



OHBC MEMORY VERSE – WEEK #46

THIS WEEK'S VERSE: I CORINTHIANS 1:10

“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

Why I Corinthians 1:10?

Because of the tremendous emphasis and priority God gives to our unity in the body in this verse!

Suppose God somehow let you know that He wanted to use you to help straighten out a struggling, carnal church that was plagued with horrendous sin and doctrinal problems. They are dealing with such issues as:

- People participating in communion stone cold drunk!
- A case of incest in the church of which everybody in the church is aware, and is making light of it!
- New believers divorcing their spouses because they aren't saved!
- False doctrine concerning the resurrection!
- False doctrine concerning spiritual gifts!
- Believers in the church suing other believers in the church!
- The misuse and abuse of liberty in Christ!
- A “women's lib” movement in the church!
- Believers factioned off and divided over everything from who had won them to Christ and/or baptized them, to which one of their leaders preaching they preferred.

If it fell your lot to give such a church spiritual direction, what in the world would you say, and where in the world would you even start? That is precisely the role God had for the Apostle Paul when He inspired him to write his first letter to the church at Corinth. All of the above problems were going on in this one local church!

So, if you were given Paul's assignment, how would you prioritize addressing the nine things in that list? What would be the first thing? What would be the last thing?

It is interesting to note that the thing that most of us would have probably addressed last, or certainly in the bottom few, is the first thing Paul addresses: the problem of division in the church! And he does so with an incredible passion!

Notice how he begins in verse 10: “Now I beseech you...”

He stresses the importance of this issue through the usage of the tremendously powerful word “beseech.” Paul is not casually mentioning something that he thinks might be nice here. The word “beseech” is more than simply asking. It is pouring your heart out and begging!

Next Paul says, “...brethren.”

He reminds them that God had not simply called them to attend the same local church, but they had become brothers and sisters with the other people in the church, because they all had the same Father!

Then he adds, “...by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This strong urging and begging that Paul is issuing wasn't being made for his own benefit, or on his own behalf. He is calling for this on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ, because of the benefit it is to Him, because it is actually His body that becomes disjointed when believers are divided!

And then Paul gets to the real point, “that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly jointed together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” The Lord is not “beseeching” us through Paul to all become cookie-cutter, carbon copies of each other in the body, He'll clarify that in chapter 12 where He says that our unity in the body is actually a reality because of our diversity. He is talking here about the importance of us walking together in our own local body of believers in doctrinal unity, and practical unity. That rather than be divided by our own agendas and personal preferences, that we adopt the mind of the Lord, and make His opinion our opinion, as we follow

His lead as He directs it through those He has placed in a position of leadership in the church (I Cor. 3:3-9; I Thess. 5:11-13).

Is there anyone in our body with whom you are not walking in perfect harmony and unity? Have you personally sought to do everything within your power spiritually that that kind of oneness might be a reality in our church? Since this admonition is given in “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” do you realize that to do less is to “take His name in vain” (i.e. to deny His name – Rev. 3:8)?

May the reality of I Corinthians 1:10 be true of our church as we seek to hide its truth in our hearts.

DAY 226

TODAY’S READING: JOHN 15-19

OVERVIEW: Jesus teaches about abiding in Him (15:1-11); Jesus teaches about loving one another (15:12-17); Jesus warns about persecution (15:18-16:7); Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit (16:8-33); Jesus’ prayer of intercession (17:1-26); Jesus’ betrayal and arrest (18:1-14); Peter’s denial (18:15-18); Jesus before the high priest (18:19-24); Peter’s second and third denial (18:25-27); Jesus before Pilate (18:28-38); Barabbas is released (18:39-40); Christ’s crucifixion (19:1-37); Christ’s burial (19:38-42).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

We enter into the whole arena of our Lord’s betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion today for the fourth time in almost as many weeks. One of the most important things to keep in your mind as you read about His incredible sacrifice is something Jesus said back in chapter 10, verses 17 and 18. Jesus said, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I LAY DOWN MY LIFE, that I might take it again. NO MAN TAKETH IT FROM ME, but I LAY IT DOWN OF MYSELF. I have power to LAY IT DOWN, and I have power to take it again.” The reason these two verses are so significant, is that they help us to interpret what is really taking place as Jesus is being crucified. Though it appears that He is the victim, nothing could be further from the truth! Jesus was never a victim to anybody! The fact is, Jesus died, not because men killed Him, because they couldn’t! There was no way that Jesus could have died had He not willed to die.

For centuries people have been arguing about who killed Jesus. The Jewish leaders, of course, are the primary targets of the blame, and rightly so, because it was their plot, and their false charges that actually forced the issue.

Others choose to blame the Romans, and they, too, deserve a portion of the blame, because they were the ones who set aside what was normal justice to appease an angry mob, and they knowingly went ahead and executed an innocent man.

But if you really want to get to the bottom line on who bears the responsibility for Christ’s death, all you have to do is listen to Peter in Acts 2:23: “Him, (that is, Christ) being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken (the Jews), and by wicked hands (the Romans) have crucified and slain.” Who was it that was responsible for the death of Christ? It was neither the Jews nor the Romans, though they certainly bear the guilt for the actual execution and sin that was involved. The ultimate responsibility lies with God! It was God who destined it. It was God that planned it. And Jesus, in an act of submissive obedience, simply carried out the eternal plan (Rev. 13:8). But don’t ever lose sight of the fact that HE LAID DOWN HIS LIFE! John 19:30 says, “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and HE BOWED HIS HEAD, AND GAVE(!!!) UP THE GHOST.” Nobody TOOK it. He GAVE it! He yielded His life. And just as surely as He laid down His life, He TOOK IT AGAIN!

Allow me to call to your attention to a few places in today’s reading where Jesus is demonstrating the fact that HE is in control:

19:16 – “Then delivered he (Pilate) him (Christ) therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and LED him away.”

It seems a minor thing to say “they led him away,” but it isn’t minor. Jesus didn’t have to be driven, He went willingly. He followed them to the cross. And, of course, that’s just how the prophet Isaiah said it would happen. Isaiah 53:7 says, “He is BROUGHT AS A LAMB to the slaughter.” Unlike cattle which are DRIVEN, sheep are LED.

19:17a – “And he BEARING HIS CROSS”

Notice, Jesus carried His own cross. Why is this happening? Because it, too, is exactly how God prophesied that it would unfold in a prophetic type in the Old Testament. Genesis 22:6 is a prophetic type rather than a prophetic statement as in Isaiah 53:7 above. In Genesis 22:6, Isaac is a picture of Christ, and the verse says, “And Abraham took the WOOD of the burnt OFFERING, and LAID IT UPON ISAAC HIS SON.” So, Isaac went up to Mt. Moriah (same mountain as Jesus, by the way) carrying the wood that was to be used for his own execution. And so Jesus, controlling every detail of what is taking place in John 19, carries His own “wood,” in a perfect fulfillment of what Isaac pictured prophetically.

19:17b – “And he bearing his cross WENT FORTH”

“Went forth” means that He was LED outside the city walls. Why did that happen? Because that was Roman law. Roman law said that no one could be crucified inside the city. And so they had a place outside the city “called the place of a skull” (19:17c), and it was called that because from a distance the mountainside resembled a skull. Jesus was taken there because it was the normal place for crucifixions. But once again, long before Rome built that law into its books, way back in the Book of Exodus when God instituted the offering for sin He said, “But the flesh of the bullock and his skin, and his dung, shalt thou burn with fire without (i.e. outside) the camp: it is a sin offering” (Ex. 29:14). And Jesus, in perfect fulfillment of the picture of the sin offering in the Old Testament, was sacrificed outside the city. The Romans had no idea about that when they made their laws, but they made that law because God knew that one day His Son was coming to fulfill the picture of Ex. 22:6.

19:18a – “they CRUCIFIED Him.”

This is another exact fulfillment. And one that could not have been anticipated! The Jews didn’t crucify people. They stoned people. But Christ was to be crucified. That was a Roman way to die. And once again, it fulfills Numbers 21:6-9, which says that when Israel was bitten by snakes, they were to make a serpent and lift it up on a rod, and anybody who looked upon it would be healed. Jesus said in John 3:14 – “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.” And that’s exactly how it happened. Jesus was lifted up on a cross. That kind of death was unheard of to the Jews in the Old Testament, but that’s how prophecy said it would happen, so it did.

19:18b – “they crucified him, and TWO OTHER WITH HIM, ON EITHER SIDE ONE, AND JESUS IN THE MIDST (i.e. middle).” Is it significant that He died with criminals? Absolutely. Isaiah 53:12 says, “He was numbered with the transgressors.”

We could continue like this through this entire passage. It is one fulfilled prophecy after another. Jesus is ordering every detail of His own execution to fulfill the plan that He laid down in eternity. He was in control of every single aspect.

Finally, John 19:28 says, “After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst.” Why did He say, “I thirst”? Because He was thirsty? I’m sure He was! But He said it, because He knew that every single other Old Testament prophecy concerning His death had been fulfilled except that one. Only one prophecy remained unfulfilled. Psalm 69:21 says about Him in His death, “In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” So, in John 19:28, Jesus says, “I thirst.” He reaches back and grabs that one unfulfilled prophecy so that His death could be “according to the Scriptures” (See I Cor. 15:3 – for the gospel to be the gospel, it required that every detail of how the Scripture said He would die be fulfilled.) John 19:30 says, “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished.” In other words, “Every prophecy has now been fulfilled. I can go ahead and die now.” And verse 30 goes on, “And he bowed his head (no slump to the side, He bowed it!) and gave up the ghost.” How did He die? Did he bleed to death? Did He die of exposure? Did He have a heart attack? Did He suffocate? No. He died because He willed Himself to die.

DAY 227

TODAY’S READING: JOHN 20-21

OVERVIEW:

Christ’s resurrection (20:1-10); Christ’s post-resurrection appearances to Mary and to His disciples (20:11-31); Jesus’ reinstatement and restoration of Peter (21:1-17); Jesus’ final instructions to His disciples (21:18-25).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

By the time we move into John 21 in today's reading, Jesus has already risen from the dead (John 20). He has made numerous appearances, two of them to His disciples. But at this point, the disciples are in danger of drifting back into their old way of life (21:3). They had spent three years with the Lord, but all of that is pretty foggy right now. Things didn't really go like they had planned. They've gone from disillusionment to despair. Sure, there was certainly a tremendous rejuvenation of their hearts to realize that Jesus had risen from the dead, but at this point, the disciples still hadn't quite pieced the whole thing together.

Things were different now. For three years they had walked with the Lord and talked with Him; they were always together. Now He appears and disappears without any notice. It's just different. And on top of that, they're all bearing the guilt of the fact that they had forsaken the Lord. All of them but John scattered when Jesus needed them most.

And when you come to the end of chapter 20 in today's reading, the main narrative ends with the great climax of Thomas' confession of faith in verse 28 as he says to Jesus, "My Lord and my God." Then John gives an explanation of his purpose in writing the book in verses 30 and 31, "and many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name," and it's a beautiful conclusion to the whole thing. And if you couldn't see the other chapter just below those verses in your Bible, you would think that the Book had ended with verse 31.

But that's not the end! There are still some extremely important things the Holy Spirit wants us to know about Peter's situation. John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, doesn't want his Gospel to end without telling his readers that Peter had been fully restored and reinstated. You see, without chapter 21, there would have been a major question in all of our minds about whether a person who has blown it like Peter had, could be restored in his relationship with the Lord. Peter didn't just turn his back on the Lord as had the other disciples; he had actually denied Him on three different occasions! I mean, how could someone who had done something like that still be entrusted with the responsibility of shepherding the flock of Jesus Christ? Again, without chapter 21, the question would remain unanswered.

Also, were it not for chapter 21, it would be a mystery in all of our minds, why in the world Peter is so prominent in the first 12 chapters of the next Book of the Bible, the Book of Acts. I mean, how does a guy go from completely denying the Lord when he's 50 feet away from Him, to the boldness exemplified on the Day of Pentecost just seven weeks later, when he looks out on the religious leaders of Israel, and all the people of Judea and Jerusalem, and faced them with the fact that they had taken God's own Son, the Lord of glory, and by their wicked hands, had slain Him! Pretty strong stuff! How do you go from being a coward, to having that kind of courage? What takes place in chapter 21 is the missing link.

And then there is at least one other reason for chapter 21. When you come to the end of chapter 20, the last of the disciples has come to genuine faith. That, of course, was "Doubting Thomas." They had all been convinced of the resurrection, and that, of course, was wonderful, but what now? What were they going to do about it? And chapter 21 is Jesus' call for action.

A few other things to grab a hold of as you make your way through chapter 21:

21:3 – Perhaps we could paraphrase, "Well, I'll tell you what fellas, I may not be a great preacher or evangelist, but there is one thing I do know how to do, and I'm gonna do that! I'm goin' fishin'! Come on boys, let me show ya how it's done!" Notice, they didn't even get a bite. The one thing Peter thought he could do, he couldn't do anymore (John 15:5), because God had put His hand on his life and was in control. Learn the lesson from Peter.

21:15-17 – No matter how our love has failed, there is restoration! Perhaps that's the message God wants you to receive today — there IS restoration! And notice in this passage, the restoration was initiated by the Lord. He could have said, "You know what Peter, you're a chump! You talk a big talk, but you can't be counted on to do anything! I gave you three years of my life, and I can't even get you to follow one simple command. Just forget it, man." But that's not the way it was at all. Jesus initiated the restoration, and provided the one who had denied Him three times, the opportunity to affirm his love three times!

21:17 – After the third time Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, Peter appeals to the doctrine of omniscience. He says, "Lord, thou knowest all things." In other words, "Lord, you're going to have to

read my heart, because I know my love for you isn't obvious by my life." The doctrine of omniscience is a tremendous thing. I used to feel like God kind of had a way to spy on me, but now I know that if God weren't omniscient, there would be a lot of times God wouldn't know that I love Him, because like Peter, it isn't always obvious from my life. I, too, have to ask Him to look on the inside, at what is in my heart.

21:15-17 – Saying, "Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep," was Jesus' way of saying, "I forgive you, Peter. I still believe in you, Peter. I still think you're the right man for the job."

The things revealed in chapter 21 of John's Gospel were a turning point in Peter's life. The things that took place seven weeks later on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 are the proof of that. May God use this chapter to be a turning point in our lives today!

DAY 228

TODAY'S READING: ACTS 1-4

OVERVIEW:

The messengers of the kingdom prepared (chapter 1); the offer of the kingdom of heaven to the Nation of Israel (chapter 2); a second offer of the kingdom of heaven to the Nation of Israel (chapters 3,4).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Author: Luke, the physician (Col. 4:14) and author of the gospel of Luke (compare Acts 1:1 with Luke 1:1-4). Luke was a Gentile and traveling companion of Paul as indicated by the word "we" when found in appropriated passages of the Book of Acts (16:10-13, 16; 20:6,13-15, etc.)

Approximate date of writing: 59-65 AD Dates of the recorded events: 33-62 AD

Theme: God's plan for Israel postponed and the revelation of the Church. Christ is seen as: our Great High Priest ministering in the heavens (Hebrews 4:14-16) Key verses: Acts 1:6, 7 Key chapters: 7-13

Chapters: 28

Verses: 1,007

Words: 24,250

As we discussed in our introduction to the Book of Matthew, there are four Books of the Bible where you can lose your way if you don't keep your compass pointed at the "ancient landmark" of the Nation of Israel (Prov. 22:28; 23:10): Matthew, Acts, Hebrews and James. It's not difficult to navigate your way through the Book of Acts if you keep the following trail markers in mind.

1. This Book is called "The Acts of the Apostles," NOT "The Doctrine (or Teaching) of the Apostles". The Book of "Acts" is the historical record of the ACTIONS of the Apostles; it's the story of what happened. It could be illustrated like this: suppose a sports writer observes you sink a hole in one after the ball slices, skims across the water, bounces between a couple of trees, and hits a bird flying directly over the hole and then drops straight in the hole. Now suppose the writer recounts that event in a chapter of "Golf For Dummies" and entitles it: "Making a Hole in One Step-By-Step". That's ridiculous! Your hole in one is what happened, but it's not the rule for every golfer! Likewise, Acts does not establish the rule of faith, experience, and doctrine for every Christian. Otherwise, every Christian would have to sell everything and move to Jerusalem (2:44-47) and after a short time, most, if not all Christians would be dead for lying to the Holy Spirit (5:1-11). The most consistent thing about the book of Acts is its inconsistency.
2. The key verses of the Book are Acts 1:6 and 7: ". . . [the Apostles] asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And [Jesus] said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." The literal earthly kingdom (the kingdom of heaven) and the King of that kingdom (Jesus Christ the Messiah) are still being offered to the nation of Israel. The Apostles' minds are focused on one thing and one thing only: the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His kingdom on earth. Jesus' answer in modern vernacular is: "For now, it's none of your business." Based upon that answer, the Apostles assumed that Christ would return within days. However, by the time Paul writes his first letter to the Thessalonians in 54 AD it is clear that the question has been answered: compare Acts 1:7 where Jesus says "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons," and I Thess. 5:1, 2 where Paul says, "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye . . . know perfectly . . ." Clearly, a transition has been made from not knowing to knowing perfectly. As you will see, the Apostles' question is finally answered in Acts 7 after the nation of Israel has rejected the offer of the kingdom for the third time. This brings us to our third trail marker.

3. Acts is a transitional book: a bridge that carries us from one dispensation to a new dispensation, the Church Age. We are currently living in the Church Age. Acts is the record of God's transition from accomplishing His plan through the nation of Israel to accomplishing His plan through the Church. God's change in plans is made obvious through seven transitions and three key events.

Transition #1: from the ministry of Jesus Christ to the ministry of the Holy Spirit – (1:2)

Transition #2: from "disciples" to "apostles" – (1:2)

Key Event #1: the nation of Israel's final rejection of the kingdom of heaven – (Acts 7)

Transition #3: from the nation of Israel to the Samaritans (a race of half Jew and half Gentile) – (8:1-5)

Transition #4: from the nation of Israel to the Church (a group composed of Jews and Gentiles) – (8:26-11:18)

Transition #5: from the preaching of the kingdom of heaven (the literal earthly kingdom offered to the nation of Israel) to the preaching of the kingdom of God (the unseen spiritual kingdom inside of individual believers) – (8:12)

Key Event #2: the salvation of the Gentile, Cornelius, and the determination by the Apostles that God is no longer dealing exclusively with the Jews, but has now taken salvation to the Gentiles – (11:18)

Key Event #3: the execution of the Apostle James, the decision not to replace him, and Peter's departure to Caesarea – (12:1, 2, 19)

Transition #6: from Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, to Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles –(9:1-13:1)

Transition #7: from Jerusalem to Antioch – (11:26 -13:1)

It is important to understand that the transition from Israel to the Church and the Church Age were "mysteries," or truths that were hidden from the twelve Apostles (see Rom. 11:25; Eph. 3:1-12; 2:11-22). The Twelve believed that God dealt exclusively with the Nation of Israel (Matt. 10:5-7), and in their ethnocentric opinions, the Gentiles were pagan heathens unworthy to receive anything from God (Acts 11:1-3). Like Christopher Columbus who thought he had landed in Asia, but had actually landed in the Caribbean, the Apostles thought they were going to land in the millennial reign of Christ, but actually ended up in the Church Age. Needless to say, their journey was full of surprises!

4. Jews require a sign. The signs and wonders done by Jesus and the Apostles were designed to prove to Israel that the message and the messengers were sent by God. God makes this explicitly clear in I Cor. 1:22: "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom". Miraculous healings and speaking in tongues were signs for the nation of Israel. I Cor. 14:22 says, "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not". Tongues were a sign given to unbelieving Jews and every time tongues occurs in the Bible, which is only three times (Acts 2, 10, 19), an unbelieving Jew is present to witness the sign. The reason that Apostolic healings and speaking in tongues do not occur today is because God has postponed His dealings with Israel. Romans 11:25 makes this very clear: "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." God has temporarily blinded Israel and is currently working exclusively through the Church.

With these four trail markers at the forefront of our minds, let's take a look at some highlights in chapters 1-4.

Acts 2. This chapter is a vortex of doctrinal error in contemporary Christianity. This is where the modern day Pentecostal and Charismatic churches (speaking in tongues, baptism in the Holy Spirit) and the Church of Christ and the Christian Church (water baptism is essential for salvation) lose the ancient landmark, Israel. If you keep your eye on the landmark and pay attention to the context, this chapter is easily understood. Here's the context in one sentence: Jews from all over the world (2:5-11) came to Jerusalem (the holiest city of the Jews) to celebrate Pentecost (a Jewish holiday, 2:1) where they saw the sign of tongues (Jews require a sign) and heard a Jewish Apostle (Peter) tell them that just fifty days prior, they had killed their Jewish Messiah (2:22-24,36) and that they needed to do exactly what John the Baptist (the last Jewish prophet) and Jesus told them to do in the Gospels (repent and be water baptized for the remission of sins, Matt. 3:1,2; Luke 3:3;! Matt. 4:17; John 3:22, 23; 4:1,2) to prepare themselves for the soon coming kingdom of heaven. I think you've got the point: this passage deals exclusively with the nation of Israel. So unless you're a Jew living in 33 A.D., there's no need for you to speak with tongues, and water baptism does not save you from your sins.

Acts 3. Again we see from the context that God is dealing exclusively with the nation of Israel. Note that Peter and John (Jewish Apostles) are on their way to the temple (the Jewish place of worship) at the hour of prayer (Jews prayed three times a day) and Peter performs a miracle (Jews require a sign) and upon seeing the crowd gathering (other Jews at the temple to pray), Peter tells them that they killed the Jewish Messiah (3:13-16), but if they repented, then Jesus would return to establish His literal earthly kingdom (3:19-21). Peter is offering Israel a second chance to accept Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah, and prepare themselves for the coming of His literal earthly kingdom.

DAY 229

TODAY'S READING: ACTS 5-7

OVERVIEW:

Internal and external opposition (chapters 5, 6); the final offer of the kingdom of heaven rejected by the Nation of Israel (chapter 7).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Acts 3 – 6 reveals for us two forms of Satanic opposition: external and internal. External opposition occurs in the form of persecution. There are two cycles of persecution meted out on Peter and John by the Jewish leaders (4:1-22; 5:17-40). Though Peter and John appear to be the objects of wrath, and though the Jewish religious leaders seem to be the persecutors, the fact is that, “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). The real object of wrath is Jesus (4:17, 18; 5:28,40), and the real persecutor is Satan. Maybe you’ve noticed that you can comfortably talk about Buddhism, Zen, Feng Shui, the Occult, etc. with any group of people in any public place, but as soon as you mention the name Jesus, an uproar is sure to follow. The devil hates the name of Jesus. Please notice what angered the Jewish religious leaders (and the devil) the most: the teaching and preaching of the gospel (4:2, 18; 5:28). The obvious application: if the devil hates it, then it must be effective and we should do it all the more! Teaching and preaching is the primary action of the Great Commission: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you . . .” (Matthew 28:19, 20). Teaching and preaching is the primary function of a pastor (see Acts 2:14,42; 3:12; 4:31; 5:20,42; 6:1-4; Colossians 1:28; II Timothy 4:17; Titus 1:3; I Corinthians 1:21; I Timothy 4:11-16; II Timothy 4:1,2; I Timothy 5:17; Galatians 6:6). Satan will do anything he can to stop the preaching and teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If he can't stop the gospel with external opposition, he'll walk right in the front doors of the church and try internal opposition. Ananias and Sapphira were held in esteem by the believers because they vowed to sell their property and give ALL of the proceeds to the church. But in an effort to “have their cake and eat it too,” they both told Peter that they had sold the land for less than what they actually received for it, thereby keeping a little nest egg for themselves. They must have thought, “What a great plan! The church will think we're really spiritual for sacrificing so much, and we'll still be rich! No one will ever know.” You can fool man, but you can't fool an omniscient God. Peter defines their offense clearly, “thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (Acts 5:4) and they both dropped dead (5:5, 10). The issue wasn't that they didn't give it all; it was that they lied to God. I wonder if this is the event that the Apostle John had in mind when he wrote I John 5:16, 17. If you're like me, you're thinking, “I bet Sunday attendance dropped after that!” Yep, you're right. And that was God's plan (5:11-14)! Notice, however, that souls were still saved. Mark it down: no matter how “holy” the church, no matter how “holy” the leaders, God still purges and purifies His people in preparation for new fruit.

Another form of internal opposition comes from envy, strife and complaining among believers (Acts 6:1). Keep in mind that the Grecians' complaint was legitimate and it certainly needed to be addressed, but consider also that the devil is more than happy to keep us busy with “legitimate needs” and even “good things” as long as it keeps us from the best thing: prayer and the Word of God. Remember Jesus' instruction to Martha when she was so busy working to serve Him while Mary sat at His feet, communing with Him? “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41, 42). The Apostles' deemed it necessary to continue in their primary function: prayer and the Word (6:2, 4), so they delegated the “legitimate need” to elected “deacons” (6:3, 5-7). It is significant to note that God holds even those who carry out the simplest forms of service to a standard of “honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” (6:3).

Finally, in chapter 7, we have come to the first key event or turning point in the book of Acts. Acts 7 is the answer to the question of Acts 1:6 and marks the beginning of five of the seven transitions. Acts 7 is the third and final offer of the King and His kingdom to the nation of Israel. Stephen preaches an incredible sermon with three significant points: first, God promised us (Israel) a land (7:2-7); second, God promised us a Prophet like Moses (7:20, 37); third, but you leaders always kill God's prophets and fail to respond properly to God's message (7:51-53). Needless to say, the council was enraged and they stoned Stephen while a young zealous Jew named Saul held the stoners' coats. To understand the significance of this event we need to pay close attention to verse 56: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." Stephen saw two things: "the heavens opened" and "the Son of man standing". Immediately following His ascension in Acts 1:9-11, Jesus SAT down at the right hand of the Father as Hebrews 10:12 tells us: "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God". Colossians 3:1 tells us that even today in the Church Age, Jesus is SEATED at the Father's right hand: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God". So the fact that Jesus is STANDING is incredibly significant, then add to that, the fact that the heavens are opened. The next time we find Jesus standing and the heavens opened is Revelation 4:1-3 and 5:1, 5 where Jesus rises to take the book with seven seals from the Father's hand which marks the beginning of the Tribulation period. Jesus is standing because He is awaiting the nation of Israel's response. If it's repentance and water baptism, then Jesus opens the first seal of the Tribulation and Daniel's seventieth week begins. If it's rejection, then Jesus sits back down, Israel is "blinded in part" (Romans 11:25) and the Church Age begins. Clearly, the stoning of Stephen is a rejection of God's offer, and as expected, we find Jesus seated for the duration of the Church Age (Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1). Consequently, God turns His attention to the gospel of the kingdom of God (the spiritual internal kingdom) and to all nations under heaven as we will see in Acts 8.

DAY 230

TODAY'S READING: ACTS 8-10

OVERVIEW:

The transition from Israel to the Gentiles (chapter 8); the salvation of the missionary to the Gentiles (chapter 9); the transition to the Gentiles confirmed by apostolic authority (chapter 10).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Thus far we have seen that Acts 1-7 is exclusively Jewish because God is still offering the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven to the Nation of Israel. The all-important question of Acts 1:6: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" has been answered with a resounding "No". This "no" was effectively communicated through the stoning of Stephen and the fact that Jesus went from STANDING in Acts 7:56 to being SEATED in Colossians 3:1. The Nation of Israel has clearly rejected the offer of both their Messiah and His kingdom: the literal, physical, earthly kingdom of heaven. God's plan for Israel has been postponed and the "parenthesis" of the Church Age is beginning. The stoning of Stephen led to a "great persecution" against the believers in Jerusalem and many of them fled Jerusalem and began preaching the gospel "abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria" (8:1c). God uses persecution to accomplish His own mission of sending witnesses to "all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Acts chapter 8 marks the beginning of the transition from God accomplishing His plan through the Nation of Israel to the accomplishment of His plan through a body of people called the Church, which is composed of both Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11-22). Notice how orderly God makes the transition from Israel to the Church: first, believers witness in "all Judaea" (8:1c); next, Philip, the deacon mentioned in Acts 6:5 and called "the evangelist" in Acts 21:8, preaches the kingdom of God (the spiritual kingdom that resides inside of a believer) to "the Samaritans" who are half-Jew and half-Gentile (8:1c); and finally, "the uttermost" as Philip preaches to a full-blooded Gentile on his way home from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (8:27,28). You may have noticed that God withheld the gift of the Holy Ghost from the Samaritans until Peter and John arrived in Samaria (8:14-17). This was done for two reasons: 1) To prove to the apostles in Jerusalem that the Samaritans had truly received the Word of God and 2) To prove to the Samaritans that the apostles in Jerusalem were God's ordained authorities.

Acts 1-6 have been dominated by the Apostle Peter because he is the apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:7, 8). However, a new character, Paul, enters the picture in chapter 9. We are first introduced to Paul in Acts 7:58 where he is called by his birth name, Saul (Acts 13:9). Paul, by his own admission, is the chief persecutor of the church: "[I breathed] out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1) and "imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed" (Acts 22:19) and "was before

a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious” (I Timothy 1:13). Sounds like a really attractive guy! Funny thing is, Paul was one of the most religious men on earth: “If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:4-6).

Oddly enough, religion is the most destructive enemy of God. It was the religious (the Jewish council) who crucified our Lord, it was the religious (the Jewish council) who stoned Stephen and it was a religious leader (Paul) who was the most destructive force against the church. But consider the rest of Paul’s testimony: “[I] was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (I Timothy 1:13-16). What a radical transformation! God can save and transform anyone! Paul goes from being the chief misery of the church to the chief missionary of the church. Paul was specifically saved to be a missionary to the Gentiles: “[Paul] is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (9:15). From this chapter forward, Peter’s role as the apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:7, 8) diminishes while Paul’s role as the Apostle to the Gentiles increases. In fact, Peter’s name is mentioned only one time after Acts 13 while Paul’s is mentioned 129 times.

Acts chapter 10 continues the transition from Israel to the Church with Peter, the apostle to the Jews, reluctantly preaching to a family of Gentiles. Notice that the heavens open again (10:11), but rather than Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father (Acts 7:56), a vessel of unclean animals descends and Peter is instructed to kill and eat them. According to Old Testament law (Lev. 20:25; Deut. 14:1-29), Jews were to avoid eating certain kinds of animals; these animals were called “unclean”. So Peter, being a devout Jewish believer in Christ, refuses God’s offer to eat the unclean animals. Pay particular attention to God’s response to Peter: “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (10:15). God is trying to let Peter know that He is transitioning from Israel to the Church by using unclean animals as a metaphor for Gentiles. In effect, God is saying, “No longer consider the Gentiles as unworthy of salvation because I am about to grant them eternal life.” But Peter has a hard time accepting the fact that God will save Gentiles. You might call him an “unbelieving Jew”. Soon, Peter finds himself preaching to a family of Gentiles who suddenly begin speaking in tongues. Remember: Jews require a sign (I Corinthians 1:22) and tongues are a sign for unbelieving Jews (I Corinthians 14:22). These Gentiles spoke with tongues as a sign to Peter, who in this context is a Jew who doesn’t believe that God will save Gentiles. Once the other eleven Apostles in Jerusalem catch wind of this “casting of pearls before swine,” Peter is called to answer for this blatantly disobedient act of preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 11:1-3). As Peter begins to defend himself, the most convincing evidence he offers to the Jewish Apostles is the sign of tongues (Acts 11:15-18). By the end of the meeting, the Jewish church in Jerusalem declares: “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). The transition from Israel! to the Church is almost complete.

Let’s briefly summarize the transitions that we have discovered: Acts 1-6 – God is offering the King and the kingdom of heaven to the Nation of Israel. Acts 7 – Israel rejects the King and the kingdom of heaven for the third time. Acts 8 – God makes an orderly transition from Jews to Samaritans to Gentiles. Acts 9 – The transition from Peter, the apostle to the Jews, to Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. Acts 10 – God’s transition to the Gentiles is confirmed by the apostolic authority of Peter.

DAY 231 – EXTRA DAY THIS WEEK

TODAY’S READING: ACTS 11-14

OVERVIEW:

The transition from Jerusalem to Antioch (chapters 11 and 12); Paul’s first missionary journey (chapters 13 and 14).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we begin today, let’s take a few moments to review what we have discovered thus far from the Book of Acts. Acts 1-6 is the record of God offering the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven to the Nation of Israel. In chapter 7, the question of Acts 1:6 has been answered by the Nation of Israel and God withdraws His offer of the Messiah and kingdom of heaven. Chapter 8 marks the beginning of the

transition from God dealing with the Nation of Israel to God dealing with a racially mixed group of Jews and Gentiles called the Church, the body of Christ. Chapter 9 continues the transition with the salvation and calling of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. In chapter 10, Peter, the apostle to the Jews, confirms that God is indeed offering eternal life to the Gentiles. From these chapters alone, God has made it abundantly clear that He has postponed His dealings with the Nation of Israel and begun to focus His attention on the Church. Today in chapters 11 through 14, we will discover the final phases of transition.

Chapter 11 reveals a transition from Jerusalem to Antioch. When the persecution arose in chapter 8, the majority of believers fled while the apostles remained steadfast in Jerusalem (8:1). Each time a new people group received the Word of God, envoys from Jerusalem were sent to confirm God's working amidst that group (see Acts 8:14-17, 25; 11:1-3, 19-22). Paul himself needed affirmation from the apostles in Jerusalem to validate his ministry (Gal. 2:1, 9). From these facts, it is easily seen that Jerusalem was the base of operations and place of authority for the early church. This makes perfect sense: 1) If you are a believing Jew waiting for Jesus your Messiah to touch down on the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9-12; Zech. 14:1-9) and establish the capital of His kingdom in Jerusalem at His second coming – why leave Jerusalem and miss all of the action?! 2) If you are seeking to reach only Jews with the message of the kingdom of heaven and 3) If the apostle to the Jews (Peter) resides there. But with Israel's rejection of the King and kingdom in Acts 7, God turns His attention to Gentiles and therefore, establishes a new base of operations in Antioch. Watch the flow of chapter 11: once the apostles in Jerusalem have confirmed the salvation of the Gentiles (11:18), Barnabas seeks out Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, and brings him to Antioch (11:25, 26) where a multi-ethnic church of Jews and Gentiles had been planted (Acts 13:1). Notice also, that it was in Antioch that "the disciples were called Christians first" (11:26). It is significant to note also that for the first ten years of the church, not one believer had ever been called a "Christian"! Not until God makes the transitions from Israel to the Church, and Jerusalem to Antioch, does God see fit to have His followers called "Christians"; another confirmation that Antioch is the new base of operations.

In the next chapter, it is evident that the apostles now understand that God has postponed His plan for Israel. The first piece of evidence is that the Apostle James is not replaced after his execution. Jesus promised the twelve apostles, "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). Since the apostles expected Jesus Christ to return immediately, they wanted to be sure. Obviously then, since Judas Iscariot committed suicide, a replacement is required to fill twelve thrones, which is why the eleven apostles immediately elected Judas' replacement in Acts 1:15-26. The fact that the Apostle James is not replaced clearly indicates that the apostles realize that Christ's return has been postponed and the Church is now God's primary institution.

Another evidence is that Peter leaves Jerusalem and doesn't return (12:19). The leadership team of Peter, James and John is being dismantled and Jerusalem's central authority is waning. This is another indication that Antioch, rather than Jerusalem, is the new center of God's global outreach.

In Acts 13, God introduces His new institution the Church. God's new institution is multi-racial (13:1) and missional (13:2-4). Paul and Barnabas are sent out as missionaries from their local church in Antioch. Note that Paul and Barnabas were called by God to perform a particular "work" (13:2) and that "work", as you have seen in reading Acts 13 and 14, is preaching the gospel and planting reproducing local churches. We may deduce then, that the work of a missionary is preaching the gospel and planting reproducing local churches. Though many faithful Christians serve in diverse capacities in missions, gospel preaching and church planting are the preeminent components of missions.

A comparison of the sermons preached by Peter and those preached by Paul give further evidence that God is no longer offering the kingdom of heaven to Israel, but instead, is bringing all men into the spiritual, internal kingdom of God. Peter's sermon is simply, "You Jews killed our Messiah and rejected the kingdom. Repent and be water baptized" (see Acts 2:36-38; 3:15, 19, 20). Paul's message, however, is, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through [Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Peter's message is the gospel of the kingdom, while Paul's is the gospel of grace (see 13:42, 43).

Acts 13:4 – 14:26 is the record of Paul's first missionary journey in approximately 46 AD. On this first journey the gospel was preached and churches were planted on the Island of Cyprus, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Perga; all cities, except Cyprus, are in Galatia which is modern day Turkey. The journey took approximately two years and covered nearly 1,250 miles!