he was still an observer of the law of Moses, and they suggested a method in which this might be done. Four Jewish Christians who had taken the vow of the Nazarite were at that time performing the ceremonies of purification connected with it, and the elders suggested that Paul should associate himself with these men in their observances. The full ceremonies of a Nazarite's vow would have required a longer time than he had at his disposal, but the law provided that a man might share the vow with others if he could find companions who had already gone through part of the observances, and were willing to allow him to join them. This permission was generally given on condition of the newcomer paying the fees required for the whole company, and completing the remaining observances along with the others. The proposal, therefore, was that Paul should join those four men, *being at charges for them*, and that when the last seven days of the vow began he should go to live with them in the Temple, formally intimating to the priest that he had done so, and that his vow would finish along with theirs—*declaring the accomplishment of the days of purification*. To this proposal Paul agreed. The elders thought it would save him from the effects of Jewish prejudice. How little they dreamed of what its actual effect would be!

Paul went to live in the Temple<sup>1</sup> with the four men,

<sup>1</sup> **In the temple.**—In the court of the women there were along the inner wall small chambers, in which the Nazarites used to live while fulfilling the last seven days of their vow.

and five of the seven days had passed when some Jews from Asia, who had come up to the feast, entered the Temple. These men had heard Paul preaching in Ephesus, and hated him. They recognised him now, and raised an outcry against him as an enemy of their religion, calling on the people to help in arresting him, declaring that he had polluted the Temple by bringing Gentiles into it. This was untrue. They had seen Paul in the city with Trophimus, the delegate from Ephesus, whom they knew, and they concluded that he had taken this stranger into the inner court, which no Gentile might enter. Immediately a great tumult arose. A crowd rushed into the Temple, and, seizing Paul, dragged him out of the inner court, the Levites immediately shutting the doors, that the sacred place might not be profaned by his blood being shed in it, for the intention was to kill him. And killed he would certainly have been but for the timely interference of the Roman soldiers. Close by the Temple, and overlooking it, was the Tower of Antonia,<sup>1</sup> a fortress in which a Roman garrison was always quartered. From this tower the guard saw the tumult going on in the Temple court, and immediately Lysias, the officer in command, hurried down with a detachment of his troops, who, forcing their way through the crowd, rescued the unknown man who was being beaten to death. When he had secured him and ordered his hands to be bound to two of the soldiers by chains, the captain inquired who the man was, and what was the cause of the uproar. From the confused cries that arose in answer to his question he could learn nothing, so he ordered Paul to be marched into the barracks. When they reached the flight of steps leading to the fortress, the mob, furious at his being thus taken out of their hands, made a rush at Paul, yelling out, "Away with

<sup>1</sup> **The Tower of Antonia.**—A fortress built by Herod the Great on a rock at the north-west corner of the Temple area. The Romans always kept this fortress strongly garrisoned with troops to overawe Jerusalem. At the festival seasons, when Jerusalem was crowded, the garrison consisted of a cohort—a band of 1000 men.

him! Away with him!" So furious were they that the soldiers had to close round their prisoner, and, lifting him off his feet, carry him till he was beyond reach of the crowd, their comrades meanwhile keeping back the mob with their weapons. As they were entering the fort, Paul gently asked Lysias if he might speak to him. The captain was surprised to hear him speak in Greek, for he had supposed that his prisoner was an Egyptian impostor, who some time before had raised an insurrection, and who, when his forces were defeated by Felix, had himself escaped. He asked Paul who he was, and in reply Paul told him that he was a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia—no mean city,—and he begged that he might be allowed to speak to the people. Permission was granted, and apparently the fetters were removed from one of his hands. Then taking up a position on the stairs, and raising his unfettered hand for silence, Paul proceeded to address the crowd. Gradually the yells and cries ceased, and the people became quiet. He spoke in the Hebrew tongue, which was a surprise to them, for they had expected Greek, and they listened the more attentively. Well might they listen. It was no ordinary speech they were to hear.

## CHAPTER XXII

### ENTERING A ROMAN PRISON

**Retrospect and Defence** (chap. xxii. 1-23).—  
"Brethren and fathers, hear my defence, which I now make unto you." Thus the poor wounded, ill-used man began, calm and self-possessed in the midst of that scene of tumult. He assured them that, as a Jew, who, though born in Tarsus, had been brought up in Jerusalem, in the school of Gamaliel, he was as zealous for God as they were. Then he told them the story of his

conversion, and explained how, even after his conversion, he had been faithful to the rites of Judaism and the law of Moses. He had been unwilling even to leave Jerusalem, till one day in that very Temple he had received a revelation from God. Up to this point the crowd listened, for the speaker was eloquent and the story was interesting. But when he went on to tell how in that vision God had said to him, "Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles," their attitude changed. "The Gentiles!" That word fell like a spark on a magazine of fanaticism. Was not this exactly what they had been told about him? Did it not confirm their worst suspicions? The moment the fatal word was spoken, their fury broke out afresh in a wild cry, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! It is not fit that he should live!" With wild demonstrations of impotent rage, they shrieked and yelled, and, snatching up handfuls of dust, threw it at him in the violence of uncontrolled passion. Fortunately the chief captain and the Roman soldiers were at hand, and, to save Paul from their violence, they marched him into the castle. To those Roman soldiers Paul owed his life, but it is pathetic to see him pass within a Roman prison, and to think that it is at least doubtful whether he was ever free again. Even if he was liberated, it was only for a short time, and to be again arrested. Never, alas! did he get clear of the meshes of that Roman net now falling over him till these were cut for him by the headsman's axe.

**Examined by Scourging** (chap. xxii. 24-30).—Lysias, being ignorant of Hebrew, had not understood Paul's address, and he was both perplexed and annoyed at the outbreak. Determined to get at the meaning of it all, he ordered Paul to be "examined by scourging"—that is, to be flogged till he should confess what he had done that the people should be so infuriated against him. Paul knew something of what a Roman flogging meant. He had been beaten with rods at Philippi, but **this time** it was a new torture that threatened

him—the terrible lash with which the Romans tried to extort the truth. The rough soldiers seized him, and, stripping him to the waist, proceeded to tie him to the whipping-post within the prison. As they did so, however, Paul quietly asked the centurion in charge, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a Roman citizen who has not been condemned?”<sup>1</sup> The centurion started at the question. It was now his turn to be afraid. Bidding the soldiers desist, he went to Lysias and warned him that Paul was a Roman citizen. The chief captain, well aware of how serious an offence it was to flog a Roman citizen, knew that already he had rendered himself liable to punishment for having even bound Paul. Hastening at once to the prisoner, he inquired whether he was a Roman citizen; and it must have been with some anxiety that he heard Paul’s quiet but decided “Yes.” “It was with a great price that I got this citizenship myself,” said the captain. “But I am a Roman born,” replied Paul. Now everything was changed. Those who were to have scourged him were sent away, and the captain was left uncomfortably anxious as to what might be the consequence to himself of this outrage. Next day, in order to have the matter fully investigated, he ordered the priests to summon a meeting of the Sanhedrin, and Paul, escorted by a guard of Roman soldiers, was brought before it.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

**Tried before the Sanhedrin** (chap. xxiii. 1-10).—There was a full attendance of the Sanhedrin. It was over twenty years since Paul had been in that court before. Then he had been one of its members, and

<sup>1</sup> See note, p. 53.

Stephen stood at the bar, while he himself was one of the accusers. How times had changed! Did he recall now the doings of that day and the strange light that had then shone in Stephen's face? Little wonder it was that when called to speak he stood for a moment silent, filled with emotion, and gazing earnestly into the faces of his judges. At length he began: "Brethren, all my life I have lived with a good conscience toward God up till this day." Something in the words irritated Ananias, the high priest, who ordered the guard to smite Paul on the mouth. With a flash of indignation, Paul answered, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall! Sittest thou to judge me according to the law, and yet commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" The words found a striking fulfilment when a few years later, during the Jewish war, Ananias was stabbed to death when trying to hide in a city drain. But they were perhaps hasty words, and when the bystanders pointed out that it was to the high priest he was speaking, Paul at once said he had not known it was the high priest.<sup>1</sup> No more seems to have been said about it, and the case proceeded. Paul, noticing that some of the council were Pharisees and some Sadducees, said in a loud voice, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and it is concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead that I am being called in question now." That sentence at once divided the two parties, and led them into a fierce argument with each other over the question of a resurrection. So sharp was the discussion that at length the scribes—who were Pharisees—declared they found no evil in this man. At this the excitement and clamour became so great that Lysias, fearing lest Paul

<sup>1</sup> I wist not, etc.—Several explanations of this statement have been given. It might well be that in the crowded assembly Paul had not noticed who gave the order; or that his defective eyesight had failed to recognise the high priest; or possibly, owing to his recent arrival in Jerusalem, he was not aware who was high priest. Some have suggested, however, that Paul was speaking in grave irony a protest against such unjust and tyrannical conduct on the part of one who was God's high priest.

should be torn in pieces, ordered the soldiers to bring him into the castle. Thus Paul was a second time rescued by the Roman soldiers. After all this excitement and ill-usage he felt depressed and sick at heart; but that night in his prison cell the Lord Jesus appeared to him while he slept, and, in comforting and encouraging words, assured him that, as he had testified for his Lord in Jerusalem, so would he bear witness at Rome also.

**An Exciting Adventure** (chap. xxiii. 11-35).—The division in the Sanhedrin regarding Paul was only temporary. Soon their hatred against him united them, and the very next day forty of them joined in a conspiracy to murder him, taking an oath that they would neither eat nor drink till they had done so. Their plan was to get Paul brought once more before the Sanhedrin and murder him on his way to the meeting. The plot, however, became known to a nephew<sup>1</sup> of Paul's, who at once informed the Roman commander regarding it. Lysias, thus warned, took immediate steps for Paul's protection, and sent him off that night with an escort of 470 soldiers<sup>2</sup> to Cæsarea, the residence of Felix, the Roman procurator, sending with him a letter to Felix narrating the circumstances which had led to his being sent. That letter proved a good friend to Paul for many a day. The whole escort made a forced march of forty miles to Antipatris, where the greater part—consisting of the foot-soldiers—left and returned to Jerusalem, while Paul, with the cavalry, rode on the remaining twenty-five miles to Cæsarea. Immediately on their arrival the centurion and his prisoner were taken before the Governor. Felix read the letter from Lysias, inquired what province Paul belonged to, and said he would hear the case when the accusers were also come. Thereafter Paul was handed over to a soldier to be kept, fortunately not in the loathsome

<sup>1</sup> Paul's sister's son.—This is the only reference to Paul's family relations in the Book of Acts. In Rom. xvi. 7-11 we learn that he had kinsmen living in Rome.

<sup>2</sup> Soldiers . . . horsemen . . . spearmen.—The words describe the three varieties of troops which formed a Roman army.

prison, but in one of the soldiers' barrack-rooms in the old palace of Herod, now used as the residence of the Roman procurator.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### WEARY DAYS IN PRISON

**Accused before Felix** (chap. xxiv. 1-9).—Antonius Felix, before whom Paul was to be tried, was the worst governor Judæa ever had. Tacitus, the Roman historian, wrote of him, "He exercises the authority of a king with the spirit of a slave." For Paul it cannot have been a cheering prospect. Fortunately, however, he had not long to wait, for within five days from the time he had himself left Jerusalem, Ananias, the high priest, and several of the Jewish elders arrived, bringing with them a hired advocate named Tertullus, whom they had engaged to conduct their case. When the trial came on, Paul was taken to the place outside the castle where Felix sat in judgment. On the case being called, Tertullus stepped forward and made a speech for the prosecution. After a flattering reference to Felix, he charged Paul with being a wicked, pestilent fellow, submitting three specific charges against him, viz. : (1) *Rebellion* or *sedition*, he having created disturbances not only in Palestine, but throughout the empire ; (2) *Heresy*, he being a ring-leader of the Nazarenes, and disturbing the Jews in their worship ; and (3) *Sacrilege*, he having attempted to profane the Temple. In conclusion he complained of the violent conduct of Lysias, the captain in Jerusalem, in taking the prisoner out of their hands. When he had finished, the Jewish elders concurred in the statements he had made.

**The Prisoner's Defence** (chap. xxiv. 10-27).—Paul was then called on for his defence. He had no

hired advocate to speak for him, but he was well able to speak for himself. After expressing satisfaction at being tried before one familiar with Jewish affairs, he took the charges made against him and refuted them one by one. It was but twelve days,<sup>1</sup> he said, since he had returned to Jerusalem, and five of these he had spent in Roman custody, so that he had not had time, even had he wished, to engage in plots against the government; moreover, neither in the Temple nor in the city had they found him disputing or raising a tumult. That he belonged to the sect of the Nazarenes he admitted, but so far from having renounced the observances of the Jewish law, he was actually in the Temple engaged in the performance of such observances when he was arrested. "I believe," he said, "all the things written in the law and the Prophets, and like those Jews themselves, I look for the resurrection of the dead." Then he repeated the words which had made Ananias so angry before: "Herein I strive to have always a clear conscience toward God and men."<sup>2</sup> He challenged the accusers to prove anything against him, unless it was his statement that for his belief in the resurrection of the dead he was being called in question.

Felix knew more about Christianity<sup>3</sup> than Paul's accusers imagined. He had also in his hand the letter of Lysias giving his account of the affair, so, professing to wait for further evidence, he adjourned the case till Lysias should come. Paul was then led back to prison. He had evidently, however, made a good impression on Felix, for the centurion was ordered to let him have considerable liberty within the castle, and to allow his friends to visit him. All the same, it is weary work

<sup>1</sup> **Twelve days.**—The days may be reckoned thus: (1) Paul's arrival in Jerusalem; (2) his interview with James and the elders (chap. xxi. 18); (3) he joins the men in their purification (chap. xxi. 26); (3-7) spent in the Temple; (7) the arrest; (8) trial before the Sanhedrin (chap. xxii. 30); (9) leaves Jerusalem; (10) reaches Antipatris; (11, 12) at Cæsarea; (13) the day on which he is speaking.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xxiii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> **That way.**—Better, "the Way" (R.V.), *i.e.* the Christian religion (see chap. ix. 2).

spending one's days in prison. Some time after this the monotony of his prison-life was broken by a summons to appear again before Felix. "Was his trial to be finished now? Had Lysias come?" If such thoughts occurred to Paul, he was mistaken. Lysias had not come, but Felix and his beautiful but wicked young wife Drusilla thought they would like to hear more about the Christian faith, and so Felix had sent for him. Paul knew the shameful doings of these two, and he talked very straight to them about righteousness, temperance, and judgment<sup>1</sup> to come—so straight indeed, that Felix's guilty conscience made him afraid. A feeling of terror seized him, and, hurriedly stopping the speaker, he told him to go away for the present, adding that, when he had a more convenient opportunity, he would send for him again. On several other occasions Paul was called before him, but it was more in the hope of obtaining a bribe to set him free than with any real desire to learn about Christianity. Paul would offer no bribe, and so the days went by, till two whole years had passed, and still he was a prisoner in the castle at Cæsarea. How strange it seems that God should allow one so eager and so able to preach the Gospel to lie in prison apparently wasting his days! But God's ways are not as our ways; and God's way is best.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE BEGINNING OF THE END

**Appeal to Cæsar** (chap. xxv. 1-12).—At the end of two years Felix was recalled in disgrace, and Porcius Festus, a very different type of man, was appointed

<sup>1</sup> R.V. The judgment.

procurator in his place. Immediately on his arrival in Cæsarea, Festus paid a visit to Jerusalem, where the chief priests and elders tried to enlist his influence against Paul, begging that he would either sentence this prisoner at once, or send him to Jerusalem for trial. They cherished the hope that if the latter were done, they might still carry out their purpose of having him murdered on the way. Festus, however, said it would be better that one or two of their number should accompany him to Cæsarea, where he promised he would investigate the matter at once. Eight or ten days afterwards he returned to Cæsarea, and the very next day Paul was brought up for trial. The same accusations that had been made against him by Tertullus were now repeated, but this time the Jews had no advocate, and very soon the trial degenerated into a scene of passionate clamour; till at length Festus, desiring to end the undignified scene, and at the same time anxious to ingratiate himself with the leading Jews, asked Paul whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be tried by the Jewish Council in his presence. Paul's heart must have sunk within him at that. He well knew that, while from a Roman tribunal he might have some chance of justice, from the Jews he had none. Sometimes in his Cæsarean prison it had crossed his mind that perhaps it might come to this, and he had made up his mind what in that case he should do. For a moment he paused, as if realising how momentous were the words he was about to utter. Then, pale with excitement, he slowly and deliberately uttered a sentence which startled the whole assembly: "I am standing here,"<sup>1</sup> he said, "at Cæsar's judgment-seat, where I ought as a Roman citizen to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. If I am a wrong-doer and worthy of death, I do not refuse to die: but if those things whereof they accuse me are nothing, no man can hand me over to them as a favour. *I appeal*

<sup>1</sup> I stand, R.V. "am standing," *i.e.* I am a Roman citizen before a Roman tribunal.

to Cæsar.”<sup>1</sup> The words produced a startling effect, and the proceedings immediately terminated. Festus was evidently annoyed that his first case should have thus been appealed. He consulted his assessors, and then answered sharply, “Thou hast appealed to Cæsar; unto Cæsar shalt thou go!” The die was cast. The cause of Christianity would now be tried before the highest court in the world. Paul had long desired to see Rome; now the whole Roman power was at his service to conduct him thither. The Roman authorities would find a ship, defray the cost, and see that the way was clear. With Festus it now lay to arrange those details. One thing, however, troubled him in connection with the case. In his official report, accompanying the prisoner, he must state the crime of which he was accused, and Festus knew of none!

**Festus and King Agrippa** (chap. xxv. 13-27).—When the court broke up, Paul was conveyed back to the castle to wait until a ship should be found. While he waited, he had an unexpected opportunity of pleading the cause of Christ before royalty itself. Among the distinguished visitors who came to Cæsarea to pay their respects to the new procurator were King Agrippa II.<sup>2</sup> and his notorious sister Bernice. To Agrippa, who was a Jew, Festus happened to mention the remarkable Jewish prisoner who was causing him so much trouble, and being interested in the particulars of the case, Agrippa expressed a wish to see the man—a wish which Festus was only too pleased to gratify, for from a

<sup>1</sup> This right of appealing to Cæsar was the highest privilege a Roman citizen enjoyed. If he thought himself unjustly treated, the accused had only to utter the single word *Appello* (I appeal), and immediately the proceedings were suspended and the case transferred for trial to the court of the Emperor in Rome.

<sup>2</sup> **Agrippa.**—This was Herod Agrippa II., son of the Herod who had slain James, and who died the horrible death in this palace of Cæsarea (chap. xii. 1, 21). On account of his youth he was not appointed to succeed his father when he died, but was shortly after made King of Chalcis, from which he was afterwards transferred to govern the tetrarchies which Philip and Lysanias formerly held and was named “king” thereof by courtesy. Bernice and Drusilla were his sisters.

Jewish prince he might get some help in dealing with a case which perplexed him. Accordingly a great function was arranged for the next day. Agrippa and Bernice were there in great pomp. The other dignitaries at that time in Cæsarea, the officers of the army, and the leading inhabitants of the town were also invited, and when all were assembled, Paul, escorted by a soldier, was led in. It was not a regular formal trial; that could only take place in Rome now. The object of the meeting was rather to afford Agrippa an opportunity of hearing Paul speak on Christianity. Festus opened the proceedings with an introductory statement, explaining the difficulties of the case, and then called on Paul to speak.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### PAUL AND KING AGRIPPA

**Paul before King Agrippa** (chap. xxvi. 1-32).—Calm and self-possessed, unawed even in the presence of such auditors, the Apostle stepped forward. Having expressed satisfaction at speaking in the presence of one like Agrippa, who, being familiar with Jewish affairs, could understand the questions in dispute, he went on to contrast his past life with his present position. He had been, he said, as strict a Pharisee as any, and the reason why he was standing there that day was because he believed that the hope of every Jewish heart had been fulfilled—that the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who had been crucified, but had risen from the dead. Why, he asked, should it be thought incredible that God should raise the dead? Once, indeed, he had not himself believed these things, and he had bitterly persecuted those who did, but God had taught him otherwise. He then related the story of his conversion, and told how, in obedience

to the heavenly vision, he had by God's help become a preacher of Christianity both to the Jews and to the Gentiles. Festus listened in growing bewilderment, and at last he suddenly exclaimed, "Paul, thou art mad!<sup>1</sup> Those many writings<sup>2</sup> have made thee mad!" Calmly, and with gentleness, Paul replied, "No, I am not mad, most noble Festus! I am speaking words of reality and soberness. The king knows about those things of which I am speaking, for they took place publicly, and were well known." Then turning to Agrippa for confirmation, he said, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? Yea, I know that thou believest." But Agrippa, uncomfortable under this direct appeal, replied contemptuously, "With but little persuasion thou wouldst fain make me a Christian!" It was a sneer, but Paul took it up solemnly, and replied, "I would to God that, whether with little persuasion or with much, not only thou, but all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except," he added, raising his fettered hands—"except these bonds." At this the king, by rising from his seat, gave the signal for the meeting to break up. As the distinguished assembly dispersed, the remark was heard on all hands that this was not a man worthy of death. He had made a most favourable impression, and the decision formally given by Agrippa was, "This man might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed to Cæsar."<sup>3</sup> So Paul was found innocent, and yet led back to prison!

<sup>1</sup> Beside thyself; R.V. "mad."

<sup>2</sup> Much learning.—Literally, "the many writings." The word was one which the Jews used for their sacred writings, viz. the Old Testament. (See 2 Tim. iv. 13.)

<sup>3</sup> Thus alike by Festus, the Roman (chap. xxv. 25), and by Agrippa, the Jew, was Paul pronounced innocent.

## CHAPTER XXVII

## A DISASTROUS VOYAGE

**Setting Sail for Rome** (chap. xxvii. 1-6).—A vessel belonging to Adramyttium was about to sail from Cæsarea on her homeward passage, and would call at some of the ports<sup>1</sup> of Asia on her way, so it was decided that Paul and some other prisoners should be sent in her, in the hope that at one or other of those ports they might find a vessel bound for Italy. A centurion named Julius, a kind, humane man, who treated Paul with much consideration, was in charge, and Paul was fortunate in being able to have with him his two friends, Luke, who has so graphically described for us every detail of the eventful voyage, and Aristarchus, the man who was dragged into the theatre at Ephesus. The voyage began auspiciously. With a favouring breeze they reached Sidon next day, and there Julius kindly allowed Paul to go ashore and visit his Christian friends. It was well, for the happy day he spent with them was the last bright time he was to have for many a day. Hardly had they left Sidon when contrary winds sprang up, and their journey became henceforth a succession of misfortunes, delays, and dangers.

**A Crowded Ship and Rough Weather** (chap. xxvii. 7-12).—At Myra they found an Egyptian grain-laden vessel bound for Rome, and into this Julius transferred his prisoners. The vessel must have been very crowded, for what between passengers, prisoners, soldiers, and crew, there were no fewer than 276 souls on board. Remembering what a ship was in those days, one can realise the discomfort which this implies through the experiences that followed. After leaving Myra they encountered bad

<sup>1</sup> "A ship which was about to sail unto the places on the coast of Asia" (R.V.). The changes in the R.V. throughout this whole narrative are very significant, and should be carefully noted.

weather, and were kept for some weeks beating about in the Ægean Sea, before they reached the Fair Havens, a bay in the south of Crete. It was now October,<sup>1</sup> and as yet they were but a third of their way to Rome. The wintry storms would soon be setting in, and they debated whether they should not remain where they were for the winter. Paul, who was an experienced sailor and familiar with the Mediterranean, strongly advised that they should, but the captain and owner of the vessel were anxious rather to make for Phoenix, another and more commodious harbour in Crete only a short distance off, and this was decided on. .

**A Terrific Storm** (chap. xxvii. 13-26).—In a few days the weather cleared, and with a gentle south wind blowing, they weighed anchor and sailed for Phoenix, expecting that a run of a few hours along the coast would bring them to it. Indeed, so fine was the weather and so short the distance, that they did not deem it necessary to take in the ship's boat, but left it to be towed behind. They had not proceeded far, however, when the weather changed and a gale<sup>2</sup> sprang up which drove them out to sea. To keep the vessel's head to the wind was impossible, so letting her drive before it, they made for the shelter of the island of Clauda,<sup>3</sup> 25 miles off, under the lee of which they prepared to weather the storm. They set about hauling in the boat, but found it a task of no small difficulty in such a sea. By and by the heavy mast swinging to and fro so strained the timbers of the ship that she began to leak. They therefore passed ropes under the hull, and by twisting these tight with sticks tried to draw the planks together and prevent the leak from widening. As the gale increased they were driven

<sup>1</sup> The Fast was already past, *i.e.* the Great Day of Atonement (Lev. xvi. 29), which falls on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Jewish year—part of September and October of our calendar.

<sup>2</sup> A tempestuous wind.—The Greek adjective used is *typhonic*; hence our word "typhoon." "Euroclydon," or Euraquilo (R.V.), "north-east," or more strictly "east by north."

<sup>3</sup> Clauda.—R.V. "Cauda," now "Gozzo"

from their place of shelter, and as it was impossible to carry sail, they lowered the big yard on to the deck, and with a bare mast drove before the wind. Soon, alas! a new danger threatened them. They were being driven right in the direction of the Syrtes—treacherous quicksands on the African coast. It was a terrible experience. All night long the storm raged furiously, while the passengers, cold and drenched with the waves, expected every moment that the vessel would go down. Morning brought no improvement. To lighten the sadly disabled ship, the captain ordered the cargo to be thrown overboard; but this was not enough, and after another awful day and night the heavy yard and the big mainsail with all their tackling had also to be cast away. A dismal time followed. For many days—sunless days, and wild starless nights—the dismantled hulk, swept by the surging waves, drifted no one knew whither, while the shivering, famishing wretches on board gave themselves up to despair.

Through that awful time, however, one man on board preserved his calm and his courage. It was Paul, the prisoner. Amidst the wild confusion he had betaken himself to prayer, and God had filled his heart with a calm assurance that although shipwreck was before them not a life would be lost; and so we see the Roman prisoner—the Christian missionary—standing forward on the wave-washed deck inspiring hope and courage into the sinking hearts of sailors and soldiers as well as passengers. “Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.”

**Shipwreck** (chap. xxvii. 27-44).—For fourteen terrible days the storm raged with unabated fury. At the end of that time the misery of the unhappy voyagers culminated in a new terror, for in the midnight darkness a cry arose that there were “breakers” ahead! They were being driven ashore on a rocky coast. Dropping the sounding line, they found their worst fears confirmed, for the water was getting rapidly shallower. In wild haste they cast four anchors out from the stern, and to their great joy they found that these held. Then

through the remaining hours of that long wintry night, in the extreme of misery and peril, they swung and tossed there, every soul on board yearning for daybreak. At length through murky clouds and rain the day began to dawn. In its dim light some of the sailors were seen lowering the boat under the pretence that they were going to put out more anchors, but in reality that they might escape, leaving the hapless passengers to their fate. Once again Paul came to the help of his companions, for he warned Julius of their design, and the soldiers instantly cut the ropes of the boat and let her drift away. The dawning light showed that they were being driven on the rocks, and would have to struggle for their lives. Faint and famished as they were, however,—for it was a fortnight since they had eaten a proper meal,—they were ill able for that struggle, and once more Paul came to their aid. Getting a meal served, he urged and encouraged them to eat it, and by his confidence and example was so successful that they ate and were refreshed. When daylight came preparations were made and the ship was run aground on a bank, where the bow stuck fast, while the stern, beaten by the merciless waves, began to break up.<sup>1</sup> It was a critical moment—a time when every man must look to himself; but, at that moment, yet another danger threatened Paul and his fellow-prisoners. A Roman soldier was responsible for his prisoners with his own life, and no excuse whatever was admitted if he allowed one to escape. A cry therefore rose among the soldiers to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should escape. We shudder when we think what horrible cruelty this would have been in such circumstances. Yet it would have been done but for Paul's sake. Julius felt that it would be base ingratitude to kill the man who had done so much for them, so he forbade it, and gave instead the order that those who could swim should first cast them-

<sup>1</sup> The place where the wreck took place was probably in St. Paul's Bay in the north of Malta, a little to the north-west of Valetta, between Koura Point and the little island of Salmonetta.

selves into the sea and get to land, while the others, clutching spars and planks from the ship, now rapidly breaking up, drifted ashore, and thus escaped. When they gathered on the beach, a drenched, miserable crowd, some of them no doubt almost more dead than alive, it was found that Paul's word had been true, for the roll-call showed not a life missing.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### ROME AT LAST

**Sojourn at Malta** (chap. xxviii. 1-10).—The island on which they had been cast proved to be Melita or Malta, and the natives<sup>1</sup> received the shipwrecked strangers with much kindness. A fire was kindled that they might be dried and warmed, and while Paul, ever active and ready to help, was gathering brushwood to heap on the fire, a viper, waked up by the heat, darted out from among the sticks and fastened on his hand. Seeing this, the simple natives concluded that he must be some murderer, whom, though he had escaped the sea, justice would not suffer to live. When, however, Paul shook off the beast into the fire and felt no harm, they immediately rushed to the opposite extreme and declared that he must be a god! Among those simple people Paul and his companions remained three months, receiving much kindness. The governor of the island himself—a man named Publius—received them hospitably, and Paul repaid his kindness by miraculously curing his father, who lay ill with fever and dysentery.<sup>2</sup> The report of this miracle spread through the island, and many other sick persons were brought to the Apostle to be cured. So the time passed

<sup>1</sup> Barbarous people (R.V. "barbarians"), *i.e.* not speaking Latin or Greek.

<sup>2</sup> Dysentery (R.V.). The words used are technical terms, such as a physician would employ.

until at the end of three months they left the island amidst demonstrations of affection and respect.

**From Malta to Rome** (chap. xxviii. 11-16).—On the return of spring, another grain ship of Alexandria, the *Castor and Pollux*,<sup>1</sup> which had been wintering in Malta, prepared to sail for Rome, and in it Julius secured a passage for himself and his prisoners; so once more they set sail. After calling at Syracuse, in Sicily, and at Rhegium, on the coast of Italy, the vessel brought them to Puteoli, the port where the Egyptian grain vessels discharged their cargoes to be taken on to Rome in small vessels that could sail up the Tiber. Here the passengers were landed; and soon the loiterers on the quay saw the prisoners, with the soldiers guarding them, marched ashore. In Puteoli there were some Christians, and these, when they heard of Paul's arrival, hurried down to meet him. How vexed they must have been to see the Apostle, of whom they had so often heard, in chains, guarded by soldiers, and bearing in his appearance sad traces of his suffering and shipwreck! As Julius remained in Puteoli for a week, Paul was allowed to spend those days with his Christian friends, and the peaceful, happy time refreshed his spirit. Too soon the week ended, and then began the march of 140 miles to Rome. News of Paul's approach had reached Rome before him, and a company of the Christians walked out to meet and welcome him, some of them coming as far as Appii Forum, a distance of 40 miles, and others as far as a town called The Three Taverns or The Three Shops, about 30 miles from Rome. All along the famous Appian Way, by which they travelled, there were interesting scenes and memorials of the past, but the only thing which Luke thinks it worth while to mention is the great encouragement Paul received from the welcome of those brethren. When he saw them he thanked God and took courage. At length the party reached Rome. Paul's long-cherished hope was realised.

<sup>1</sup> R.V. "The Twin Brothers."

He was entering Rome, but oh! how differently from what he had ever dreamed—a chained prisoner, guarded by soldiers and on his way to trial. How often we find it so in life! We attain a long-cherished purpose, but lo! it is very different from what we had pictured. On arriving in the city, Julius handed over his prisoners to the captain or prefect of the Prætorian troops who served as the Emperor's bodyguard, and had charge of all prisoners sent from the provinces to be tried before the Emperor. The kindly centurion must have spoken favourably of his remarkable prisoner, for, instead of being confined with the other prisoners, Paul was allowed to procure a lodging for himself, and to live there guarded by a soldier, to whom he was chained, but with free permission to see his friends. †

**An Interview with the Jews** (chap. xxviii. 17-22).—In Rome there were many Jews, and Paul was anxious that, as usual, his first appeal should be addressed to them. Since he could not go to the synagogue, he invited them to come and see him in his lodging, and there he explained to them that he had been guilty of no offence either against his country or his religion; that he had made his appeal to the Emperor from no desire to accuse his own nation, but in order to save his life; that the Roman magistrates, after examination, had admitted his innocence, and would have let him go but for the Jews in Jerusalem; and that he was a prisoner really because he believed that the hope of Israel had been fulfilled, and that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. The reply of the Jews was very diplomatic. They did not wish to get involved in any trouble with the Romans, so they answered that neither by word nor by letter had they received any accusation against him personally; but as for this sect,—the Christians,—they knew that everywhere they were spoken against. They would, however, be glad to hear what he thought and knew of that doctrine. Paul asked them to choose their own day for coming to his lodging, and he would explain it to them. A large number came, and to them he

preached the Gospel, reasoning and discussing the subject the long day through, with the usual result,—some were convinced, but many believed not. Before the meeting broke up Paul solemnly warned the unbelievers against the doom of penal blindness, reminding them of Isaiah's prophecy<sup>1</sup> of a people who *could* not see the truth because they *would* not, and declaring that he would now address himself to the Gentiles, who were willing to hear. Thus in Rome, as elsewhere, a separation took place between the obdurate Jews and the Apostle of the Gentiles.

**Two Years a Prisoner in Rome** (chap. xxviii. 30, 31).—The days dragged wearily on, and still the day of trial came not. Possibly the witnesses had not arrived; perhaps the Emperor was otherwise occupied. Anyhow, two whole years passed. The Apostle, however, was not idle. To that hired house many a one came and learned from him the way of life. True, he was chained, but the Word of God was not bound, and to all who came he preached the Gospel "with all boldness, no man forbidding him." Here the writer of the Book of Acts suddenly leaves him. It is with this picture of Apostolic preaching in Rome, the centre of the world, that he ends his book. We would have liked to follow the Apostle farther. From their own terms we learn that during these two years he wrote some of those epistles which are the precious heritage of the Christian Church,<sup>2</sup> and that he was cheered by the companionship of some of his most valued friends.<sup>3</sup> We have also references to one or two happy incidents which occurred like gleams of sunshine brightening his prison life. Luke's purpose, however, is not to trace the biography of the Apostle, but to record the planting

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah vi. 9, 10. This passage is more frequently quoted in the New Testament than any other words from the Old. It was quoted by our Lord, Matt. xiii. 14; Mark iv. 12; Luke viii. 10; see also John xii. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Those to the Philippians, the Colossians, and Philemon.

<sup>3</sup> Besides Luke and Aristarchus, he had the companionship of Tychicus, of Timothy, of Epaphroditus, and of Mark.

of the Christian Church. Now the banner of the Cross is planted on the citadel of the World! At the beginning of his book he recorded for us the "marching orders" given on the day of the Ascension. He described the endowment of power from on high given at Pentecost. He has testified to the faithfulness and labour with which those marching orders have been carried out in face of opposition from fanatical Jews and hostile Gentiles. He has told how through persecution, suffering, and death the followers of Jesus have won their conquests, and how they have left—like garrisons in a conquered territory—a countless array of little Christian churches, not only in Palestine, but scattered throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe, to claim and hold the land for Christ. Now in his last sentence he shows us the standard raised and the garrison planted in the centre of Imperial Rome—the Apostle preaching the truth with all boldness, no man forbidding him. It is the victory of God's truth. It is the triumph of the Gospel of Christ. It is the fitting close of the Book of Acts.<sup>1</sup>

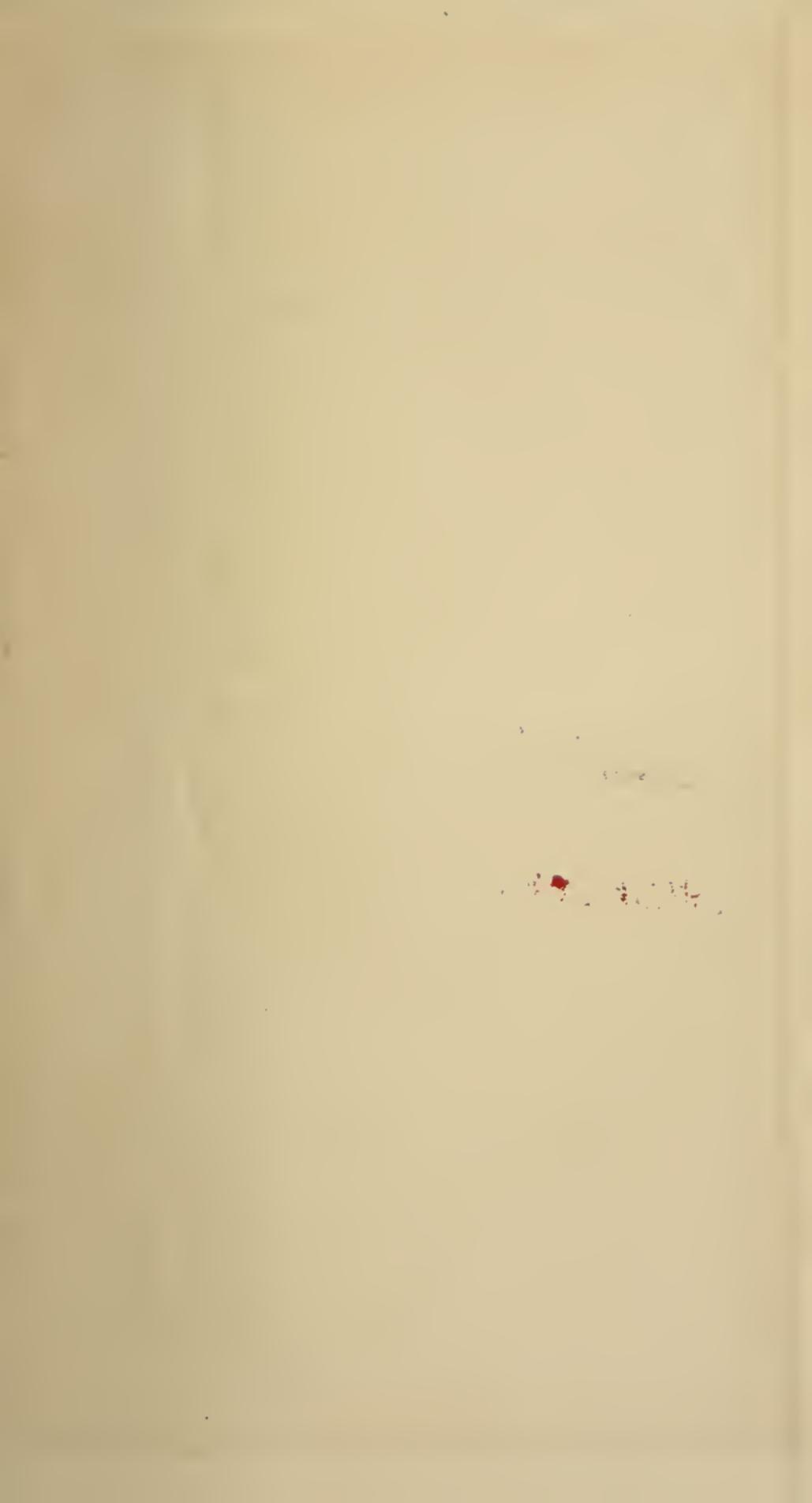
#### 1 Chronology of the Book of Acts.

The dates of the various incidents in the Book of Acts have been obtained with more or less accuracy by noting one or two points at which the sacred narrative touches events in secular history, and counting backwards or forwards from these. The death of Herod Agrippa occurred, we know, in 44 A.D.; the expulsion of the Jews from Rome took place in 52 A.D.; Porcius Festus became Procurator in 60 A.D.; and the persecution by Nero took place in 64 A.D. The following chronological table may be given (following Meyer):—

|      |              |  |
|------|--------------|--|
| A.D. | 31           | —The Ascension of Christ.                    |
| "    | 34           | —The Martyrdom of Stephen.                   |
| "    | 35           | —The Conversion of Paul.                     |
| "    | 43           | —Paul goes to Antioch (chap. xii. 25).       |
| "    | 44           | —Martyrdom of James.                         |
| "    | 45 }<br>48 } | Paul's First Missionary Journey.             |
| "    | 51           | —The First Council at Jerusalem (chap. xv.). |
| "    | 52 }<br>54 } | Paul's Second Missionary Journey.            |
| "    | 55 }<br>59 } | Paul's Third Missionary Journey.             |
| "    | 59 }         | Paul's Arrest at Jerusalem (chap. xxii. 24). |
| "    | 60 }         | The Two Years' Imprisonment at Cæsarea.      |
| "    | 61 }         | Paul's Arrival at Rome.                      |
| "    | 63 }         | Paul's Two Years' Imprisonment in Rome.      |

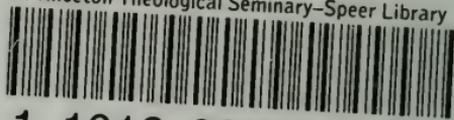






BS2625.8.R65  
Studies in the Acts of the Apostles.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00070 4199