

A Walk Through The Book of Acts in Story Form

Introduction

Today we are going to talk about the Book of Acts. In fact, I call this teaching “A Walk Through the Book of Acts.”

The Book of Acts can be called the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, or the Book of the Acts of the Church. But I would like to call it the Book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

We could say that the Old Testament focuses on God the Father, the Gospels focus on God the Son, Jesus, and the Book of Acts focuses on the Third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. He is, of course, mentioned throughout the Bible, as we can see from Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless, and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And we know that He was with certain people in the Old Testament in a specific way as,

Joseph (Genesis 41:38)

Moses and the 70 elders (Numbers 11:16-17)

Joshua (Numbers 27:18)

Gideon (Judges 6:34)

Samson (Judges 13:25)

Saul (I Samuel 10:9-10)

David (II Samuel 23:2)

Elijah and Elisha (II Kings 2:9)

Isaiah (Isaiah 48:16)

Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:1-2)

Daniel (Daniel 4:8)

We can see from these examples that the Holy Spirit would come upon certain people, such as leaders, judges, kings and prophets for a particular reason. But He did not come upon everyone.

However, Jesus promised that things would change (John 14:16-17) and that all His followers, and not just some of them, would have the Spirit of God in them. These followers would not only include the disciples who were with Jesus at the time that He was on earth, but would include all the believers from that time on.

While Jesus was still on earth, He sent His twelve disciples out to teach people about the Kingdom of God, to heal the people, and deliver them from evil spirits (Luke 9:1-2). The reason they were able to do these things is because Jesus gave them power and authority to do so. To us that may well make sense. After all, they had been especially chosen by Him. But we would not expect anyone else to be able to do these things. However, Jesus chose another group of followers to do the same things, and that was quite a large group of 72 disciples (Luke 10:1). All of them, the 12 as well as the 72, saw many people healed and delivered from demonic spirits. So it was an amazing time.

These disciples may well have believed that the ministry they were involved in would continue for ever and ever. But then something happened they were not prepared for: the One, who had given them power and authority to teach, heal, and deliver, had been taken from them and crucified (John 19:17-18). This should

have never happened according to them. But it had. What would that mean for them? Would it mean they too would be crucified, since they were known to have followed Jesus? In fact, the disciples had become so afraid that they hid themselves behind locked doors for fear of the authorities (John 20:19a). They reasoned that if they kept quiet perhaps the authorities would forget about them. One thing was sure, they were never again going to teach and heal and deliver people. It was too dangerous a task and, anyway, Jesus was no longer there to guide them, nor to give them power and authority to do so. That special time in their lives had come to a sudden end, and it looked like they had started a new season. But they could not tell what kind of season they had entered, for nothing had worked out as they had expected, since they never thought they would find themselves hidden behind locked doors, too afraid to go out.

It was true, of course, that at one time Jesus had told them they were to be “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). However, how could they be “fishers of men” without the Lord being there to guide them? No, they needed to face reality that they were never again going out to do the things they had so believed in. But they did not dare think what they were going to do instead. After all, they had been His disciples for the last three years. That was the only life they had known all that time, but it seemed it had all finished. Or had it finished....? While these disciples were hiding behind locked doors for fear of the authorities, unknown to them, things had happened at the tomb in which Jesus’ body had been placed. Two angels in white had appeared at the tomb (John 20:12). Also, the stone in front of the tomb had been removed and Jesus’ body was no longer inside the tomb (John 20:1-2).

And, yes, Mary Magdalene, one of the women disciples, had claimed that she had seen Jesus alive (John 20:18). But they just knew she must have imagined that. After all they knew how much Mary Magdalene loved the Lord. And no wonder for He had set her free from seven demons (Luke 8:2). Consequently, her life had been totally transformed by Him. So, they would excuse Mary Magdalene’s words that she had actually seen the Lord and had spoken with Him.

But Jesus had risen, and after having visited His Father in heaven (John 20:17a), He came back to earth to see His fearful group of disciples, for He knew they needed to receive His peace to replace their anxiety. What a moment that was. Mary Magdalene had been right after all. Their Lord and Saviour had been raised to life and was once again in their midst (John 20:19). And joy filled their hearts. Then Jesus told them He had not just come to calm them down but to send them out as He had been sent out by His Father (John 20:21). They may have thought they would never be going out again but Jesus corrected their thinking. After all, they had been trained by Him during a three-year period for a purpose and that purpose had been to go out and teach people about the Kingdom of God and to heal and deliver them. That training period was not going to be wasted for it had been a necessary introduction to what they were going to do in the future. But He knew that His future plans for them were much greater than they could have ever imagined, and would need a special empowering (Acts 1:8a). That is why He said as well that they were not yet ready to go out for they must first of all receive this special gift from heaven called the Baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). And He then disclosed to them where they were to go: they were to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8b). We can well imagine the shock on the faces of Peter and the other disciples when they heard Jesus say to them they were going to be His witnesses in Jerusalem,

Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. No doubt, they would have all looked to Peter to speak up and to tell Jesus what they were all thinking, which would have been something like,

“Excuse us, Jesus. We can cope with going to Jerusalem even if that might mean imprisonment, and going to Judea is okay too for everyone is like us, Jewish. But, Jesus, You cannot mean for us to go to Samaria, can You now? We remember that not too long ago You insisted we go there and so we went, and then You talked to that Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42). But that only happened because we had gone into the town to buy lunch so we could not stop You from talking to her. But we want You to know we were very concerned for Your reputation because You talked to a Samaritan woman. And Jews do not communicate with Samaritans and certainly not with Samaritan women. It is true, we did not dare to say anything to You at that time, but we were really so concerned for Your reputation, because You are a Rabbi. Moreover, we were concerned for our reputation since we are Your followers. Therefore, Jesus, You can not possibly tell us to go Samaria, can You now?... And then to tell us to go the ends of the earth?... Jesus that is where all the unclean people are, whose homes we cannot enter, and who cannot enter our homes.... Jesus, what are You doing? Don't leave us now. We need to discuss this...”

But it was too late for Jesus was already on His way up to heaven to be with His Father once again, and He was not coming down (Acts 1:9). Not yet anyway. As a matter of fact, we are still waiting for His return some 2000 years later (Acts 1:10-11)

The disciples then remembered that Jesus had told them to wait in Jerusalem for this gift from heaven and since they did not know what else to do, they decided they better go back to Jerusalem. And there they waited and waited (Acts 1:12-14). And then the Day of Pentecost arrived, and something very special happened, as we can read in Acts 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost came they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The gift from heaven had arrived in the form of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus had told them would happen. And He had come upon all the disciples who had gathered together, a total of 120 men and women (Acts 1:15). As a result, these men and women began to speak in other tongues, or languages, they had never spoken before. Now, that day there were many Jews from other places in Jerusalem. They heard themselves being spoken to in their own language about all the wonderful things God had been doing, even though they knew the people who were speaking their language were from Galilee. How could that be? They did not understand how these people could talk to them in their own language. This truly was an amazing event (Acts 2:5-8). However, some people in the crowd decided that this group of one-hundred-and- twenty had had too much to drink and made fun of them (Acts 2:13). The truth is, that day these believers had been changed from being a fearful people, who had hidden behind locked doors, to a bold people, who were no longer afraid of what the authorities might do to them. In particular, we see it in the changed life of Peter who, not so long ago, had denied Jesus three times at the time of His trial (John 18:27). And who, afterwards,

together with the other disciples, had hidden himself behind locked doors for fear of the authorities.

But that day, Peter stood up and boldly addressed the crowd, as we can read in Acts 2:14-16

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: **“Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk as you suppose. It is only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel. (Joel 2:28-32)**

So he explained to them what had happened to these disciples, and he then preached to them about Jesus. Moreover, he did not use politically correct language in his message, but told them clearly that they were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 2:23b). However, he did not stop there, for he explained that this had taken place with the foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23a) Who had, in fact, raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:24a). Peter explained as well that Jesus was now seated at the right Hand of the Father in heaven. And He had been the One who had poured out the Holy Spirit upon them (Acts 2:33). Many people then asked Peter what they should do, and he told them to repent of their sins. And we can read that in Acts 2:38

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, everyone of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

That day, three thousand people became believers (Acts 2:41). It truly was an amazing day in the life of the Church that had been born that very day. It seemed the authorities did not dare to interfere. The question is: Did the situation remain peaceful?

The Holy Spirit Empowers

We next learn of a miracle that took place after the disciples had been baptised with the Holy Spirit. And we can read that in Acts chapter 3:1-6

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us.” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk”

That day had begun as any other day for the crippled beggar: after he had woken up, he had been dressed and had been given his breakfast. Then it was time for him to be taken to his spot to beg, which was at the Temple Gate, called Beautiful. When he saw Peter and John he did what he had been doing all day: he asked them for money. Perhaps these men could give him a little bit of money. He did not think they would be able to give him very much for they looked like they were very ordinary people, possibly fishermen. But then these two men stopped and looked at him.... Perhaps they might be able to give him more than he had originally anticipated. Then one of the men began to talk to him. That was amazing for most people did not ever stop to talk to him. They might just throw him a small coin out of pity but they would never look at him. After all, he was just a beggar and a crippled one at that. But

these two men looked at him and began to talk to him and they asked him to look at them. Why would they ask him to look at them? Hope rose up in him for surely something good was about to happen to him. Perhaps they might be able to give him so much that he would never need to beg again. But then his heart sank for he heard one of the two men say to him, "Silver and gold I do not have..." That meant, he knew, he would have to continue his life of begging. But then the man continued speaking and what he heard was beyond anything he had ever heard before for he heard the man say in him, "In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." When he heard these words, faith rose up in him that he could do exactly what this man had said. Thankfully, the man who spoke these words to him, whose name was Peter, next stretched out his hand and helped him to get up for he had never in his life walked. But that moment strength came into his legs and he was able to not just walk, he was able to jump. And for the first time in his life he was able to physically enter the Temple Courts and all the people who saw him were amazed at his miracle (Acts 3:7-10).

So what do we see here? We see that the Holy Spirit did not only enable Peter and John to preach, He enabled them to heal, as the healing of this crippled man demonstrates.

And all the people who witnessed this miracle came running towards Peter and John. And Peter used that opportunity to preach to them about Jesus, for he wanted people to know that this man had not been healed because of him and John, but that this man had been healed because of Jesus (Acts 3:11-16).

We would expect everyone to be very happy and excited because of the miraculous healing of this man. However, that was not the case, as we can read in Acts chapter 4:1, 2 and 3

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the Apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

These religious leaders did not seem to care that this crippled beggar had been miraculously healed. Their only concern seemed to have been with the teaching of Peter and John. In fact, they had become so disturbed about what these men were teaching that they decided these two men had to be silenced. And the only way they knew how to do this was to have them put in jail. The very thing these two Apostles had been afraid of in the past and had caused them to hide behind closed doors (John 20:19), had happened to them; they had been put in prison. But remember, these two men were no longer the fearful people they had been, because they had been empowered by the Holy Spirit at the Day of Pentecost. And He caused a great change in their lives, so they had become a fearless people, no longer a fearful people (Acts 2:1-4).

The religious leaders had these men come before them after a night in jail expecting them to have learned their lesson somewhat, and to be willing to tone down their message (Acts 4:5-7). However, that is not what happened. When Peter and John came before them, Peter used that opportunity to preach to them, to these religious leaders, about the Lord Jesus (Acts 4:8-10). That caused great frustration among the religious leaders, but they knew they had no case against them, so they had to let them go (Acts 4:13-14). All they could do was to try and threaten them not to talk about Jesus ever again

(Acts 4:18). But the Apostles simply said, “We must obey God rather than men.” A night in jail had not caused them to be quiet, but had made them rather more confident, and more bold in their sharing of the Gospel (Acts 4:19-20).

As soon as Peter and John were released, they joined the other believers to tell them what had happened to them. We can well imagine that the believers decided it was necessary to stay out of sight for a while, since they would now all be in danger of prison. But is that what they decided to do? Let's read Acts chapter 4:23-31, to find out to find out the decision of the believers.

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “You made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One. Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed. They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness. Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the Name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

These believers, too, had become a bold people, as we can see from the prayer they prayed. The imprisonment of Peter and John did not stop them from stepping out and continuing their bold preaching. On the contrary, enabled by the Holy Spirit, they became even bolder in their teaching and preaching.

The Holy Spirit Purifies

There was great unity among the believers, and they shared with each other their possessions. For instance, one of the believers, a man named Barnabas, sold a piece of land and gave the money to be shared among all the other believers (Acts 4:36-37).

One day, a certain believer, named Ananias, did so as well, as we can read in Acts 5:1-2

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but he brought the rest and put it at the Apostles' feet.

Jerusalem was buzzing with the news that Barnabas had sold a piece of land, and do you know what he had done with the money he had received for the sale of the land? He had given it all to the Apostles, to be shared among the believers. Ananias had heard about Barnabas's kind act as well. That night, when he came home for dinner he talked to his wife. He said to her, “Sapphira, I have been thinking. We should do a similar thing, don't you think? It would be so nice if we became known among the believers for our

generosity. And we have this piece of land we could sell. Why don't we go ahead and do so?"

His wife fully agreed.

"But," said Ananias, "I have been thinking too that in fact I will keep some of the money for ourselves. After all, I could do with some new tools and you would like some new jewellery so what we will do: we will keep some of the money for ourselves and we will give the rest to the Apostles. That is still very generous, don't you agree?"

His wife fully agreed with him.

"However," said Ananias, "we will not tell the Apostles that we are planning to keep some of the money for ourselves. We can just pretend that we have given them the full amount for we would look better in the eyes of the believers if they thought we would give them the full amount."

His wife listened to him and said, "Ananias, I will do whatever you want me to do. I agree with your proposal."

So the next day Ananias went out and organised the sale of his piece of land. It was quickly sold for it was a very good piece of land. As soon as he had received the money he went back home first of all, to put aside a certain amount for the tools and for his wife's jewellery. And with the rest, he went to the place where the Apostles were staying. As he walked in, he saw Peter. He gave Peter the money, fully expecting a thank you from Peter. But it was very strange, for Peter looked at him very solemnly.

And then Peter asked him a question Ananias never expected to hear from him, for Peter asked him, "Ananias, is this all the money you have received for the sale of the land?"

Ananias looked at Peter. Why would he ask that question? Did he know something? He could not possibly know that he and Sapphira had decided to keep part of the money for themselves. Surely, Peter could not know that, for he had not said anything to Peter, and Sapphira would not have spoken to Peter about it either. Therefore, Peter could not possibly know anything. And he must keep up the deception.

So he said to Peter, "Yes, Peter, the money you have received is all the money that we received for the sale of the land."

Sadness came over Peter's face. "Ananias, you have lied because, in fact, part of the money that you have received is at your home right now waiting to be used for you to buy tools for yourself and jewellery for your wife. And you have only brought us part of the money, not the full amount. Now, Ananias, I want you to know that the money was yours and you could have done with it as you wished. But you have tried to deceive us. And you have lied not just to us, but you have lied to the Holy Spirit."

Ananias was so shocked when he heard Peter's words that he fell down and died. (Acts 5:1-5a).

In the meantime, Sapphira is waiting for her husband's return. She is excited for she just knows that he will come back with the words that the Apostles were so pleased with their gift. But then she is waiting and waiting.... Where is her husband?..... She has waited one hour... She has waited two hours..... He still has not returned. She decided she needs to go and see for herself where he husband is. She had better go to the place where the Apostles are staying. So that is what she does. She enters the home where they are staying and sees Peter waiting for her, it seems. And asks him where her husband is. He does not answer her question.

Instead he says to her, “Sapphira, is the money that your husband brought here earlier today, the amount that you have received for the sale of the land?” Sapphira is taken aback by his question. Why would Peter ask her that question? Had Anaias spoken to him and told him that they had kept some money for themselves? No, he would not have done so. She was sure Anaias had not exposed their deception. Therefore, she must keep up the deception as well.

So she said to Peter, “Yes, Peter, the money that my husband brought you this morning is all the money we received for the sale of the land.

Peter looked at her with sadness in his eyes. “Sapphira, you have lied. You and your husband agreed to deceive us by deciding you would keep part of the money for yourselves to buy tools for him and jewellery for you. And you decided you would give the rest to us. But you decided you would not share that with us, you would just pretend you were going to give us the full amount. And Sapphira, we want you to know the money was yours to do with as you pleased; you could have kept all of it, you could have given some of it or you could have given the whole amount. But you lied. You tried to look better in our eyes. But the Holy Spirit revealed to me your lies.”

When Sapphira heard these words she too fell down and died in great shock. (Acts 5:7-9).

These two believers did not have to sell their property. Moreover they did not have to give everything they had sold the property for. The land, as well as the money they had received for the land, was theirs and they could do with it as they wished. But they lied, trying to look better in the eyes of the other believers than they were. As Peter said, they lied not just to the other believers, but they lied to the Holy Spirit of God. God is a holy God, and He considers lying an evil act for which these two people had to pay a high price; their very lives. God’s standards were high then, but they have not changed, for God is still Holy God. This means that even today God expects us to live by His standards, and not by the standards of the world we live in.

Of course, what happened to Anaias and Sapphira became known to many people. And yet, many more people became believers, and were healed and delivered from demonic spirits (Acts 5:11-16). This caused the Jewish religious leaders to become very jealous, because they realised they were losing control over the people. All they could think of to do was to have these troublesome Apostles put in prison once again. Perhaps this time they would be more successful in silencing them. That is not quite what happened for, during the night, an angel came to the prison, and opened the jail doors for the Apostles. And he told them to go to the Temple Courts in the early morning, and share the Good News of Jesus Christ (Acts 5:19-20). And that is what they did (Acts 5:21a).

However, the angel had “forgotten” to tell the religious leaders about the jail breakout so in the morning the religious leaders got together and sent for the Apostles to appear before them (Acts 5:21b), only to be told that these men were no longer inside their prison cells, even though the prison was securely locked, and the guards were where they were supposed to be. How could that be? What had happened to these men? One of them remembered something and he shared that with the others, for not too long ago there should have been the Body of the Man Jesus in a tomb safely behind a large stone. But they were told it was no longer there, that this Man had risen, and had appeared to His followers (John 20:19). The truth was, there really was no

longer a Body inside that tomb. But they could not allow people believe that He really had risen, for if they did, then what would that mean for them in their position as religious leaders? So, at that time, they had allowed this “rumour” to go around that His Body had been stolen. But now these Apostles, these men who claimed that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, and were going around sharing that with everyone, had disappeared from the prison. Where could they be? What could have happened to them (Acts 5:22-24)?

The solution to their predicament came when they were told that the men they had put in prison the night before were now preaching in the Temple Courts (Acts 5:25). How they got there, no one could explain. And it certainly was a very embarrassing situation for the religious leaders.... Nevertheless, they decided they could not let these Apostles carry on with their preaching, but had to have these men appear before them. They also decided that they should not bring up this incident of the jail breakout, for that would not look good for them. Instead, they would just pretend the incident had not happened, and only tell them once again to stop speaking about this man Jesus. For these Apostles were determined to make it look as if they were guilty of this Man’s blood (Acts 5:27-28).

However, in response, Peter and the other Apostles replied that they must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). Their words caused the religious leaders to become so angry with them that they were ready to have them put to death. Thankfully, one of them, a man named Gamaliel, was able to calm the situation down (Acts 5:38-39). Consequently, the Apostles were not put to death, but only flogged. And afterwards, they were warned not to speak about Jesus ever again. However, these words fell on deaf ears for the Apostles knew they had to obey God rather than men, and God had made it very clear that they had to continue speaking about the Lord Jesus, and so they never stopped proclaiming the Good News that Jesus is the Christ.

The Holy Spirit’s Ministry Challenged

As the church continued to grow, some problems began to arise, and a plan was developed to deal with these challenges as we can read in Acts chapter 6:1-4 **In those days when the numbers of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”**

A group of deacons was selected to oversee the distribution of food. Their requirement was that they were full of wisdom and full of the Holy Spirit. Among the men chosen was a man named Stephen (Acts 6:5). And the Holy Spirit enabled him to do so much more than taking care of the distribution of food, for he preached the gospel, and performed miracles among the people (Acts 6:8). We would expect everyone to be very appreciative of the ministry of Stephen but that was not the case. In fact, false accusations were made against him and he was eventually brought before the religious court, the Sanhedrin, to prove his innocence (Acts 6:9-12).

Stephen used that opportunity to speak boldly, proving to them from their history that they were a stiff-necked people, just like their fathers had been, for they too resisted the Holy Spirit and, as a consequence, had murdered the Righteous One, the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts Chapter 7:2-53).

The religious leaders got so angry with Stephen that they stoned him to death (Acts 7:54 – Acts 8:1a).

One of the people present at his stoning was a young man named Saul. We will come back to him later on.

The Holy Spirit's Ministry Beyond Jerusalem

That day, things changed for the believers in Jerusalem for, on that day, persecution broke out, and all the believers fled, except the twelve Apostles, who stayed in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1b). One of the believers who fled was a man named Philip. He was, in fact, one of the deacons who had been taking care of the distribution of food among the widows. As he travelled to a city in Samaria, we would expect him, at least initially, to live a quiet life, so that no one would find out who he was, nor why he had gone there. After all, he had just had to flee Jerusalem because of the persecution that had broken out there. But is that the lifestyle he chose? Let's read Acts 8:5-8 to find out

Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and crippled were healed. So there was great joy in that city.

Far from being quiet, Philip began to minister right away. And the Holy Spirit empowered him to not only be able to clearly preach the Good News about Jesus Christ, He empowered him to do many miraculous signs, so that many people were healed and delivered. What an exciting time that was for the people in Samaria. The news of what was happening in Samaria travelled back to Jerusalem, so that even the twelve Apostles, who had remained behind in Jerusalem, heard that many people in Samaria had become believers because of the preaching of Philip. No doubt, they were thrilled with that great news. However, they knew as well they needed to make sure that what was happening over there truly was a work of the Holy Spirit, so Peter and John went to visit there (Acts 8:14-17).

After Peter and John arrived in Samaria, they realised that the people Philip had ministered to had become genuine believers and the Holy Spirit was residing in each one of them. However, these believers had not yet been empowered by the Holy Spirit in order for them to fulfil their God-given tasks. Therefore, Peter and John prayed over these believers in Samaria, so that they too would receive the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, just as the believers in Jerusalem had received the Baptism with the Holy Spirit at the Day of Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit's Ministry to Individuals

It is clear that Philip had a very successful ministry in that town Samaria. Therefore, we might expect the Holy Spirit want him to stay on, so that even more people can be reached by Christ. However, that is not what happened, as we can read in Acts 8:26

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

We can well imagine Philip saying to the angel, “Thank you for that message, angel. By the way, do you know what I am to do there? Oh, you don’t know. That’s fine. I’m sure it is very important so let me have a look at my diary.... Hmmmm... I see I have three days of evangelistic meetings planned. But after that I should be able to go to the Desert Road. You see, these evangelistic meetings are very important because we have invited many people to them and we believe that many people will come to faith in Christ Jesus and will be healed and delivered. Excuse me angel, you mean I am to go right now? But what about my meetings? And what about the people who are supposed to organise these meetings with me? They will be upset if I don’t attend their meetings. They may never ask me again....” Is that what Philip said? No! Philip, after having heard the words of the angel, simply obeyed and went to the Desert Road now knowing what he was to do there. As he was walking on that road, he noticed a chariot in the distance. And the Holy Spirit spoke to him and told him to walk alongside that chariot (Acts 8:27-29). And again Philip did not ask the Holy Spirit why he had to leave his successful ministry in Samaria where he had ministered to so many people to now just walk on this road and minister to one person. He had no such questions, no such comments. He simply came alongside the chariot and as he came alongside the chariot he heard a man reading a bible passage out loud and it was clear this man did not understand what he was talking about so Philip asked him would he like for him to explain the passage (Acts 8:30). The man gladly accepted, stopped the chariot, had Philip come in and Philip then explained the passage to him and shared the Gospel with him (Acts 8:31-35) (Isaiah 53:7-8)).

As they were travelling along the road they noticed some water. The man stopped the chariot, asked if he could be baptised and Philip gladly did so (Acts 8:36-38).

We would then expect the Holy Spirit to have Philip continue to travel for a least a little while with this man, so he might teach him further truths from the Word of God, but that is not what happened. For as soon as the man had been baptised, the Holy Spirit took Philip away. He obviously felt Philip’s task was done, and he no longer needed to remain with the man. But Philip had now other work to do, so the Holy Spirit removed him, took him to another city for ministry. And the man in the chariot carried on travelling to his home (Acts 8:39-40).

To return to the man Philip shared the gospel with at the road. As I said, Philip did not know who this man was, for the Holy Spirit had not revealed to whom he was leading him. Philip just obeyed the leading of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit knew how important it was for this man to hear the gospel, for he would be the key to bringing the gospel to his nation. So He made sure Philip left the city in Samaria at the right time and that he was at the right road to meet a chariot with this person in it, just at the time this man was reading a certain portion of the book of Isaiah. Talk about perfect timing..... Coincidence? I don’t think so. It was more likely a God-incidence.

The Holy Spirit’s Life Changing Ministry

In the meantime, other things were happening related to a man named Saul, who had been present at the time of the stoning of the deacon Stephen (Acts 7:59 – Acts 8:1a). Saul was one of the religious leaders and was very opposed to believers, as we can read in Acts chapter 9:1-2

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Saul believed that these followers of Jesus were a threat to Jewish society. He was sure that God was very pleased with him for going after them, and having them put in prison. Having learned that the teachings of Jesus had gone beyond Jerusalem, and had even influenced Jews in Damascus, he felt it his duty to go there and find these people, for he was totally convinced that God was as against these people as he was. And so he set off for Damascus. But then something happened he was totally unprepared for, as we can read in Acts chapter 9:3-4 **As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?"**

As I said, Saul was a very devout believer who loved God. His aim was to please God in whatever way he could. And he believed that finding these followers of Jesus and having them put in prison was greatly pleasing to God. He had done so already in Jerusalem. But then he had heard the news there were even followers of Jesus in Damascus. How dare they be there! And he determined he would go there to find them, bring them back to Jerusalem, and have them put in prison; stamp out this group of people. So one day, as he had prepared for his trip, he and some of his companions set off for Damascus. When they neared the city, a light from heaven came upon them, a very bright light. In fact, it was so bright it caused Saul to fall off his horse onto the ground.

Then Saul heard a Voice speak to him. And the words he heard he had never expected to hear for he heard the Voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" He was shocked to the core. He never expected to hear these words. Neither did he know who had spoken these words. But it was very clear that the One who had spoken these words to him was not at all pleased with his actions but was, in fact, very opposed to his actions. So who could it be that had spoken to him?

The Voice then spoke and said to him, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. And Saul, I still want you to go to Damascus. But not to take My followers back to Jerusalem and have them put in prison. Instead, you are to wait for My guidance" (Acts 9:5-6).

Saul was totally overwhelmed by his experience. By that time the bright light had gone back into heaven. But he was still very blinded by it. Moreover, he had become so weak in his body that his companions had to help him back on his horse. And they had to take him into the city. Not so long ago Saul had been a man totally in charge of his life, knowing full well his mission. But that was no longer the case. He had become a helpless man who did no longer know what he was to be about. His companions took him to the house of a man named Judas who lived in Straight Street. And there Saul spent the next three days seeking the Lord in prayer and fasting, that the Lord might be merciful to him, and that the Lord might show him His plans for his life (Acts 9:7-9).

While Saul was praying, the Lord gave him a vision of a man named Ananias, whom God had chosen to minister to him. Such a scene would have been unthinkable just a few days ago, for then Saul had been on his way to Damascus

to find just such people, and take them back to Jerusalem to be put in prison. But now God had selected one of these believers to pray over him. Truly, nothing is impossible with God (Matthew 19:26).

Having prepared Saul for his visit from Ananias, God next needed to prepare Ananias for his visit to Saul.

Ananias was very troubled. He had heard that this great persecutor of the Church, this man, Saul of Tarsus, was on his way to Damascus and might even have already arrived in the city, to take people like himself back to Jerusalem, and have them put in prison. As he sat in his chair trying to pray, he kept thinking what he should do about this situation. Perhaps he should go into hiding for a while, until this man Saul had gone back to Jerusalem. It was true of course, he was willing to give his life for Jesus. But he did not feel it was the time yet for him to die. There were so many people who still needed to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

As he was praying, the Lord appeared to him in a vision and spoke to him.

“Ananias.”

“Yes Lord.”

“Ananias, I want you to go to Judas on Straight Street.”

“Sure Lord. It will be very good for me to go for us to have a time of prayer and fellowship to encourage each other especially during these challenging days.”

“Ananias.”

“Yes Lord.” “I want you to go and pray for someone in Judas’ home.”

“Okay Lord. I can do that. I can pray for one of the brothers in Judas’ home.”

“Ananias, it is not one of the brothers that I have there. I want you to pray for a man named Saul” (Acts 9:10-12). “Lord, You cannot mean for me to pray for this man Saul? Lord, he is the persecutor of the Church. Lord, please, don’t You know who he is? Don’t You know that he has come from Jerusalem to Damascus to take people like myself back to Jerusalem and put us in prison? I cannot possibly go to Judas on Straight Street. Lord, You know I am obedient and I love You and I’ll do whatever you ask me. But don’t ask me to go to Judas on Straight Street and pray for this man Saul” (Acts 9:13-14).

The Lord patiently listened to Ananias’ outburst and then spoke again.

“Ananias I do want you to go to Judas on Straight Street and pray for this man Saul for I have a plan for this man” (Acts 9:15-16).

Then the Lord went back to heaven. The vision disappeared. Ananias, still sitting in his chair, realised something had happened to this man Saul. He did not know what. He did not know how it had happened. But he knew something had happened. This man was no longer the persecutor of the Church. This man had become a brother in Christ.

And so Ananias went to see Saul and prayed for him, as we can read in Acts 9:17. Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-Jesus who appeared to you as you were coming here, has sent me, so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Right away, Saul, having been born again and baptised with the Holy Spirit, showed the reality of the change in his life by preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ wherever he went (Acts 9:20). And Saul's conversion had a great effect upon the Church for it enabled the Church to enjoy a time of peace when many more men and women were added to the Church (Acts 9:31).

The Holy Spirit's Ministry to Gentiles

At that time the Apostle Peter was travelling throughout the country encouraging believers in places such as Lydda (Acts 9:32) as well as Joppa (Acts 9:43). In another city Caesarea lived a man named Cornelius, as we can read in Acts chapter 10:1

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.

Even though he was a Gentile, he followed the Jewish religious practices by regularly praying to the Jewish God and giving to the poor (Acts 10:2). God heard his prayers and saw his kindness towards the poor. And He was pleased but God knew that Cornelius was in need of hearing the Good News of Jesus Christ in order to be saved.

So God sent him an angel in a vision. That day, Cornelius was doing what he regularly did; he would take time out to pray. He would find his favourite place, which was a special chair, and he would sit in that chair, and he would pray to God. But that day was special, for on that day God sent him an angel in a vision. When Cornelius saw that vision, saw that angel, first of all he thought he had a dream. But then the angel spoke to him. So he knew it was real. And the angel called him by name, "Cornelius" (Acts 10:3).

Then the angel continued to talk to him by telling him to select some of his men and send them to a place called Joppa. And in Joppa they had to go to the house of a man named Simon the Tanner, for Simon had a visitor from Jerusalem, a man named Peter. And they were to ask Peter to return with them to Caesarea (Acts 10:4-6).

After the angel had given him his message, he went back to heaven, and the vision ended. Cornelius sat in his chair, amazed by what he had just experienced, for he realised that God knew him by name and that God cared for him. He knew too that he had been given a task: he had to send some men to Joppa, so he called for some of his most trusted men, and told them to prepare, and go to Joppa as soon as they were ready. And when they reached Joppa, they were to find the house of a man named Simon the Tanner, and ask for his guest Peter. And to make sure that Peter would return with them, for Peter would have a message from God for them (Acts 10:7-8).

The next day, when these men neared the city of Joppa, Peter was at the rooftop of the house of his friend Simon the Tanner. He was praying (Acts 10:9).

It was lunchtime. Peter was becoming hungry, so he asked someone to prepare a meal for him. While he was praying, God sent him a vision. The vision that God sent to Peter was very different from the vision that God had sent to Cornelius. For the vision that God sent to Peter was of a sheet that came down from heaven. And that sheet included all kinds of animals. What a mouthwatering invitation for Peter, since he was so very hungry. We would expect Peter to be very glad, and ready to eat, because a Voice even told him, "Peter, kill and eat." Peter expectantly looked at all these animals, thinking which animal he would choose. But then his face changed, for when he looked at these animals, he knew he could not eat all of them. So he said, "No" to this tantalising offer (Acts 10:10-14).

Why would he say, "No" to this offer from heaven? Because that sheet contained so-called unclean as well as clean animals, at least for Jewish people because, according to their dietary laws, they were not allowed to eat every animal. Peter was confused. Why would God send him a sheet with these animals, knowing full well that he was not allowed to eat all of them?

Then the Voice from heaven spoke again and said, “Peter, do not call anything impure what God has made clean” (Acts 10:15).

Then the sheet went back up into heaven. Peter was totally mystified. Was God trying to confuse him? Did God not know that he had always lived as a good Jew? And as a good Jew, even a hungry good Jew, he was certainly not going to eat certain animals, for that would have made him unholy. As he was thinking about this vision, he heard some voices outside the door of the house of his friend.

Then the Holy Spirit spoke to him and said, “Peter, go downstairs, receive these people, for I have sent them. Peter went downstairs, opened the door, and in front of him stood some men. They spoke to him and said, “Are you Peter?” He said, “Yes, I am.” So they told him, “We have come from Caesarea. And we have been sent by a man named Cornelius, who is a Roman Centurion.” When they had spoken these words, Peter understood his vision from heaven right away. He understood that these so-called clean and unclean animals had not been about so-called clean and unclean animals at all, but had been about so-called clean and unclean people, or Jews and Gentiles. For, according to Jewish belief, they were the clean people in the world and Gentiles were unclean people, with whom they could not communicate, and whose homes they could not enter. But, here in front of him were some Gentiles, and the Holy Spirit had told him he should receive them. And God had already spoken to him that he should not call anything impure which God considered clean. Therefore, in God’s eyes, these men were acceptable. And, likewise, Peter should accept them. Therefore, he received these men into the home of his friend. Then they told him they would like him to go back with them to Caesarea, for they believed that he had a word from God for them. The men stayed overnight, ready to go back to Caesarea the next morning (Acts 10:17-23a).

That night, Peter would have had very little sleep. He would have been thinking about what had happened that day. A great transformation had taken place in his mind, and in his heart. In the morning, he had been like any other Jew; he had believed that in order to be pleasing to God, he should remain separate from Gentiles. But, by the evening, God had so changed his mind and his heart that he knew he should receive them as brothers in Christ.

The next morning he, some other Jewish brothers, and the men sent by Cornelius, set off for Caesarea. When they arrived at the home of Cornelius the day after, a large group of people were waiting for the arrival of this man Peter, whom they knew would have a message from God for them. As soon as Peter entered Cornelius’ home, Cornelius shared his vision with him (Acts 10:23b-33). Peter then understood the reason for his coming, as we can read in Acts 10:34-35

Then Peter began to speak, “I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”

He then explained to them the Good News of Jesus Christ. And all those present listened attentively, and took his message to heart. And the Holy Spirit came upon them in power as a sign that they were all born again. Peter, and the other Jewish men who had come with him, recognised that these Gentiles had been baptised with the Holy Spirit in the same way that they had been baptised with the Holy Spirit at the Day of Pentecost (Acts 10:36-48).

What an amazing day that was, not just in the life of Cornelius and those with him. No, this was an amazing day in the life of Peter and the other Jewish believers as well. In fact, it was an amazing day in the life of the Church, for it started a new chapter in the life of the Church. But was the Church prepared for this new chapter?

The Holy Spirit's Unifying Ministry

The answer is: No, the Church was not quite ready for this new chapter, as we know from Acts 11:1-3

The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticised him and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

The Jewish believers from Jerusalem had heard news about Peter. Rumours were going around that Peter, who was one of the Apostles, had entered the home of a Gentile and had eaten with him. They could not believe that Peter could have done such a thing, especially because he was one of the Apostles, who were the examples to the other Jewish believers. And they all knew that as a God-fearing Jew, you remain separate from Gentiles, in order to be pleasing to God. But then Peter was supposed to have gone into the home of a Gentile. It could be that this was just a story that had been fabricated to make Peter look bad in their eyes. Deep in their hearts that is what they were hoping for. But, be that as it may, they needed to know the truth. So, when Peter came back to Jerusalem, the Jewish believers organised a meeting to ask him about what might have happened. That day, when the meeting was organised, the believers sat down and Peter stood in front of them. And he looked at them with eyes of love. These were his brothers in Christ. He knew them so well. And he knew exactly what they were thinking.

For not too long ago he had been like them; he too had believed to be pleasing to God he had to be separate from Gentiles. But then God had transformed his life. He knew too that God could do the same for these believers. But it would need careful explanation what had happened to him. So, he began to tell them the story of the time when he had been at Simon the Tanner's home in Joppa. He told them he had been at a time of prayer and God had given him a vision of a sheet from heaven. In that sheet were all kinds of animals. He was told to kill and eat. And he had said "No" to that offer even though he was very hungry at that time. The reason he had said "NO" to that offer was because there were clean and unclean animals in that sheet. And, as a good Jew he could not eat all of these animals. But then the Voice continued speaking to him and had told him, "Peter, do not call anything impure that God has made clean." Peter told them that he was totally puzzled by this vision, and that he was thinking about it, when he heard some voices outside the house where he was staying. And the Holy Spirit told him to go downstairs, receive these men, for He had sent them. As Peter is sharing his story with them, he watches the faces in front of him, and realises that the Holy Spirit is at work through his words; their faces are beginning to soften. But he knows too, transformation has not yet fully taken place, so he continues.

He then told them, "I opened the door, saw some men. They told me they had come from Caesarea and had been sent by a man named Cornelius, a Roman Centurion. I then understood that my vision had not been about so-called clean and unclean animals but had been about so-called clean and unclean people for God has shown me that Jews and Gentiles are acceptable and that, likewise, I should accept Jews and Gentiles as well." He continued to see their faces soften, but there was more for him to share, so he went on to say, "Because of what I believed, I went with them to Caesarea the next morning. When I entered the home of the Gentile Cornelius, this Roman Centurion, he told me that God had spoken to him saying that he, Peter, would have a message from God for him." And Peter said, "I then understood that I was to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with them, which I did. And when I was still sharing with them, when I was still preaching to them, when I was still explaining this message to them, the Holy Spirit came upon them in the same way that He had come upon us at the Day of Pentecost (Acts 11:4-16). And I then fully understood that God accepts Jews and Gentiles alike in His plan of salvation, and who was I to oppose it?" (Acts 11:17) The faces of those in front of him totally transformed, for they too then understood that God wanted to include Gentile believers in the Church. And they were so thrilled with that news (Acts 11:18).

Did these believers fully understand what their recognition that Gentiles were to be included in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ would mean for them? I doubt it. But there would have been a peace in their hearts, and a joy, and an expectation of what was to come, for they just knew God had great things in mind for His Church. Of course, they did not know that these great things included your salvation and mine.

And so the believers began to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with other Jews as well as Gentiles as led by the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:19-26).

The Holy Spirit's Miraculous Ministry

At that time, the Church did face some real challenges for the Apostle James was imprisoned and put to death, as we can read in Acts 12:1-2

It was about this time that king Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.

When king Herod realised that the death of James was pleasing to the religious Jews, he decided he should take further action, in order to remain in their favour. So he thought what he should do, and the idea came to him that he should select Peter, and have him put in prison, for Peter was one of the main leaders of the followers of Jesus. That really would please the religious leaders, if Peter were silenced. So he had Peter arrested and put in prison. But king Herod remembered that, not so long ago when Peter and the other Apostles had been in prison, they had been set free somehow, and were found preaching in the Temple Courts the next morning. And the rumour had been flying around that this had happened because of an angel (Acts 5:17-25).

Be that as it may, he was going to make sure that Peter would not be able to escape prison, so he had him guarded by four squads of soldiers (Acts 12:3-4).

The night before the trial, king Herod went to sleep totally at ease, for he was convinced that even heaven could not help Peter because he was guarded by four soldiers and therefore his prisoner would still be in his prison cell the next morning. But God had been watching king Herod's activities and God had a plan of His own. So when it was dark, God began to set His plan into action by sending an angel to the prison where Peter had been taken, and where he was guarded by four soldiers. However, God had "forgotten" to tell Peter about His plan, so Peter had gone to sleep (Acts 12:6).

After all, he was very tired. Nor was he going anywhere, since he had four soldiers to guard him. But, as he was having this wonderful sleep, it felt like someone was disturbing him very rudely by shaking him. However, that person, that being, seemed to be an angel. And it seemed as if his chains had come off (Acts 12:7).

But he was so tired. And tomorrow he had to go and stand before king Herod. And he knew that he would have to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to king Herod. But this angel kept pushing him and prodding him. And the angel told him, "Peter, put on your clothes. And put on your sandals. And wrap your cloak around you. And come with me. Hurry! Come with me. Hurry!" (Acts 12:8)

So Peter and the angel went outside the prison onto the street. Then the angel disappeared (Acts 12:9-10).

Peter looked around him. It's real. It was not a dream. He really had seen an angel. The angel had released him. And he was really outside the prison (Acts 12:11).

In that case he must hurry, for he knows that the believers are meeting at the house of Mary, no doubt praying for his release. He should tell them that their prayers have been answered. No doubt he should do so quickly, for his escape will soon be found out, and soldiers will be sent out to find him (Acts 12:12).

As Peter was making his way to the home of Mary, the mother of Mark, the believers had indeed gathered for prayer. They were praying that God would give Peter strength and wisdom for the trial that was to come in the morning. As they were praying, they heard a loud knocking at the door. Someone was at the door. Who could that be at this late hour of the night? "Rhoda, please could you check who is at the door? But be careful. Don't let just anyone come in...." "What do you mean, Rhoda? You think it is Peter outside the door? (Acts 12:13-14)

No, Rhoda, that cannot be. That is not possible. He is securely guarded by four soldiers this time. You must have seen his angel instead. But, oh please go again because that person keeps knocking at the door...." "It is you Peter! You have been released from prison" (Acts 12:15-16).

Yes, it was Peter who had been knocking at the door all that time and not his angel. The believers were overjoyed to see him and heard from him what had happened to him. However, it was not safe for him to stay, so he left soon thereafter for another place (Acts 12:17).

The Holy Spirit's Sending Ministry

The Church in Antioch was blossoming, as led by the Holy Spirit. One day, the leaders had come together to seek direction. As they were asking the Lord for guidance, the Holy Spirit impressed upon these leaders to select Barnabas and

Saul for a specific task that He had for them. Consequently, these two men were sent out by the leadership of the Church and set off for the island of Cyprus under the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-4).

They eventually arrived in a place called Paphos (Acts 13:6).

That's where they then began to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the people who lived there. The Pro-Consul of Cyprus lived in Paphos. His name was Sergius Paulus, and he heard about Barnabas and Saul. He decided he would like to meet them (Acts 13:7).

However, Sergius Paulus had an assistant, a man named Bar-Jesus or Elymas. Since Bar-Jesus heard that Sergius Paulus wanted to invite Barnabas and Saul to meet with them, he went to speak with Sergius Paulus, and told him not to listen to these two men (Acts 13:8).

Was that because he was concerned for the well-being of Sergius Paulus, and did not want him to be misled by their message? Or was it because he had other reasons? The truth was, Bar-Jesus was a Jewish sorcerer and a false prophet. But the Pro-Consul Sergius Paulus did not know that. Sergius Paulus trusted Bar-Jesus, who had a very comfortable life, and a place in society. He knew that if Sergius Paulus allowed these two men to come and speak to him, they might just expose him for what he really was, and that could never be allowed. Sergius Paulus listened to Bar-Jesus but, nevertheless, said he would want to listen to Barnabas and Saul as well. So, he had them come to the Palace. As they were making their way to the Palace, Sergius Paulus invited Bar-Jesus to attend that meeting as well. So Barnabas and Saul went to the Palace to meet with Sergius Paulus and Bar-Jesus. When they entered the room where these two men were, the Holy Spirit spoke to Saul, and showed him that Bar-Jesus was a Jewish sorcerer and a false prophet. So Saul said to him, "You are an enemy of everything that is right and God will cause you to be blind for a season" (Acts 13:9-11a).

At that same moment, Bar-Jesus was no longer able to see. Just as Saul, or Paul as he is sometimes called, said would happen. The Pro-Consul watched in amazement. No doubt, he was very thankful that the man he had trusted so much had been exposed for who he really was; a sorcerer and a false prophet. He knew too that the message that Barnabas and Paul had preached to him about the Lord Jesus was the truth, and he believed (Acts 13:11b-12). What the Holy Spirit had planned all along had happened; Bar-Jesus had been exposed as a false prophet and the Pro-Consul, the Governor Sergius Paulus, had become a believer, so that he could be used as an instrument by the Holy Spirit for the spreading of the Gospel in that region. Does that mean that the Holy Spirit was only concerned about so-called important people, since He could use them in ways that He was not able to use so-called less important people? Let's look at the next story to see if that is the case.

It was time for Paul and Barnabas to continue their travels. One of the cities the Holy Spirit led them to was Lystra. No doubt, the Holy Spirit would lead them once again to just the right person to start their ministry, just as he had done in Paphos. And we can read in Acts 14:8 to whom He was leading them.

In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked.

Could that really be the person the Holy Spirit intended them to meet, since obviously he was not a very influential person? It seems he was indeed the person the Holy Spirit had specifically selected them to meet in Lystra. Paul, led by the Spirit, seemed to focus on him in particular after he had been preaching, for he looked at him, and told him to stand up on his feet and walk! That is exactly what this man did (Acts 14:9-10).

So we see then that the Holy Spirit cared about all kinds of people, whether rich or poor, important or unimportant and He would choose whoever He wished as His instrument, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. The Holy Spirit has not changed, and He still cares for every one of us and wants to use every one of us, whether rich or poor, important or unimportant, as His instrument to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others.

The Holy Spirit's Clarifying Ministry

Afterwards, Paul and Barnabas travelled to some other cities, and eventually ended up back in Jerusalem, where they met with the believers as well as the Apostles. Difficulties had arisen related to the question of whether or not Gentile believers had to adopt the Mosaic Law in order for them to be saved, as we can read in Acts 15:4, 5 and 6

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers, who belonged to the party of the Pharisees, stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." The Apostles and elders met to consider their question.

This meeting was a very significant event in the life of the Church, for the decisions made that day would affect the Church that day and thereafter. The Holy Spirit, who was present at the Birth of the Church at the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), was very much in charge of what took place that day, and led Peter to share his experience in the home of a Gentile named Cornelius (Acts 10:34-48).

And Peter reminded these Jewish believers that God had accepted these Gentiles just as much as He had accepted them, who were of Jewish descent, by giving the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles in the same way that He had given the Holy Spirit to them, as a sign that both Jews and Gentiles alike were saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 15:7-11).

Based on Peter's words, the Church decided not to make it difficult for Gentiles to become believer (Acts 15:12-19).

Led by the Holy Spirit, they proposed that Gentile believers should simply abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. A letter was prepared with these guidelines in mind and this letter was sent to the church at Antioch where it was received with gladness (Acts 15:20-30).

This letter still affects us today as believers for all of us here are Gentile believers. And aren't we grateful that we do not have to follow the Mosaic Law in order to be pleasing to God?

The Holy Spirit's Continuing Ministry

Sometime later, Paul and Barnabas planned to go on another trip to visit believers in various places. Barnabas wanted to take along a young believer called Mark. He had been with them on a previous trip, but had left them halfway (Acts 13:13). Therefore, Paul did not think it was wise to take him with them (Acts 15:36-38). Paul and Barnabas could not come to an agreement as to what to do with Mark, so they separated. This disagreement may have happened in part because of their particular personalities and gifts. Paul was very focused on ministry, and he could not afford to have someone on his team he could not rely on. Barnabas' special gift was that of encouraging others (Acts 9:23:27; Acts 11:25).

Very likely, that is why he wanted to give Mark another chance, but Paul did not want to risk it. However, Barnabas did the right thing by taking Mark with him, for eventually he proved very helpful to Paul (II Timothy 4:11). And Mark is the author of the Gospel of Mark.

Thankfully, God continued to bless the ministries of these two men, despite their disagreement. Both men ended up selecting their own partner with whom to travel. In the case of Paul, he had Silas travel with him, and later on a young disciple named Timothy joined them. They tried to enter certain regions, but the Holy Spirit prevented them from going there (Acts 16:6-7).

We don't know why the Holy Spirit did not allow them to go to these areas at that time, for He did not tell them why this was so. It seems Paul did not question the Holy Spirit why they were not allowed to go to these places; they simply obeyed by not going. And what a great example that is to us. However, they knew they should not just go home, for they were called to preach the gospel. As they continued to wait for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they discovered which place they were to go, as we can read in Acts 16:9-10

During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Having shown Paul where they were not to go, the Holy Spirit next showed him where he was to go; he was to go to Macedonia. Having been given direction Paul, set off for his destination, Philippi, which was the leading city of Macedonia. Once again, we have here an example of someone obeying the Holy Spirit, even when it may not have made sense to him. And it reminds us of the example of Philip, when he was told to leave his very successful ministry in Samaria to go to a particular road in the desert, where he met with just one person in a chariot (Acts 8:26-29).

These examples are for us to learn from, for the Holy Spirit wants to guide us as much as He guided them. The question is: Are we as willing to listen and obey, even if His direction does not make sense to us? Or are we more likely to put up an argument and follow our own counsel, for it may seem to be more logical to us to go the way we have decided?

As for Paul, after arriving in Philippi, he set out to find a group of worshippers. His custom was to always visit the synagogue in every town that he went to. However, there was no synagogue in Philippi, which would have meant there were not sufficient Jewish men to set up a synagogue. Did that mean the Holy Spirit had made a mistake by leading him there? Not at all, for the Holy Spirit did

have a group of worshippers in that city for which He had chosen Paul to minister to. But these worshippers could not establish a synagogue according to Jewish Tradition, because they were women. Nevertheless, these women loved God and wanted to come together for prayer and worship, so they met at the river. And the Holy Spirit knew exactly where these worshippers met each Sabbath Day, so He led Paul to these women (Acts 16:13-14)

We may not realise the tremendous change that had taken place in Paul's life since his Damascus experience (Acts 9:1-5), for him to be willing to speak with these women at the river. Before his conversion, he had been a very zealous Pharisee (Philippians 3:5), and Pharisees did not communicate with women. But here, we find Paul preaching the Good News of Jesus to a group of women. And the Holy Spirit used the words of Paul to touch the heart of one of these women in particular; a woman named Lydia. That day, she became a follower of Jesus. Moreover, she opened her home to Paul and his companions, so they had a place to stay while ministering in Philippi, for Paul knew his ministry in Philippi had not yet ended (Acts 16:15).

There were more people who needed to hear the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ so, every day, he and Silas would go out and share whenever they had the opportunity.

As they were going around the town a young girl followed them. And she had something amazing to say, for she said, "Listen to these men! They are servants of the Most High God. And they know the way to be saved (Acts 16:17).

We would expect Paul and Silas to be very pleased with her help, and thankful to the Holy Spirit for having sent her to them. In particular, because this young girl was from the area, would have been known by many people, and therefore would have encouraged many people to listen to their message. But one day, after she had followed them for many days already, Paul suddenly stopped in the middle of his preaching, turned around, looked at this young slave girl, and spoke to her. Was he perhaps inviting her to join their ministry team? No, not exactly. Moreover, he did not really speak to her, he spoke to a demonic spirit that was inside her, and he commanded this demonic spirit to come out of her in the Name of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:18).

And the amazing thing is that demonic spirit left her. Why did Paul do such a thing? Because the Holy Spirit had shown him that He was not the Source behind the girl's words, but that these words had been inspired by a demonic spirit. Consequently, anyone who had come to believe in Jesus through listening to her would not have become a true believer in Jesus Christ. We need that same discernment today, for we need to know that those we listen to are led by the Holy Spirit, and not by a false spirit.

No doubt, the crowd who had watched what had happened to this young girl, would have been amazed. They knew her. At least, many of them would have known her, and would have known that she had always been able to know facts about people. But they did not know that this was because of a demonic spirit in her. Neither did they know that the Lord Jesus, about whom Paul and Silas had been preaching, had authority over this demonic spirit. So the people must have been amazed, when they saw this young girl released from this demonic spirit, and would have been very happy for her. However, not everyone in Philippi was happy that this young girl had been set free from

this evil spirit. Those who were not happy with what had happened to her were her owners. In fact, her owners were furious with Paul. You see, so far, they had been able to use this young girl to earn money, since she was able to predict things for people. Because Paul had set her free from this demonic spirit, she was no longer able to make predictions, and consequently there was going to be financial loss for them. They did not care about this young slave girl. They only cared that she was able to make them money. Now Paul and Silas had put a stop to that. These men needed to be punished. They needed to be taught a lesson to never do such a thing again. So the owners decided they should be thrown in jail to teach them a lesson (Acts 16:19-23).

We would think that Paul and Silas may well have felt very discouraged. After all, they knew that the Holy Spirit had led them to Philippi, where He had led them to preach to Lydia and to the other women. Furthermore, He had led them to preach to other people, when Paul had cast out a demonic spirit from a young slave girl in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit. They might have expected His protection of them. But, it seems He had allowed them to be beaten and thrown in prison instead. What good could they do in prison, since they were now locked up, and would not be able to go out to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which had been the very reason for their coming to Philippi. We may think so, but it seems Paul and Silas did not feel abandoned by the Holy Spirit, even in their suffering, as we can know from Acts chapter 16:25

At about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

They may not have known exactly why God had allowed them to be put in prison, but they believed that God had a purpose for them to be there. After all, they had been called by God to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ wherever they went. Perhaps God could use them in this prison, even though their feet were fastened in stocks, making it impossible for them to freely move about. But they knew they could trust God to make the impossible possible, for nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37).

And God did make the way for them to preach by allowing an earthquake to shake the prison. This caused all the prison doors to open and everyone's chains to come off. What an opportunity for the prisoners to escape. But, miraculously, none of them moved; they all stayed in their cells (Acts 16:26-28).

They had experienced the Presence of the Holy Spirit in prison, because of the worship of Paul and Silas. Their prison had become a place of worship, a place of peace beyond what they had ever known in their lives. Paul and Silas had begun to show these prisoners that true freedom is possible, even when in prison.

Because of this experience, these prisoners had a taste of inner freedom, which had nothing to do with them being in or out of prison. Therefore, they did not feel the need to run away. So it is for us; true freedom can only be found in Jesus Christ and does not depend on our circumstances (John 8:36).

The earthquake woke the jailer up as well. He had not stayed around at the time when Paul and Silas had been worshipping the night before. He had simply put these two prisoners in their cells, and afterwards had gone home for dinner (Acts 16:23-24).

He had then gone to bed for a good night's sleep because, in the morning, he would have to go back to take care of his duties in the prison. But then the

earthquake had rudely awakened him. Fear set in that the prison may have been damaged by this earthquake. Moreover, the cell doors may all have opened up. That would mean that all the prisoners would have escaped, and he would be made responsible. So he ran to the jail, only to have his worst fears confirmed, for all the cell doors were indeed open. He might as well kill himself. But at the very moment he was about to take his life, the voice of the prisoner Paul rang out through the prison saying to him, “Do not kill yourself for we are all here” (Acts 16:26-28).

The jailer could not believe his ears. Could that really be true? He decided to check it, so he looked in every cell and indeed all the prisoners were still there! Moreover, each one of them looked peaceful, for the atmosphere in the prison had become so peaceful. This must be because of the two new prisoners of last night. He remembered that he had treated them so roughly. Would it be possible for him to make some amends? Yes, he knew just what to do; he would take them to his home, and wash the wounds they had received when they had been flogged the day before. So he took them to his home and he gently washed their wounds and put ointment on them. Then he asked if they would they share the message they had been preaching in the city every day with him and his household. Of course, Paul and Silas gladly did so. So they had the jailer and his family sit down, then began to share the wonderful news that God knew them, that God loved them, and that He loved them so much He had sent His Son to die for them on the Cross. So that day the jailer and his family received forgiveness of their sins, and became followers of the Lord Jesus (Acts 16:29-34).

The Holy Spirit had led Paul to Philippi knowing full well that it would mean imprisonment for him and Silas. However, He knew too it would mean the jailer and his family would hear the truth about Jesus. Just like the Holy Spirit allowed Paul and Silas to suffer, so that a jailer and his family would hear the gospel, He may allow us to go through difficulties and hardships in order that we may have an opportunity to share the gospel with others.

The Holy Spirit’s Discerning Ministry

Some time later Paul and Silas carried on their journey. One of the places they visited was Athens. While walking through the city, Paul was greatly disturbed by the many temples, as we can read in Acts 17:16

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.

How did Paul deal with these idols? Did he go into the temples and physically try to destroy them? No, for that would have been of no use. Paul knew that in order for people to give up their idols, they would need a change of heart and that could only happen if they heard the gospel. So, Paul went among the people, and preached the good news of Jesus Christ to them. However, he was very aware of the fact that he was dealing with a different audience than when going into a synagogue.

Therefore, he adapted his approach by speaking to them about an altar he had seen in their city, which had the inscription on it that said: “To an unknown God.” Paul used these words, which would have been familiar to the people listening to him, to reveal who this unknown God was, namely the Lord of heaven and earth who does not live in temples built by men, and who one day will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed (Acts 17:17-31).

The Holy Spirit used Paul's words to stir the hearts of those who heard his message. Some opposed his message but others accepted his message and became followers of Jesus Christ (Acts 17:32-34).

The Holy Spirit's Ongoing Ministry

After having spent some time in Athens, Paul went to a city called Corinth. There too, opposition arose against him that may have caused him to wonder whether or not he should stay in that city. The Lord must have been aware of his anxiety, as we can learn from Acts 18:9-10

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."

Even the mighty Apostle Paul could sometimes be taken over by fear, as may have happened in this situation, so God came to reassure him not be afraid, and to continue his ministry there, for He was going to protect him. These words so strengthened Paul that he continued his teaching and preaching ministry in Corinth for another year-and-a-half. However, he eventually left, and travelled to various other places. One of these was Ephesus. While there, he met some believers, as we can read in Acts 19:1-6

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the One coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Paul asked these believers a very interesting question; he asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. Why would he ask such a question? This was, no doubt, because he sensed something was lacking, and he wanted to find out what exactly that was. His question was the right one, for it revealed that they had never even heard of the Holy Spirit. As Paul continued questioning them, he learned that they had only received John's Baptism, which was a baptism performed by John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus (Matthew 3:11).

These believers did not yet know that the One John had spoken of, the Lord Jesus, had already come, had already died on the cross for their sins, had already been raised back to life and had gone back to heaven from where He had sent the Holy Spirit to earth to reside within believers and to empower them for their God-given task. No doubt, Paul then explained the gospel message in all its fullness to them whereafter he baptised them in the name of the Lord Jesus.. Furthermore, he prayed for them to receive the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, and consequently they spoke in tongues, and prophesied, as a sign that Jesus had indeed baptised them with the Holy Spirit. Paul would have recognised that this baptism was a genuine baptism, for their experience would have been like his own experience when a believer named Ananias had come to pray for him in Damascus some time ago (Acts 9:17).

The Holy Spirit's Resurrection Ministry

Eventually it was time for Paul to move on once again, so he set off for other places, one of them being Troas. While there, he met with a group of believers in one of their homes, as we can read in Acts 20:7

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day he kept on talking until midnight.

Paul had much to share with these believers, because he was about to leave them, and he wanted to make sure they fully understood the Good News of Jesus Christ, so that they, in turn, would be able to share it with those the Lord would put on their path. So he kept on talking and talking, because he was so concerned that they would not only be able to share the gospel properly, but that they would be prepared for whatever difficulties and challenges might come their way. So he kind of forgot about the time, and it was getting later and later (Acts 20:7).

One of the believers, a young man named Eutychus, was seated in one of the window seats. He was so eager to learn all that Paul was teaching, and it was so wonderful to have the Apostle Paul himself there to teach them. But he was becoming a little tired. After all, it was getting late, and he had been up since dawn. Maybe he could just close his eyes for a moment. He would still be able to listen very carefully. So Eutychus drifted off into a slumber, which turned into a deep sleep. The next moment, a loud crash was heard outside. The believers realised that Eutychus had fallen out of the window onto the pavement below. They rushed downstairs fearing the worst. Their worst fears were confirmed when they saw his lifeless body lying on the ground (Acts 20:9).

The Apostle Paul followed after them. The Holy Spirit had spoken to him to place himself on the body of this young man, and to pray, for the Holy Spirit had shown him that he would live. So, Paul stayed on that body while praying, and the believers surrounded him in prayer. Then the time came, as they kept praying and believing the Lord would create a miracle, colour began to come back into the young man's cheeks. Then he opened his eyes. Soon thereafter Paul was able to lift him up from the ground. He had truly come back to them (Acts 20:10).

The believers were overjoyed, and so grateful to the Lord for the miracle of this young man! By that time they were all fully awake, so they all went back upstairs. Paul continued his teaching until the morning, for there was so much in his heart he still needed to share with them (Acts 20:11).

The Holy Spirit's Guiding Ministry

Afterwards, Paul left for Jerusalem, for he knew the Holy Spirit was leading him to go there. On his way to Jerusalem, he arranged for a meeting with the elders from the church in Ephesus, and shared with them his urge to go to there (Acts 20:22-23)

Even though believers tried to persuade Paul not to go to Jerusalem, he would not change his mind (Acts 20:37-38; Acts 21:3-4; Acts 21:11-15)

As expected, once Paul arrived in Jerusalem very soon opposition followed, including a plot to kill him, as we can read in Acts 23:12

The next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.

However, the plot was discovered, and it was decided that, for Paul's safety, he

should be taken to Caesarea to be placed under the protection of the governor, a man named Felix (Acts 23:31-33).

Paul knew that the Holy Spirit had preserved his life by having him taken to Caesarea, so that he could present the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ to governor Felix. So when the governor sent for him, Paul shared with him the issue most in his heart: faith in Christ Jesus (Acts 24:24).

For two years, Paul patiently and consistently shared the gospel with Felix. We do not know if Felix ever accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour, but we do know that God cared greatly for Felix by allowing Paul to be taken to him as a prisoner, so that he could hear the gospel over a two-year period. Did Felix ever appreciate who it was that God had sent him? I doubt it. To him Paul was, very likely, nothing more than a Jew, who had issues with other Jews, that he did not grasp. Sadly, he will not have understood that he had been listening to the greatest Apostle who ever lived, and who wrote most of the New Testament.

God is no respecter of persons and cares as much about you as He did about Felix. Just as the Holy Spirit led Paul to Felix so he could minister to him, similarly the Holy Spirit may send someone in your life to minister to you. The question is: are you open for the Holy Spirit to send someone into your life, to help you grow in your faith, even if that person is perhaps not someone you would have chosen? Paul was very likely not Felix's choice to be ministered to, but he was God's choice for him. Likewise, we may not always appreciate the choice of person the Holy Spirit sends us, for they may not be like us. Therefore, we may not be that comfortable with that person. Nevertheless, we must be careful not to reject those the Holy Spirit may send us.

After the two-year period, another governor took the place of Felix, a man named Porcius Festus (Acts 24:27).

He, too, had Paul appear before him who then asked to be sent to Rome to appear before Caesar (Acts 25:11).

Festus was willing to grant his request but, before doing so, had Paul appear before some very important visitors, king Agrippa and his wife Bernice, who had come to pay their respects to him, as we can read in Acts 25:23

The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.

Once again the Holy Spirit had been at work behind the scenes, so that Paul would have an opportunity to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who were in need of hearing it. In this case, his listeners were governor Festus, as well as Festus' guests, king Agrippa and his wife Bernice (Acts 26:1-23).

All three of them were people of great importance. Nevertheless, Paul wished they would become like him, as we can read in Acts 26:29

.... I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am except for these chains.

Paul had been a Pharisee, and as such he had been a person of great importance in Jewish society. But his life had been totally transformed by the Lord Jesus. Consequently, he had given up his position as a Pharisee, for he had realised that this position was, in fact, worth nothing. In its place, he had become a bond servant of the Lord Jesus. And he knew his new position would bring him great rewards, not in this life, but in eternity. He also longed for Festus, king Agrippa

and his wife Bernice to become servants of the Lord Jesus, so they too could have eternal rewards.

If Paul were here today, he would give us that same message, for we are as much in need of salvation today, whether or not we have an important function in this world. Christ died for all people, whatever their race, their status in life, or their gender. Therefore, whoever turns to Him will be saved.

The Holy Spirit's Travelling Ministry

Eventually Paul was put on a ship for Rome as we can read in Acts 27:1
When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment.

Unfortunately, he, and those with him, suffered a shipwreck (Acts 27:39-41). Thankfully all the people on board, including Paul, were able to swim to a nearby beach belonging to a small island called Malta (Acts 27:42-44). The Lord had spared Paul's life once again. Nevertheless, he was now seemingly in the wrong place for he was not supposed to be in Malta, he was supposed to be in Rome. Or did the Holy Spirit have a purpose in him spending some time in Malta? Paul would have been confident that this so-called detour had been allowed by the Holy Spirit for a particular reason and that sooner or later he would find out why he had ended up in Malta, instead of Rome. It did not take too long for him to discover the purpose of him being at Malta. The chief official, a man named Publius, invited Paul to his home. His father was very unwell so Paul prayed for him and he was healed (Acts 28:7-8).

The news of the healing of this man spread throughout the island and many more sick people were brought to Paul to be healed (Acts 28:9). No doubt, Paul shared then with the people of Malta who the Source was behind all these healings. Thereby giving the people an opportunity to turn from worshipping false idols to worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ.

After having ministered in Malta for three months, they found another ship that was able to take them to Rome (Acts 28:11).

This time he did reach his destination without any interruption (Acts 28:14). While in Rome, he was allowed to live in his own home (Acts 28:16), and here too the Holy Spirit opened doors for him to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to Jews, as well as to Gentiles, as we can read in Acts 28:30-31
For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

He lived in Rome for two years before being released because of lack of evidence against him. However, some years later Paul was again imprisoned and, at that time, he was beheaded.

Conclusion

The Book of Acts is truly the Book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit who, either overtly or covertly, directed the lives of the believers. Wherever He was at work, we have seen Him do a number of things:

1. He convicted people of their sins and had them come to faith in Christ Jesus.
2. He exposed the hardness of hearts of others.

3. He healed people.
4. He delivered people from demonic spirits.

The Holy Spirit is not less powerful today and will do the same work through us today, if we are willing and obedient.