



THE APOSTLE PAUL SPREADS THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE ROMAN WORLD

Reading: Acts 13-28

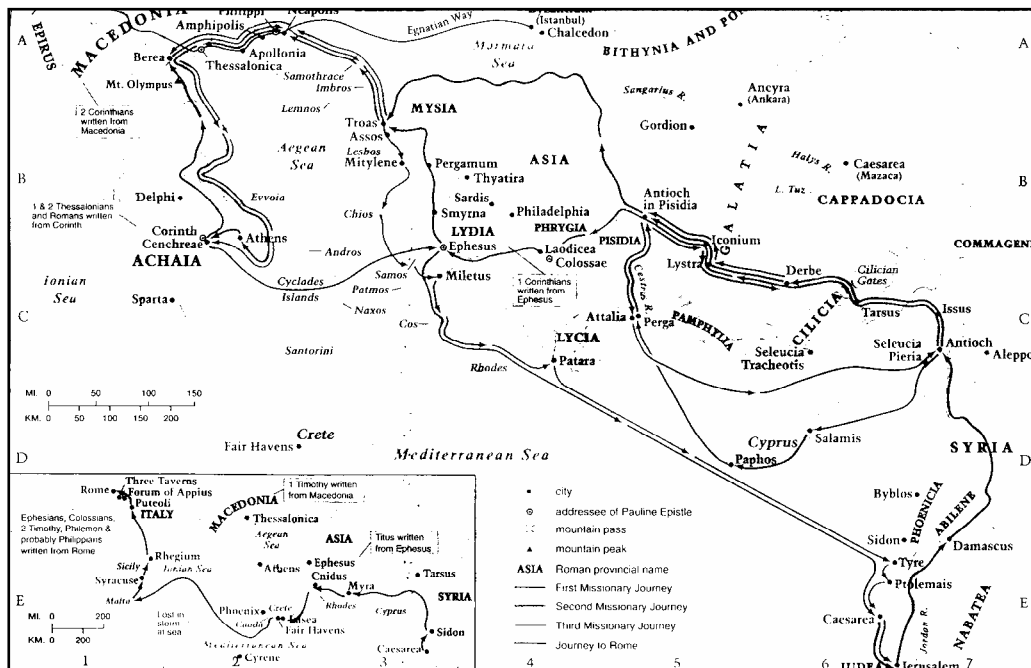
In Acts 9 we considered the conversion of Saul, who later was called Paul. There we noted that the Lord said of him: “He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings and the children of Israel” (v15). We will now consider how this great work was accomplished.

The Missionary Journeys of Paul

Three missionary journeys of Paul are recorded in The Acts of the Apostles. As we read through them we come to appreciate the way in which the Gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire. With the development of communities of believers in different cities of the empire we can understand why Paul needed to write letters to them. These were written to encourage their faith, to answer their questions and to correct problems that had arisen in their midst. Many of these letters have been preserved by God’s overshadowing providence, so that we have the benefit of Paul’s inspired teaching to guide us even today.

The Greek word for each community of believers is *ekklesia*, translated “church” in most Bibles. The word is a composition of *klesis*, from *kaleo* “to call” and the prefix *ek*, meaning “out of”. It describes an assembly of people called out for a specific purpose. The English word “church” does not accurately convey the meaning of the Greek, and therefore there is a preference to use “ecclesia”, the English form of the Greek word. This word more accurately shows that the believers are a community “called out” by God through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, to stand aside from the ways of the world and follow him (1 Peter 2:9; Acts 15:14; Ephesians 1:18; 4:4).

Map showing the journeys of Paul



The First Journey (Acts 13-14)

As we read through these chapters we can follow the journey of Paul and Barnabas as they took the Gospel first into Cyprus and then into Galatia, the ancient name for central Turkey today. Most Bibles with maps in the back will have these journeys marked on them. Later Paul wrote his **Epistle to the Galatians** to the believers in that area.



The Second Journey (Acts 16-18)

On this trip Paul and Silas revisited the ecclesias in Galatia and travelled on to Troas, across to Philippi, and then down to Athens and on to Corinth. The return journey to Jerusalem took them via Ephesus and then by ship back to Judaea.

Later Paul wrote letters to those whom he had met on this journey. They are the letters to the **Philippians, Thessalonians, and Corinthians.**

The Third Journey (Acts 18-21)

Paul again travelled through Galatia and then on to Ephesus, where he stayed for three years. From this centre the Gospel spread so that *“all Asia heard the word of the Lord”*. Then on to Greece again before returning to Jerusalem. While he was in Greece he wrote the letter to the **Romans.**

Paul later wrote letters to the **Ephesians** and **Colossians** (including the personal letter to **Philemon**).

Paul’s Imprisonment in Jerusalem and Journey to Rome (Acts 21-28)

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem after this third journey he was arrested in the Temple by the Jewish religious leaders, and later taken into custody by the Romans. He was imprisoned first in Jerusalem and then in Caesarea and later, when he appealed to Caesar’s tribunal, he was sent to Rome. His journey was very perilous but finally he reached Rome safely and spent two years there in prison. Though in chains, he was able to write or dictate letters which were of great benefit to the early communities of believers, as well as to us today.

The Power which Motivated Paul

In looking at the places Paul visited as he travelled throughout the Empire and on his final journey to Rome, we see that he, above all others, was the one responsible for the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

In some of his writings we catch a glimpse of that power which motivated him to commit himself to such an arduous mission. He said in the epistle to the Romans: *“So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is **the power of God** unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”* (Romans 1:15-16).

Again he wrote: *“We have the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak.”* (2 Corinthians 4:13)

Paul believed that the Gospel message was the **only** hope for mankind. He believed it so intensely he was compelled to “speak” of it to everyone he met.

He certainly has left us a worthy example to follow. If we really do believe the Gospel, then we will not only obey it in baptism and walk faithfully before God, but we will feel compelled to speak of it to others that they too may share the great hope of salvation.

The Other Letters of the New Testament

As we have mentioned, many of the letters that are found in the New Testament were written by Paul to the ecclesias of believers. Paul also wrote personal letters to some of those who had laboured with him in the work, such as **Timothy, Titus** and **Philemon**. Though no specific writer is named, the letter to the **Hebrews** is also attributed by many scholars to Paul.

Other disciples also wrote letters which have been included in the New Testament. These are the letters of **James, Peter, John and Jude.**

These letters not only help us to understand what is necessary for our salvation but also provide guidance for disciples that they may glorify God in their daily life.



The Holy Spirit in the First Century

As we have seen, the Lord Jesus Christ had been given the power of the Holy Spirit to work miracles, so that there could be no doubt that he was sent by God (John 3:2; Acts 2:22; see Lesson 20).

After his resurrection, Jesus told his disciples that when he had gone to heaven they, too, would receive the power of the Holy Spirit. He also explained why this would be so. It was given for two particular reasons:

1. It would give them the ability to understand the ways of God clearly and help them to remember all that Jesus had taught them (John 14:26).
2. They would be empowered to do miracles in the name of Jesus as an irrefutable sign that he had been raised from the dead and that God was vindicating the Gospel message they proclaimed. God would not bear witness with miracles to the message of teachers if they did not speak the Truth (John 9:30-33).

It was through the power of the Holy Spirit that the disciples were able to record the teachings of Jesus so accurately. Prior to Jesus' death the disciples had often misunderstood his teaching, but now the Holy Spirit enabled them to bear accurate record of what they had seen and heard.

The Miracles

There are those today who claim that they have the power of the Holy Spirit and can work miracles just as the apostles did in the first century. This is a delusion. As we read the life of Jesus and of the apostles we quickly realise that the effect of the miracles was instantaneous and complete. There were always eyewitnesses who spoke of the wonder of the miracles they had seen, so that multitudes came from hundreds of kilometres away to be healed (Matthew 4:23-25). In the same way, the miracles which the apostles did in the name of Jesus were proclaimed far and wide (Acts 4:16; Acts 5:14-16). Testimony was not confined to the believers of some little sect.

Today, followers of a variety of religious persuasions claim to work miracles by the Holy Spirit. The very fact that they hold beliefs diverse from one another nullifies their claim to work in God's name, since God proclaims Himself a God of Truth. Miracles must honour God and must therefore, as in the first century, be a witness to the truth of the Gospel. We must first examine the doctrines of those who claim such power to see if they really are in harmony with the Bible (1 John 4:1).

The Holy Spirit Given for a Purpose

The Holy Spirit was given in the first century so that Jesus, and then the apostles, had a divine witness to the truth of their message. Once the New Testament was written and people could read about the wonder of Jesus Christ and the teaching of the apostles, this became no longer necessary. God ceased to make His power available after the apostles and their immediate disciples died. By this time the Gospel message had spread throughout Asia, Europe and North Africa and copies of those teachings had been collated into the New Testament. The apostle Paul, realising that this would happen, spoke of the time when the ability to prophesy, talk in foreign languages (tongues), etc would cease, because the revealed will of God would be completely recorded in His word (1 Corinthians 13:8-10).

Speaking in Tongues

In Acts 2 we have the record of the apostles speaking in tongues. As we read through the incident we note that there were Jews gathered from all over the Middle East, yet when the apostles spoke "*every man heard them speak in his own language*" (verse 6). This miracle caused the people to marvel saying: "*Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?*" (verses 7-8).

The miracle of speaking in other tongues enabled the Gospel to spread more rapidly throughout the Empire. The apostles, who were Galileans, could now speak in foreign languages. Speaking in tongues gave them the ability to preach the Gospel throughout the world in the tongue or language of the hearers. Once the Gospel was believed and established in those countries there remained no need for this miracle to continue.



The Last Book of the Bible—Revelation

This last book of the Bible has fascinated most people who wish to understand the Bible. The Revelation was given to the Apostle John while he was a prisoner on the island of Patmos in approximately AD 96. Many want to understand this book before they have come to appreciate all that has gone before. There is one fundamental point that is so often missed. The Revelation was given by Jesus Christ *“to show unto **his servants** things which must shortly come to pass”*. It is therefore a **prophetic** book, revealing those things that were to affect the servants of Christ from the time when it was given through to the time when the Kingdom will be set up at his return, and even beyond. It has therefore been very encouraging to his servants in every generation from the time of John and forward.

It is a remarkable book for the unerring accuracy of its predictions; however it can only be understood in the light of a knowledge of the doctrines of the Bible and the prophetic messages, particularly Daniel’s, which have gone before. To try to interpret it without such a foundation will only lead to confusion and error. It was specifically given to **the servants of Christ**, who have come to know and understand God’s will and purpose with the earth. The patient and careful consideration of its visions and message is a source of encouragement to all those who put time and effort into studying it.

The message of Revelation is clearly consistent with the rest of the Bible—it proclaims the teaching of the coming Kingdom of God on Earth.

- *“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever”* (Revelation 11:15)
- *“Thou hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and **we shall reign on the earth**”* (Revelation 5:10)
- *“Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be”* (Revelation 22:12)

John concludes the book with an earnest prayer. It is the prayer of all those who faithfully look for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have every reason to believe that he will soon return to reward those who have endeavoured to serve him and have earnestly prayed: *“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10). Let us all prepare for that day in the way he has appointed so that we, with John, can genuinely pray, **“Even so, come, Lord Jesus”** (Revelation 22:20).

Summary Points

1. The Book of Acts gives the details of the journeys of the Apostle Paul as he travelled throughout the Roman Empire preaching the Gospel.
2. The Book of Revelation was specifically given by Jesus Christ from heaven to the Apostle John for the benefit of all **the servants** of Christ from the days of John through to these present days (**Revelation 1:1-3**). It predominantly is a book of prophecy and sets forth, among other things, the sequence of events in Europe and the Middle East from AD 96 through to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth under the rule of Jesus Christ (**Revelation 11:15-18**). It therefore gives an accurate prophetic overview of today’s world events relative to the imminent return of Christ, and warns how we should be preparing for that great event (**Revelation 16:15**).
3. *“Even so, come, Lord Jesus”* (**Revelation 22:20**) is the earnest prayer of all those who, having come to appreciate the glorious plan that God has revealed in the Gospel, have believed it, been baptised into the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and are striving to glorify God in their lives (**Mark 15:15-16**).



CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE MISSION

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

Lesson 23

Lesson 23 Questions

1. To whom was Paul particularly sent with the Gospel?
2. In the Greek of the New Testament the word *ekklesia* is used to speak of the communities of believers. Why was this word chosen to describe the believers?
3. How many journeys are recorded of Paul's missionary work?
4. What power motivated Paul to preach the Gospel, even at the risk of his life?
5. Why was the Holy Spirit given to the apostles?
6. Why was the ability to speak publicly in different languages given to the apostles?
7. Why did Jesus Christ give the Revelation to John?
8. Where shall those who will be made "*kings and priests*" at Christ's coming reign?
9. What is the final prayer of John at the end of the Revelation?