



Open Bible Learning

Bible Reading Plan—weeks 13-16

This document is the fourth in a series of fourteen that provides guidance notes in four week portions for a whole year Bible Reading Plan.

The daily portions have been selected to bring the foundation truths of God's plan and purpose before you in a way that makes them clear and straightforward.

These notes continue the consideration of the books of the Acts of the Apostles and Exodus.

	Chapter						
Week	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
13 Acts	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
14 Exodus	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15 Acts	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
16 Exodus	16	17	19	20	24	25	32

The sections of the reading plan and notes are uploaded to the website at www.openbiblelearning.com/brp10 every 4 weeks.

We would always encourage thoughtful questioning and comparison of anything that anyone says about the Bible with the Bible itself. You should treat this notes in the same way, so if you have any questions about what they say please send them to openbiblelearning@hotmail.com

We hope you enjoy your Bible Study

Week 13

Introduction

Jesus had instructed his disciples to preach the gospel throughout the world, beginning at Jerusalem with God's people of Israel. These chapters in the Acts of the Apostles describe their obedience to this command. They preached the gospel in Jerusalem and throughout the promised land and many Jews



Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives

believed and obeyed, and in due course the gospel also spread to the Jews scattered throughout the world. God's purpose, however, also required the opportunity of salvation to be extended to the Gentiles and we read how this was effected, first through the apostle Peter and then principally through Paul. This is particularly interesting to us, whether Jew or Gentile, because from this record we learn how we too may obtain eternal life and inherit the kingdom which God has promised to them who love him.

Week 13

The Acts of the Apostles 8

Sunday

Saul, later named Paul, consented to Stephen's death v.1 but was destined to play a most important role as Christ's apostle to the Gentiles. The persecution which began with Stephen's murder scattered disciples throughout the land. These included Philip who preached Christ to the Samaritans vs.4-5. Jesus had preached "the gospel of the kingdom of God" which the apostles also preached, adding "the things concerning the Name of Jesus Christ", and when Philip taught this to the Samaritans many believed. Jesus had also commanded his disciples to be baptized and so: "when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women"

v.12. It is one of the almost inexplicable aspects of Christendom that so many people sincerely claim to believe in Jesus but will not obey his command to be baptized. All the original Christians, however, having believed the gospel, were baptized.

In those days believers could receive gifts of the Holy Spirit which enabled them, by the power of God, to perform extraordinary deeds, including prophesying, healing, and speaking in foreign languages. However, they could only receive this gift from those with power to pass it to them by the laying on of hands. Philip did not possess this power, and it could not be bought with money as Simon attempted to do v.20, but it was possessed by the apostles, so when Peter and John came to Samaria “then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” v.17.

There are no apostles today, and no-one has the power to pass the Holy Spirit to others, so no believers now have the Spirit gifts. It was specifically in the purpose of God that believers in the first century “tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” Heb.6:4-5. Not until that world comes, when Jesus returns and gives Spirit gifts to his faithful disciples, will men and women again possess the Holy Spirit. Then this power of God in the hands of the rulers of the new order will establish righteousness and peace and blessing in the earth.

Week 13

The Acts of the Apostles 9

Monday

Saul of Tarsus was a strict observer of God’s law through Moses and a zealous persecutor of Jewish Christians because he thought they had departed from God’s ways. Obtaining authority from the priests to take these people into custody, he travelled to Damascus to bind them. However, unknown to him, he had an important role in God’s plan of salvation, as Jesus said: “he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” v.15.

The dramatic conversion of Saul occurred as he made his way to Damascus. Jesus appeared to him in an exceedingly bright light which blinded him and directed his thinking into the right way. Jesus instructed him to proceed to Damascus where he would be told what to do. Saul was very knowledgeable in the scriptures and would

know the truth concerning the coming kingdom of God and the Messiah (Christ) who would reign on God's throne in that kingdom. Previously, he refused to accept that Jesus of Nazareth was that Messiah, but he was soon convinced once Jesus himself appeared and spoke to him. Having believed, like all the disciples, he had to be baptized, so when Ananias told him this, he "arose, and was baptized" v.18.

Saul immediately became a supporter of the very people he had persecuted so severely. This caused consternation, both among the disciples and the Jews. The disciples were wary of him, suspecting a trick, but were soon convinced of the genuineness of his faith, while the Jews were outraged and sought to destroy him. The Jews of the city believed in the coming of the Messiah (Christ) to establish God's kingdom, and Saul proved to them concerning Jesus "that this is very Christ" v.22. Like most Jews, they refused to accept this truth and reacted by seeking to take Saul's life, but he escaped over the city wall during the night.

Saul was then taken to Jerusalem and met with the apostles but, persecuted by the Jews, he returned for a while to his own city of Tarsus. Saul and the twelve apostles had the Holy Spirit in large measure and were able to perform extraordinary deeds even, as in the case of Dorcas at Joppa, raising the dead. The purpose of these miracles was to confirm the word of God which they spoke, and this miracle "was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord" v.42.

Week 13

The Acts of the Apostles 10

Tuesday

Jesus preached the gospel to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" only (Mat.15:24) and he instructed his disciples to do the same (Mat.10:5-6). This was because the offer of eternal life was first to be made to Israel (Acts 3:26), but God knew beforehand that most of them would reject it, and therefore he had declared through his Old Testament prophets that salvation would be extended to the Gentiles. This was a difficult concept for the first disciples to accept because, as Jews, they were brought up to view the Gentiles as unclean. Therefore Jesus specifically affected the thinking of Peter who had the responsibility of using the key of the kingdom to open the door of salvation for Gentiles.

The acceptability of the Gentiles to God was shown to Peter in a vision of unclean animals, with the declaration: “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” v.15. Peter later understood the significance of this, saying: “Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean” v.28. This good news for Gentiles was expressed by Peter: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” vs.34-35.

The first Gentile to become a Christian was Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who was “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway” v.2. He also knew of Jesus’ teaching and works, as Peter said to him: “The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) that word, I say, ye know... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” vs.36-38. Peter then told Cornelius of the death and resurrection of Christ and how Jesus was ordained to be the Judge of the living and the dead, and also “that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” v.43.

While Peter was speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and the rest of his household. This clear confirmation from God of their acceptance prompted Peter to ask his fellow Jewish Christians: “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?” v.47. Then “he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” v.48. It is very important to note the emphasis on baptism, for many fatally claim that baptism is not required for salvation. God sent Peter to tell Cornelius what he ought to do v.6; and Peter told him to be baptized. Even though Cornelius’ character pleased God, his prayers were responded to by God, he believed the gospel, and he was a recipient of God’s Holy Spirit, yet he was still commanded to be baptized! Why then should any other believer refuse or neglect to do the same?

Jesus declared “salvation is of the Jews” (Joh.4:22) but at the same time spoke of the inclusion of people of all other nations “when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” Joh.4:22-23. All these Gentiles were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph.2:12) but their position before God was completely transformed if, like Cornelius, they believed and were baptized, for then they were “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph.2:19).

The Jews who had become Christians were at first antagonistic to this development “and when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision [the Jews] contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised [the Gentiles], and didst eat with them” vs.2-3. Peter, however, described what had happened and showed that it was clearly the purpose of God, and “when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” v.18.

The gospel was then preached further afield into northern Palestine, but to the Jews only v.19 “and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” v.21. In Antioch, in particular, many believed the gospel and Barnabas was sent to exhort and encourage the new converts “that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” vs.22-23. Barnabas then brought Saul to Antioch, and the concluding verses of this chapter describe the good work that these two men did in the city from which they would later go forth to preach the truth in Asia Minor.

King Herod had joined with Pilate in condemning Jesus to death and he also became a persecutor of his disciples v.1 and executed the apostle James v.2. He also imprisoned Peter who was, however, released by an angel. This seemed so unreal to Peter that “he wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought it was a vision” v.9. This expression of Peter’s mind helps us understand words of Paul concerning visions he received, words which are often misapplied: “I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew

a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven” (2Cor.12:1-2) that is, Paul did not know whether the vision was simply in his head or whether he had actually experienced the things described. Peter, however, did come to know his experience was real: “And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews” v.11.

During this period “the word of God grew and multiplied” v.24 and then “Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark” v.25. Mark was a relative of Barnabas and the writer God inspired to write the gospel record that bears his name, and he soon set off with Paul and Barnabas to preach the gospel outside the promised land.

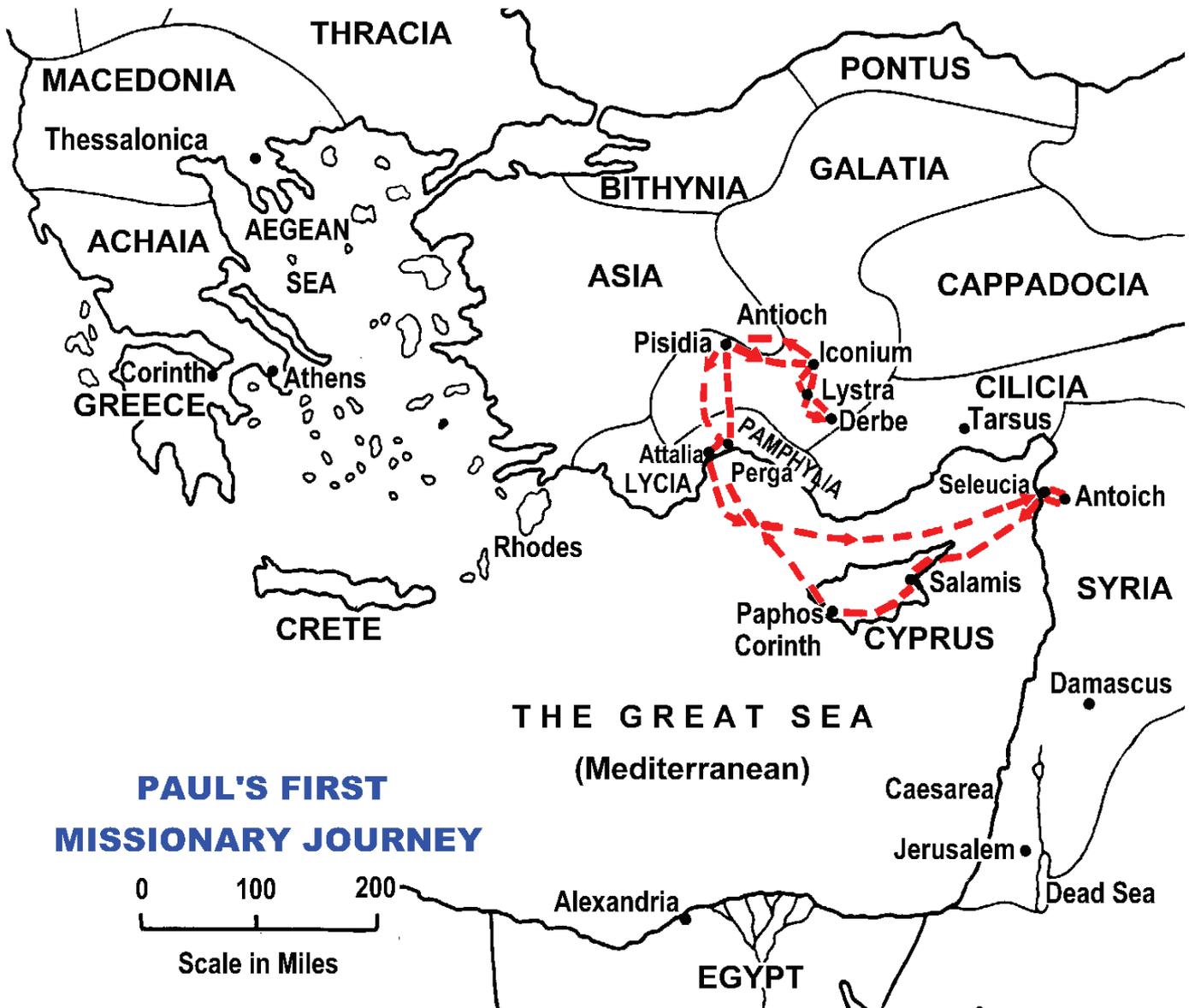
Week 13

The Acts of the Apostles 13

Friday

The decision to preach the gospel further afield was God’s who said through his Holy Spirit: “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” v.2, and so they sailed to Cyprus where the deputy of the island, Sergius Paulus, believed v.12. The cities and regions of the Roman Empire were administered in a variety of ways but Luke always records the correct names and titles of Roman officials. This is an example. In the original, the word translated “deputy” is “proconsul”, showing that Cyprus was under the authority of the Senate in Rome, and secular history confirms this, revealing that the status of the island had recently changed from an imperial province whose governor would then have been a “propraetor”. Accusations of inaccuracy have in the past been levied at Luke’s record, but these false accusations have always been overturned when more information about the Roman Empire of those times has come to light. As we should expect, it is always the word of God, rather than the word of men, which is proved correct.

From Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas sailed to Asia Minor where they went first into the synagogues of the Jews to preach the truth, telling them “to you is the word of this salvation sent” v.26. In Antioch in Pisidia Paul traced God’s dealings with Israel from the Exodus through to the coming of Christ and his death and resurrection,



proving from the scriptures that the purpose of God is in Jesus, declaring: “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man 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” vs.38-39.

The things Paul said spread through the city so that “the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God” v.44. The Jews then became envious of this favourable response by the Gentiles and “they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming” v.45. This was the typical reaction of the Jews in those days who also resorted to inciting violence, as in this case when “the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and

raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts” v.50.

As a consequence of this rejection Paul declared: “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you [Jews]: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth” vs.46-47 (Isa.49:6). Thus, in the purpose of God it was necessary for the offer of life to be given first to the Jews as God’s own people, but their rejection of it opened up the way for all others, “and when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” v.48. The great desire of all who believe the gospel is that many others too may hear God’s word and rejoice in the anticipation of eternal life at the appearing of the Prince of Life.

Week 13

The Acts of the Apostles 14

Saturday

Moving on to Iconium, Paul and Barnabas preached the truth there to both Jews and Gentiles, and despite antagonism from the Jews, “long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands” v.3. Eventually, however, “there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them” v.5, therefore they fled to Lystra where again they preached the gospel vs.6-7.

In Lystra they healed a man lame from birth, convincing the citizens that their gods had come down to them, supposing that Paul and Barnabas were the Greek gods Mercury and Jupiter. Only with great difficulty did the apostles dissuade them from making sacrifices to them, by pressing upon them the truth concerning the living God. However, Jews following them from Iconium soon stirred up the citizens to stone them and, although they left Paul for dead, he rose up, and the next day moved on to the neighbouring city of Derbe.

After preaching the gospel in Derbe, they retraced their steps, visiting the same cities, despite the danger from alienated Jews, “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith,

and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” v.22. In due course, they arrived back at Antioch, having fulfilled their mission v.26 “and when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” v.27. The first journey was completed, with many Gentiles believing the gospel, being baptized, and continuing in the apostles’ doctrine and practice in the hope of obtaining places in the kingdom of God at the return of his Son Jesus Christ.

oooOooo

Week 14

Introduction

Pharaoh and the Egyptians were determined not to let their Israelite slaves leave the land, but God would force them to do so, not only to save his people but also to demonstrate to all the nations that he, the God of Israel, is the one true God. The apostle cites this purpose in his letter to the Christians in Rome: “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth” Rom.9:17.

There are direct parallels with today for the scriptures also speak of our own time when once more the people of Israel are to be brought out, not just from Egypt, but from all the nations of the earth, into the promised land by the power of God. Pharaoh was stubborn and modern rulers and peoples will be likewise, but God’s power then achieved the desired result and it will do so again in the near future when all people of the earth will acknowledge the one true and living God and his Son Jesus Christ who will return to exercise that power.

Week 14

Exodus 8

Sunday

Moses was again sent to Pharaoh with the demand from God that he let his people go v.1, warning that refusal would result in the land being infested by frogs. Pharaoh did refuse and his recalcitrance brought the frogs into all their houses and every part of their living space. Although the magicians were also able by enchantment to bring up the frogs from the river v.7, it was to Moses that Pharaoh pleaded that the frogs be removed, promising in return to let the people go v.8. Moses declared they would be removed but at a

precise time so that Pharaoh might “know that there is none like unto the LORD our God” v.10. The LORD did remove the frogs “but when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said” v.15.

Consequently, another affliction was brought upon the Egyptians: a plague of lice v.17. The magicians again attempted to produce the same effect by their enchantments but, failing to do so, acknowledged the power of the living God, saying to Pharaoh: “This is the finger of God” v.18, but “Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said” v.19.

There followed, therefore, another plague, this time of flies, but with the difference that they would not afflict all the land of Egypt as had been the case with the other plagues, but only the land where the people of Israel did not dwell. The land of Goshen where Israel lived would be completely free of the flies which would swarm everywhere else in Egypt “to the end thou [Pharaoh] mayest know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth” v.22. This time Pharaoh relented and offered to let Israel sacrifice to the LORD in the land of Egypt v.25 but when this offer was rejected agreed to allow Israel to go three days’ journey into the wilderness vs.27-28. Once, however, Moses had entreated the LORD v.30 and the flies were completely removed from the land “Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go” v.32.

Week 14

Exodus 9

Monday

Once more Pharaoh was told to let God’s people go and of the next plague to come upon Egypt if he refused. This was a disease which would afflict all the different kinds of animals kept by the Egyptians v.3, but none of Israel’s animals would be afflicted, to demonstrate that the word and power came from Israel’s God. Pharaoh again refused to obey and the pestilence came upon the Egyptian animals that they died v.6, but none of Israel’s cattle did so. Pharaoh sent to Goshen to confirm the word of God, but still his heart was hardened and he did not let Israel go v.7.

The next plague was of boils which afflicted all the Egyptians, including the magicians who had attempted to match the power of God with their enchantments but who were now driven from the presence of Moses by the affliction v.11. Pharaoh had resisted every

command of God, being defiant, even in the face of the plagues, and deceitfully broke his promise to let God's people go. He hardened his heart and, with this plague, God maintained this hardness in his heart v.12 that he might be an instrument in the manifestation of God's power to all the people of the earth v.16.

The next plague was of hail, so great that it would kill any man or beast in the open. The Egyptians, however, were forewarned so they could take themselves, their families, and their animals under cover and be safe v.19. Those that had learned from the previous plagues responded to this warning, but those who disregarded God's word left servants and animals in the fields vs.20-21. And the hail came as stated, "Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail" v.26. We can all recognise the wisdom of those who obeyed God's instruction, did what he said, and saved their lives, and we should all recognise that, in effect, we are in the same position now. God has said what he will do, we have abundant evidence [as did the Egyptians] that he always does what he says, and by obeying his word we can save our lives, which in God's purpose means the difference between extinction in the grave or eternal life in the kingdom of God.

We should take note of the use of hail here in the judgments of God because he says he will use great hail in the latter days against one like Pharaoh who will invade Israel and afflict her. This is an event soon to happen, for Israel have returned to their land as foretold and the stage is being rapidly set for her to be invaded from the north, the outcome of which will be the salvation of Israel and the acknowledgement of God throughout the world: "And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face. And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD" Ezek.38:18,22-23.

The hail greatly affected Pharaoh in that he acknowledged to Moses: "I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked" v.27. He promised to let the people go if the hail ceased

v.28. Moses agreed to appeal to God because the ending of the ferocious storm would demonstrate “that the earth is the LORD’s” v.29, but he also expressed his knowledge that Pharaoh would remain recalcitrant v.30, which proved to be the case vs.34-35.

Week 14

Exodus 10

Tuesday

The plagues in Egypt ultimately effected the release of Israel from slavery but they had the additional benefit that the remembrance of them enabled succeeding generations to know the power of the LORD and have the assurance that he is the one true and living God: “Thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son’s son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I am the LORD” v.2. Because the record of these events has been preserved in the scriptures, we can also have the same knowledge and assurance.

After experiencing seven plagues, Pharaoh’s servants were convinced they should obey God’s word through Moses and, hearing the next plague would be of locusts, implored Pharaoh to relent and let the people go v.7. He did relent, but would not agree to let all the people and animals go, insisting that the men only go and worship God in the wilderness v.11. This was unacceptable and the plague of locusts came, moving Pharaoh to react more quickly than before: “Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the LORD your God, that he may take away from me this death only” vs.16-17.

Once the locusts were removed v.19, Pharaoh’s continuing recalcitrance brought darkness for three days upon all the land of Egypt, but not Goshen for “the children of Israel had light in all their dwellings” vs.22-23. This produced an offer from Pharaoh to allow all the people of Israel to depart, but not their herds and flocks v.24. When this was rejected Moses was thrust from Pharaoh’s presence with the exclamation that they would never meet again v.28. Moses assured him his words were true v.29 for the final plague would certainly release Israel from Egypt.

Week 14

Exodus 11

Wednesday

The LORD himself assured Moses that the tenth plague would not only make Pharaoh release Israel but also cause him to thrust them out v.1. This final terrible plague would kill all the firstborn in Egypt, both of men and animals v.5, but none of Israel would be harmed that all might “know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel” v.7. This is an important lesson to learn, even today, for God has chosen Israel to be his people, and he has promised to bless them that bless Israel and curse them that curse Israel. Furthermore, it is only by association with Jesus, and thereby with Israel, that any of us can receive the blessings which God has promised to bring upon his people.

The people were told to prepare for the last plague so that they would be ready to leave Egypt immediately. The following chapters tell us what the people of Israel had to do in preparation for the Exodus, and the New Testament tells us the significance of these events for the disciples of Christ. These disciples also are told to prepare for the sudden final intervention of God in the affairs of the world, when only those who have listened to his instructions and are ready and prepared will be able to respond immediately! We should note the significance of midnight v.4, for this is the time Jesus spoke of in his parable of his coming as a bridegroom to the wedding in which he exhorted his disciples to be ready: “And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” Mat.25:6,10-13.

Week 14

Exodus 12

Thursday

The apostle Paul wrote: “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” 1Cor.5:7, guiding us to an understanding of the significance of the last plague in Egypt which delivered Israel from bondage. That event, like so many in scripture, is a foreshadowing of a greater deliverance for God’s people, not from slavery, but from sin and death.

Deliverance in Egypt was effected by the sacrifice of a lamb v.3, but it is not possible that the blood of animals can take away sins (Heb.10:4) so God provided his only begotten Son as an efficacious sacrifice. He is “the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” Joh.1:29 “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of God’s grace” Eph.1:7.

Jesus would live a perfectly obedient life and have no blemish in his character. Therefore, to represent this, Israel was commanded concerning the passover lamb: “Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year” v.5. They were redeemed by the shedding of that lamb’s blood: we may be redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” 1Pet.1:19.

They were to sacrifice the lamb on the fourteenth day of the month Abib v.6, the very day that Jesus himself was sacrificed, and the blood of the lamb was to provide a covering for them so that they would not suffer when the judgments of God came upon the land. Likewise the blood of the Lamb of God can cover us in the coming day of judgment: “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” Rom.4:7-8.

The people of Israel, however, had to do their part. They had to strike the blood on their door frames v.7 and this would provide protection: “For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you” v.23.

Likewise we also, if we desire to remain alive when the LORD executes his righteous judgment in the earth, must act precisely according to his instructions. These are to believe the gospel of the kingdom of God, to be baptized, to continue in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, to obey the commandments of Christ, and to be ready for his coming. This readiness is typified by the instruction to Israel: “And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD’S passover” v.11.

The final plague brought the desired and anticipated result, for Pharaoh and the Egyptians rose up in the night and thrust the people

of Israel out of their land v.31 with such anxiety that they gave them every inducement to leave v.36. It is significant that the Exodus occurred on the very day God had arranged in advance, exactly 430 years from the day that Abraham entered the promised land v.41. This is reassuring, for God has made promises about the future which we can confidently anticipate taking place exactly as preordained. Although hundreds of years may have gone by, we know from the signs that the day of the Lord is very near at hand. We can also be sure he will intervene in the affairs of the world precisely on the day he has reserved in his own power (Acts 1:7). We are wise, therefore, if we believe the word of God and obey Christ, and are ready for the coming day.

Week 14

Exodus 13

Friday

The people of Israel left Egypt on the fourteenth day of the month and, although they left in the middle of the night, their way would have been lit up by the full moon which is very bright in Egypt. They were instructed to keep this day each year as a feast to the LORD to remember their deliverance from Egypt v.8. They were also to keep a further seven days as the feast of unleavened bread, and the significance of this in the lives of Christ's disciples is shown by the Apostle: "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" 1Cor.5:7-8.

The people of Israel were to keep these feasts at the appointed time each year in the land to which they were heading: the land flowing with milk and honey which the LORD promised to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob v.5. The faithful in Israel had been looking forward to this for centuries, and even those who knew they would not live to see the Exodus trusted that God would fulfil his word. For example, Joseph said on his deathbed: "I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence" Gen.50:24-25. Moses faithfully executed this request v.19.

The people had to travel through the howling wilderness to reach the promised land, but they were not left to find their own way, for God

guided them: he provided a pillar of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night vs.21-22. Interestingly, Israel's Exodus from Egypt, their journey through the wilderness, and their entry into the promised land is provided as a graphic representation of the journey of Christ's disciples walking in the way of salvation. We need to leave the world, represented by Egypt, and embark on a wilderness journey to bring us in the end to our inheritance with Abraham and Christ in the promised land. God provides guidance for us also, and that guidance is in his word, the Holy Scriptures.

Week 14

Exodus 14

Saturday

This chapter records the passing of the people of Israel through the Red Sea, and this should be of intense interest to disciples of Christ for the event was designed, not only to save Israel from the Egyptian army and to manifest the power of God but also to represent the salvation of believers of the gospel. The apostle said: "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" 1Cor.10:1-2. Just as Israel were baptized into Moses at the start of their journey to the promised land, so disciples of Christ are baptized into Jesus to begin their own journey to that same land. The apostle proceeded to show the significance of the events during Israel's journeying, and we will consider them in due course.

Pharaoh and the Egyptians very quickly regretted allowing Israel to leave v.5, and their army was sent in pursuit of their escaped slaves v.9. The Israelites were hemmed in by the sea, with no way of escape, and when they saw the approaching army their hearts fainted and they showed their faithlessness, complaining to Moses vs.11-12. Moses had already been told the outcome and was able to reassure the people: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" vs.13-14.

The people were not unprotected, for all God's children are served by the angels who are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation" Heb.1:14. The angel leading Israel moved the pillar of cloud between the Egyptians and the Israelites to

keep the Egyptian army at bay v.20. Moses then obeyed God's command to stretch his rod over the sea, and the LORD caused a strong wind to part the waters and provide a dry pathway for his people to cross to the far shore vs.21-22. The Egyptian army also went along the sea bed but when Moses once more stretched his rod over the sea the waters returned and destroyed them vs.23-28.

Many people dismiss this as myth, whereas God declares it is truth and a deed done to make himself known to both Egypt v.18 and Israel v.31. Similarly, God is about to make himself known in the earth by demonstrations of great power, but those who reject this record are unlikely to be prepared. They cannot see the evidence of God's hand at work among the nations now and are ignorant of the prophecies which are about to be fulfilled. For example, in the chapter which declared that Christ would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5), it is declared that Jesus will be "ruler in Israel" v.2, will be great to the ends of the earth v.4, and will deliver Israel and cut off her enemies when "...the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off" vs.8-9.

When Israel are delivered from all the nations they will be brought again into the wilderness (Eze.20:33-36) and once more they will pass through the Red Sea: "And the Lord shall set his hand the second time to recover the remnant of his people... And he shall... assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dryshod. And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt" Isa.11:11-12,15-16.



Week 15

Introduction

The apostle Paul had preached the gospel of the kingdom of God in Asia Minor, and many Gentiles had accepted the truth as it is in

Jesus. This produced problems between Jews and Gentiles, some of which were extremely serious for they could result in the corruption of the truth and the loss of eternal life. Most Jews refused to accept that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and resented Gentiles accepting the offer of salvation which they had rejected. The apostles had to deal with these problems, and we read particularly of Paul trying to persuade both Jews and Gentiles to believe the gospel, be baptized, and continue steadfast in the faith. This week we cover his second and third journeys through Asia Minor and into Europe until, back in Jerusalem, he is taken into custody by the Roman authorities.

Week 15

The Acts of the Apostles 15

Sunday

This chapter records the first heresy introduced into the Church, fatal to salvation if accepted, with some asserting that Gentile disciples of Christ must keep, not only his commandments but also the law of Moses: “And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” v.1. This heresy was so serious that Paul and Barnabas perceived that the authority of all the apostles was required to eliminate it, and so a conference was held at Jerusalem to decide the matter.

There was much disputing, especially by some who had previously been Pharisees v.5, but Peter, declaring how God had chosen him to open the way of salvation for the Gentiles, rebuked them, saying: “Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” v.10. The apostles Paul and James supported Peter, the outcome being that the apostles sent a letter to the Gentile Christians reassuring them that they were not required to keep the law of Moses. Nevertheless, to avoid offending the Jews v.21 who might yet believe the gospel and be saved, some particular precepts in the law were laid upon the Gentile disciples: “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well” vs.28-29.

When the Gentiles received this news, they “rejoiced for the consolation” v.31 because they were all released from the burden of

the law of Moses. Paul, Christ's apostle to the Gentiles, later fully explained the importance of this provision. The law given through Moses was "holy, just, and good" but because of human nature no one was able to keep it and obtain eternal life by obedience to it. Everyone under the law disobeyed, the consequence being death. Therefore, God provided Christ to keep the law perfectly that he might release us, not only from sin and death but also from the curse of the law: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" Gal.3:13. He took the law "of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" Col.2:14. For disciples of Christ, even today, this is a matter of great consolation, as it was to those in the first century, for "the wages of sin (disobedience to the law) is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" Rom.6:23.

Week 15

The Acts of the Apostles 16

Monday

Paul, having decided to "visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do" 15:36, went with Silas through Syria and Cilicia until they came to Derbe and Lystra v.1. Here there was a young man, Timothy, who had believed and who was to become a faithful companion to Paul in later years as well as a leading member of the church in Ephesus where he received the two letters from Paul which are preserved in our Bibles.

Paul and Silas on this journey were guided by the Holy Spirit which prevented them visiting certain Roman provinces vs.6-7 but which instructed them to go to Macedonia and preach the gospel there vs.9-10. At Philippi, the chief city of Macedonia, Paul preached the gospel to a group of women by the riverside, and Lydia "who worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" v.14 was baptized, and her household v.15.

Paul stayed at Lydia's house while he preached the gospel in the city, and one day he cured a woman who was supposedly possessed by the spirit of Python, a Greek god. Her masters were distressed at the loss of income occasioned by this cure, and accused Paul and Silas before the magistrates. Paul and Silas did not reveal they were Romans but permitted themselves to be beaten with many stripes and



cast into prison vs.22-23. They could easily have avoided this suffering as the magistrates would not have issued the order if they had known of their Roman citizenship, and when they discovered it later they were afraid v.38.

The concealment of their status achieved two results. Firstly, it dramatically disassociated them from the people of Philippi who were especially proud of their city's status as a Roman colony and of their own Roman citizenship, emphasising to the disciples that "Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" Phil.3:20-21. Secondly, it led directly to the acceptance of the gospel by the jailor and his household. When Paul and Silas "spake unto the jailor the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house v.32 they

rejoiced, believing in God with all his house v.34 and was baptized, he and all his, straightway” v.33. Again, as we see throughout this record, they who heard and believed the gospel were baptized.

Week 15

The Acts of the Apostles 17

Tuesday

Continuing on their journey, Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica where they went into the Jewish synagogue and taught the truth concerning Jesus. The Jews were looking for the coming of the Messiah (the Christ) to restore the kingdom of God to Israel, but they knew nothing of the Messiah’s suffering, death and resurrection. Therefore, Paul “reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead” vs.2-3. He also declared: “that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” v.3.

Some of the Jews and a multitude of Greeks believed v.4 that Jesus of Nazareth, who had suffered, died and risen from the dead, was indeed the Christ and destined to fulfil all that God had promised. But the Jews who did not believe, moved with envy, instigated a riot v.5 which resulted in Jason and other disciples being charged before the rulers of doing “contrary to the decrees of Caesar and saying there is another king, one Jesus” v.7. However, they were soon released, and Paul and Silas departed to Berea.

In Berea the apostles found Jews who were highly commended in the record because “they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so, therefore many of them believed” vs.11-12. This shows us the best way to respond to any who approach us purporting to preach the gospel: we should test what they say against the scriptures (and it should be noted that the scriptures referred to here are what we call the Old Testament for at that time none of the New Testament had been written). The Old Testament scriptures are full of information about the Lord Jesus Christ, written hundreds of years before his birth, providing absolute proof that these writings are the word of God and demonstrating how God is in control of events to fulfil his purpose.

In Athens, Paul was provided with the opportunity to teach this fact to the Greek philosophers, the leading thinkers of the time. He told them that “God hath made the world and all things therein” v.24 “and

hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” v.26. The extent of kingdoms and empires, and the times of their existence, are predetermined by God, and all nations are under his control while men and women have the opportunity to “seek the Lord” v.27. His purpose had been for centuries with Israel, during which time he “winked at” the ignorance of the Gentiles, but from the time of the Apostles “he commandeth all men everywhere to repent” v.30.

In due time, the “appointed day” will come when God “will judge the world in righteousness by the man [Jesus] whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead” v.31. The philosophers scoffed at the resurrection of Jesus v.32 and thereby rejected the assurance that God will intervene in world affairs and establish righteous rulership of the earth, bringing blessings to all mankind. Some, however, did believe v.34 and these would thereafter have the glorious hope for the future, looking forward to the time when Christ returns from heaven, raises the faithful from the dead, gives them eternal life, and invites them to live and reign with him: “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” Rev.20:6.

Week 15

The Acts of the Apostles 18

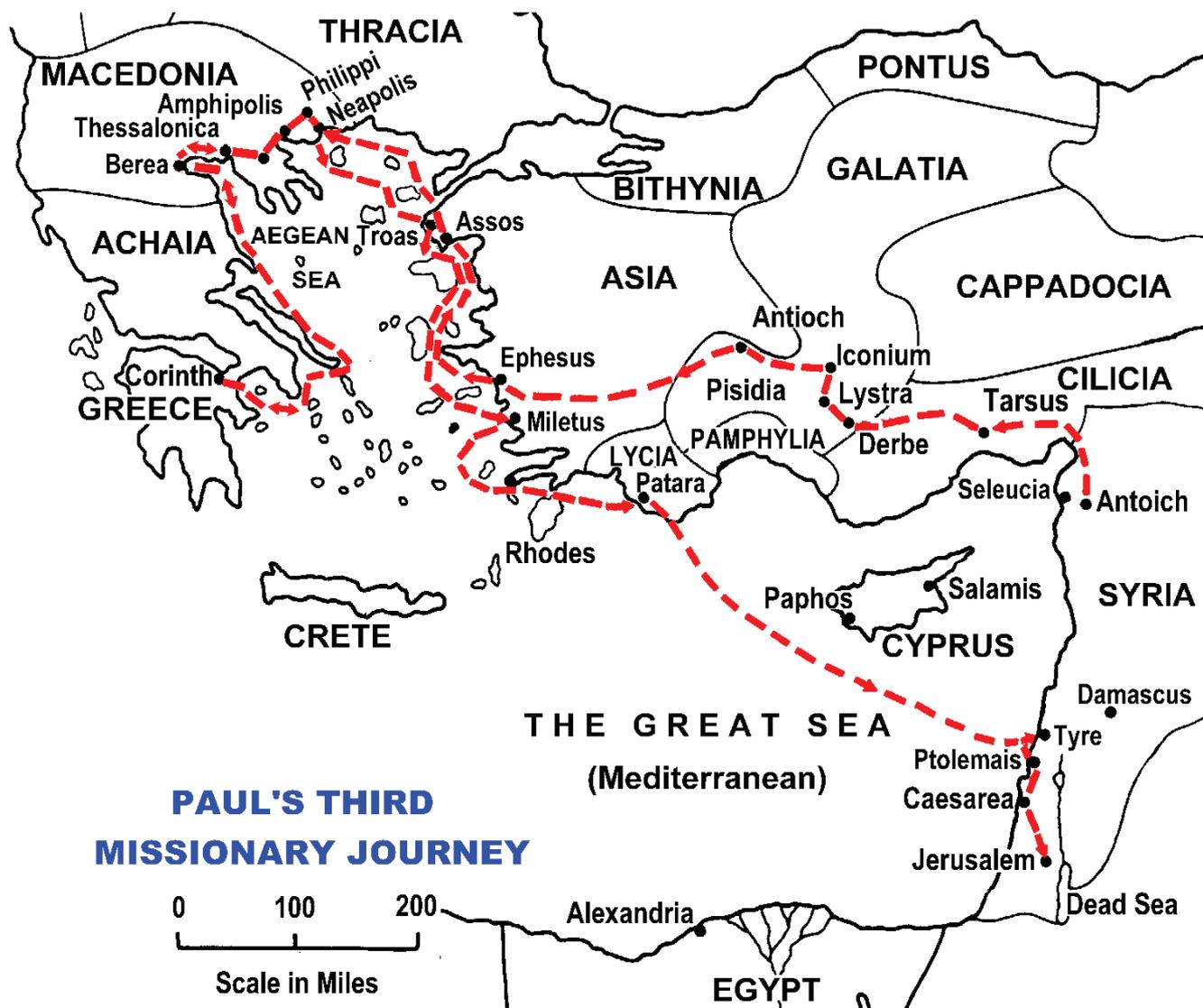
Wednesday

Arriving in Corinth, Paul “reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks” v.4. He would, as before, have persuaded them from the scriptures that the Messiah, as well as reigning as king in God’s kingdom in Israel, had to suffer, die, and rise from the dead, and it seems they accepted his reasoning. However, with the coming of Silas and Timotheus, he “testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ” v.5 so that “they opposed themselves, and blasphemed” v.6. Therefore the apostle declared: “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” v.6. The Jews in general refused to accept that Jesus was the promised Messiah and, as a result of this rejection, the opportunity of salvation was extended to the Gentiles. Many Gentiles believed and accepted the opportunity presented to them, even though it brought persecution, often instigated by the Jews, as illustrated in the events of this chapter.

Not all the Jews were rejectors of the gospel, and we have an excellent example in Apollos who was “an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures” v.24. He had, years before, responded to the teaching of John the Baptist but was unaware of Jesus: “he spake and taught the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John” v.25. After the disciples had “expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” v.26 he travelled through Achaia “mightily convincing the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures [the Old Testament] that Jesus is the Christ [the Messiah and king of Israel]” v.28.

Week 15 The Acts of the Apostles 19 Thursday

Paul also discovered twelve men in Ephesus who knew only John’s baptism v.3 so he pointed out to them that John the Baptist’s teaching was “that they should believe on him which should come after him,



that is, on Christ Jesus” v.4. Hearing this teaching, “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” v.5. Like all the disciples of Christ, they were baptized and, like many in the first century, they received the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the apostle's hands, and this was immediately apparent for they were able to speak foreign languages v.6.

Paul then “went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God” v.8. The gospel is “the gospel of the kingdom of God” and Paul made this good news known to the Jews, but when they hardened their hearts against his teaching he moved to the school of Tyrannus v.9 and continued teaching in Ephesus for a further two years “so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” v.10.

He also performed powerful deeds by the power of God vs.11-12,16 so that “the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds” vs.17-18. Learning the Truth, these believers recognised that the books they had previously highly valued were worthless, irrespective of their monetary value, and they burned them v.19. These men had come to realise that the books which are of inestimable value are those which constitute the word of God: “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed” v.20.

The apostle taught the truth about the LORD: that he is the only true and living God, the creator of all things, and that “idols made with hands are no gods” v.26. The consequence to the silversmiths in Ephesus, who made images of the city's god Diana, was very serious because “Paul persuaded and turned away much people” v.26, resulting in loss of trade. The silversmiths therefore provoked the people of the city into uproar, but the townclerk quelled the outbreak by warning of the consequences from the Romans of holding such an unlawful assembly, and successfully dismissed the crowd, saving Paul and the disciples from the prospective persecution.

Week 15

The Acts of the Apostles 20

Friday

Leaving Ephesus, Paul journeyed through Macedonia and in due course came to Troas v.6 where he met with the disciples on the first day of the week to break bread. Jesus had requested his disciples to

remember him until his return and instituted the feast in which they could break bread to remember his body broken for them and drink wine to remember his blood shed for them. Therefore, throughout the centuries, those who love the Lord's appearing have followed the apostles' example, as here at Troas, in keeping the feast every Sunday. On this occasion Paul spoke for a long time through the night, during which a young disciple fell from a high balcony and died v.9. Later, however, Paul brought him back to life again, greatly comforting the disciples.

On his way back to Jerusalem, Paul left his ship at Miletus and called for members of the church at Ephesus to meet with him. These were elders who, having the gifts of the Spirit, had the responsibility of feeding God's flock "over the which the Holy Spirit hath made them overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" v.28. Paul had preached the kingdom of God to them, but now he told them they would not see his face again v.25. He knew this by the Holy Spirit v.23, and they were very distressed vs.37-38.

Paul, however, gave them a warning of much greater concern - which he had previously pressed upon them day and night for three years - the departure of many disciples from the Truth as a result of false teaching, including that by some of these elders who had the Holy Spirit: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" vs.29-30. Jesus and all the apostles warned the believers that men would introduce error into the churches and that many disciples would depart from the One Faith. Even while the apostles were still alive this apostasy took place with the result that there were, and have been ever since, many who call themselves "Christians" but who are in fact disbelievers of the faith of Jesus Christ and believers of the errors which have been introduced over the centuries. The only course for seekers after truth is to test every doctrine against the word of God in the scriptures: "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise

unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” 2Tim.3:13-17.

Week 15

The Acts of the Apostles 21

Saturday

Paul, returning to Jerusalem, knew by the Holy Spirit that he would be taken prisoner v.11, knowledge of which caused distress to his fellow disciples, but “Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” v.13.

A false accusation against Paul was that he taught the Jews not to keep the law of Moses v.21, therefore James and the other disciples in Jerusalem counselled him to disprove this charge by worshipping in the Temple with some who made a vow: “Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication” vs.24-25.

Nevertheless, at the end of the seven-day feast, the false accusation was shouted out in the midst of the temple: “Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place” v.28. In the resulting uproar, Paul was nearly killed by the Jews, but was rescued by the commander of the Roman garrison v.31. This commander supposed Paul was an insurgent but when Paul spoke to him in educated Greek he was persuaded to let him address the Jews in his own defence vs.37-40. The Jews, though incensed, stood in silence while he spoke to them in their own language of Hebrew and taught them the truth concerning Jesus, as recorded in the next chapter.

oooOooo

Having been delivered from the attack of the Egyptian army and seen them drowned in the Red Sea, Moses and the people of Israel sang a song extolling the LORD and rejoicing in their deliverance (Exodus 15). The New Testament reveals that when the people of Israel are again delivered from their vicious enemies at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ a similar song will be sung: “And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest” Rev.15:3-4.

It will be necessary for the power of God in the hand of Jesus to bring God’s judgments on the oppressors of the nations because only by this means will righteousness and peace be established: “when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” Isa.26:9. Jesus will be established as king of Israel and ruler of the whole earth, and he will deliver the oppressed: “He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor” Psa.72:4. When this happens the people will sing joyful songs of deliverance, and they will appreciate then the happiness of the people of Israel on the banks of the Red Sea after their deliverance from their cruel oppressor.

Not all of that generation of Israelites who left Egypt were faithful. One would have thought that having seen the mighty works of God, by which they had been saved from bondage, and having passed through the Red Sea and watched the destruction of the Egyptian army, they would have known that God would certainly take them safely to the promised land. But many began to murmur and complain at the smallest setback, for example when they found the water was undrinkable. Although again the power of God resolved this problem they continued to complain throughout the wilderness journey. Disciples of Christ are therefore warned not to follow this example: “Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” 1Cor.10:10-11.

A month after leaving Egypt, the whole congregation of Israel as a body remonstrated with Moses declaring they would rather have died in Egypt where, though they were slaves, they had plenty to eat. The LORD therefore declared he would again demonstrate his power to them by bringing them flesh in the evening and bread in the morning v.12. The flesh was provided by great flocks of quails which flew over the camp and fell among them, so that evening they had abundance of flesh to eat. And first thing in the morning they discovered small round food which they called "Manna" v.15. The LORD provided them with this manna throughout their journeys in the wilderness v.35. It is instructive to learn from the New Testament that this Manna represents the word of God which the LORD has provided to sustain believers on their spiritual journey to the promised land. Jesus alluded to this when resisting temptation in the wilderness by quoting from the word the purpose of the Manna: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" Deut.8:2-3.

Furthermore, when Jesus miraculously fed the multitude with bread, they requested him to feed them daily with Manna as they said Moses had done. Jesus taught them that what they needed was not natural food, but the spiritual food of the word of God which would enable them to live for ever. They could obtain that life-giving word from him. In effect he was the true manna, therefore he declared: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent... I am that bread of life" Joh.6:29,48.

With the manna representing the word of God, it is instructive to consider the detailed directions given to the people in the wilderness for its collection and eating. They had to gather it each morning, and eat it that day, otherwise it corrupted. So we must feed upon the word of God daily. However the manna laid up before the LORD never corrupted because this represented the Lord Jesus Christ. He

was the Word of God made flesh and, being made immortal and incorruptible after his resurrection, has for the last 1900 years been with the LORD in heaven.

Week 16

Exodus 17

Monday

The people of Israel continued on their journey but at Rephidim they found no water to drink v.1. Again showing the incorrigibility of sinful flesh, they violently remonstrated with Moses and were on the point of stoning him to death when he sought assistance from the LORD v.4. And God did help, causing water to gush out of a rock after Moses had smitten it with his rod v.6.

These are representative events to illustrate God's greater work of salvation through Christ. Men have a natural propensity to murmur and complain about their lot but the LORD, in his mercy, has provided the means by which we can be saved out of all our distresses. This salvation is effected through his Son Jesus Christ who is represented by the smitten rock. Not only were the Israelites baptized into Moses, as Christians are baptized into Christ, and ate the same spiritual meat, but they "did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" 1Cor.10:4.

This was the reason why Moses was commanded to smite the rock with his rod: because this represented the smiting of Christ for the salvation of mankind. Jesus was scourged and crucified for us, and out of him flows the spiritual water, which is the word of God, by which we may live: "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" Joh.7:38.

Immediately the water was provided in the wilderness, the people of Israel were attacked by the Amalekites. Water in the desert was literally 'the water of life' for which men would fight. The same effect is seen spiritually in that whenever men have freely drunk of the water of life flowing from Christ they have been attacked. The simple imbibing of the word of Life, unfortunately, has this effect and has throughout history brought persecution, torture, and death. We are fortunate in living during times when physical violence is not afflicted on the disciples of Christ, but even today speaking the word of Christ can bring every other form of antagonism. The appropriate reaction of disciples of Christ under attack is to appeal to the LORD in prayer,

represented here by Moses holding up his hands during the battle v.11: “I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” 1Tim.2:8. Moses was not the only one active in this time of distress for companions helped him, even as disciples of Christ are commanded to help one another.

Week 16

Exodus 19

Tuesday

Three months after leaving Egypt the people of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai vs.1-2 where God would enter into a covenant with them and give them his law to regulate their lives when they lived in his kingdom in the promised land. God told Moses the condition upon which they would be his people and blessed above all the other nations: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” vs.5-6.

Moses relayed these words, with the result that “all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD” v.8. This affirmation formed the basis of the covenant which God made with Israel, the “Old Covenant”, to remain in force until the mediator of the “New Covenant” came. Jesus, by his sacrifice, confirmed the covenant made long before with Abraham and brought this new covenant into effect. While the people of Israel under the old covenant promised to obey God’s law given through Moses, the disciples of Christ under the new covenant promise to obey the law of God given through Jesus.

The rest of the chapter describes the terrifying manifestation of God’s power on Mount Sinai and the effect that fire, trembling earth, and sound of thunder and trumpets had on the people. The apostle contrasts this coming to Sinai with Christians, as it were, coming to Zion: “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I

exceedingly fear and quake:) but ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant” Heb.12:18-24. Therefore the Apostle warned the disciples of Christ: “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven” v.25.

Week 16

Exodus 20

Wednesday

At mount Sinai the people of Israel heard the LORD declare the ten commandments. Later these were written on stone tablets and kept in the ark of the covenant. These ten commandments were the core of those which the people of Israel were required to keep in the LORD’s land when they constituted the kingdom of God. These stated an Israelite’s duty to God and man. It is instructive to note the order of these commandments which indicates the priority to be given to different relationships: first to God vs.3-11, second to parents v.12, and then to others vs.13-17. These laws, as part of the Law of Moses, were appropriate to Israel as a nation in the holy land, and God promised them great blessings if they obeyed these commandments. The law, being the Law of God, was “holy, just and good” but, because no-one could keep every ordinance perfectly, instead of bringing eternal life to the individual, it brought a curse and death (Rom.7:10-12). It was to deliver men and women from this curse, as well as from sin and death, that Jesus died, and the New Testament teaches that this law was only to remain in force until the sacrifice of Christ. The disciples of Christ were therefore taught that they were not under the law of Moses but under the law of Christ, and it was a heresy to insist that Gentile believers were required to keep the commandments given to the nation of Israel. However, while the ceremonial elements of the Law of Moses were omitted from the law of Christ, the weightier matters of the Law such as love, mercy, and justice are emphatically required of Christians.

As to the ten commandments, nine of them are incorporated in the law of Christ, the excluded one being the keeping of the Sabbath (which is Saturday), concerning which the apostle wrote: “One man

esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” Rom.14:5. The Israelites could delight God by keeping the Sabbath day in the right way; we can delight God by living our whole lives in this way: “If thou... call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth [i.e. reign with Christ when he rules the world in righteousness]; and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” Isa.58:13-14.

Week 16

Exodus 24

Thursday

God gave Moses the law for the nation of Israel to keep in the promised land, and this became known as the “Law of Moses”, and Moses wrote all the words of the LORD in a book v.4. The people of Israel then entered into a covenant with God. Moses read all the words of God's law to them and they promised: “All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient” v.7. Sacrifice was made and blood shed vs.5-6 for, as the apostle pointed out when quoting this record, all covenants with God must be dedicated by blood: “For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats... and sprinkled both the book and all the people, saying: This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you” Heb.9:18-20. The apostle, in his exposition, contrasts the ordinances of Moses and Christ, showing that the blood of calves and goats cannot take away sins for ever, but the blood of Christ can, for his was a sacrifice of a perfectly obedient man gaining for his people forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

When Jesus, the evening before he was crucified, instituted a memorial feast for his disciples he employed similar words to Moses. He instructed his disciples to eat bread in remembrance of his body broken for them, and to drink wine in remembrance of his shed blood, saying: “This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” Luk.22:20. Since that time, all faithful disciples of Christ have partaken of this feast weekly as part of their obedience to Christ who said: “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luk.22:19) for they, like Israel of old, have promised: “All that the Lord hath said we will do, and be obedient.”

This chapter begins the description of the tabernacle which God required Israel to construct in the wilderness as his dwelling place in their midst. The design of this tent is interesting in itself but becomes more so when we realise that it represents the house composed of people in whom God will dwell in the midst of men. Because the tabernacle was to be typical of the household of God, Moses was warned to adhere strictly to the LORD's design, as the apostle later pointed out when showing how the ordinances given to Moses represented the future development of God's purpose: "the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount" Heb.8:5.

The design of the tabernacle, like the temple, consisted of a Most Holy Place, a Holy Place, and a Court, and these represent the three stages through which people pass to attain to eternal life, with the tabernacle's furniture indicating the requirements necessary for individuals to gain immortality.

God provided Jesus as a sacrifice to take away our sins: to redeem us "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" 1Pet.1:19. The lambs were sacrificed on the altar in the court outside the entrance to the Holy Place and the sacrifice of Christ, as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, enables individuals to enter, as it were, this Holy Place. Baptism is the ordinance by which believers associate themselves with the sacrifice of Christ. However the individual is also required to wash himself as the priests did at the laver in the court of the temple before entering the tabernacle. Therefore we are required to wash ourselves in the water of God's word: "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" Eph.5:25-26.

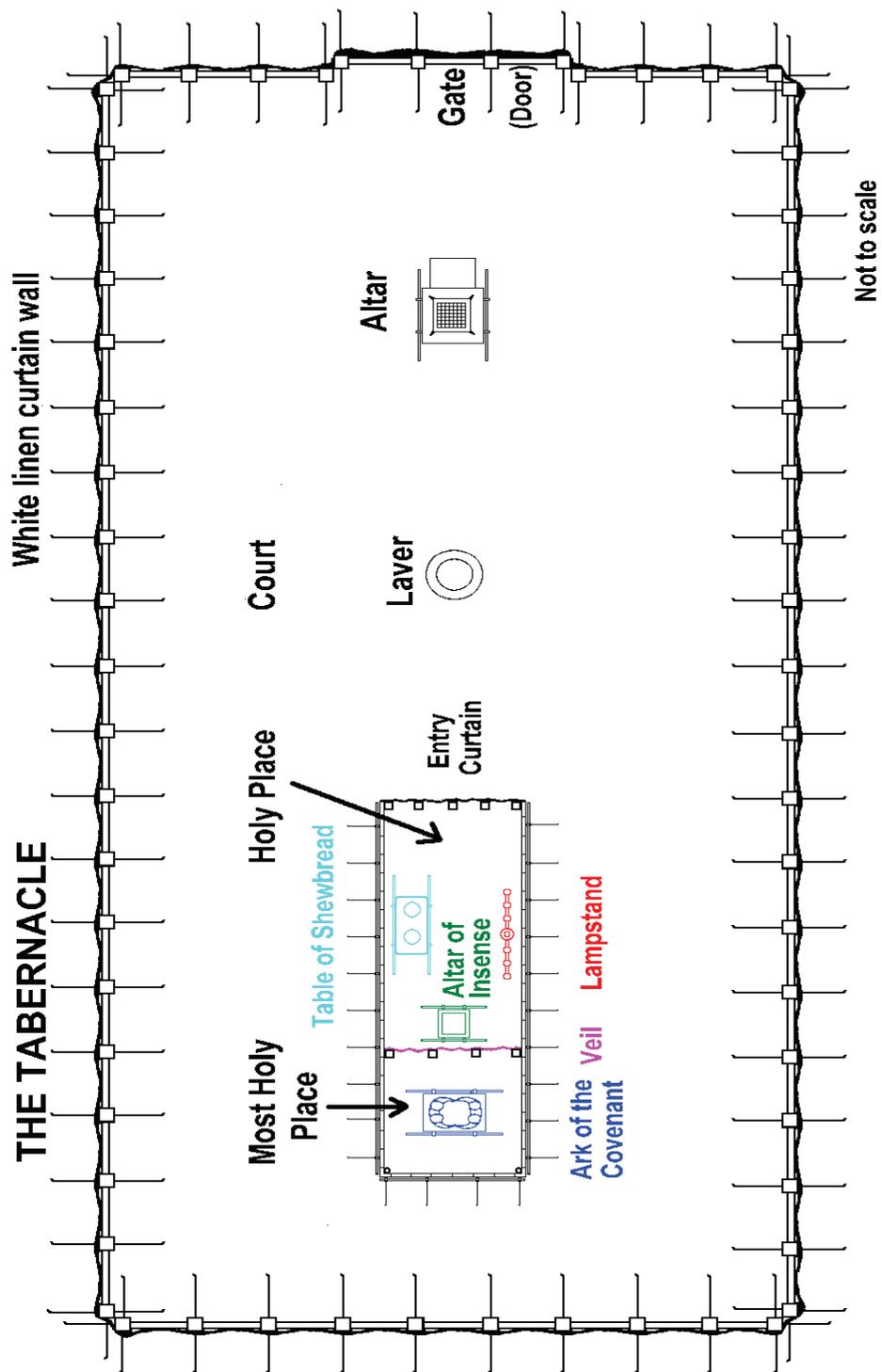
By believing God's truth in his word and ending his old life by being buried in the water of baptism, the believer begins a new life in which he "presents his body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is his reasonable service" Rom.12:1. He has, as it were,

entered into the Holy Place hoping in due time to enter the Most Holy and enjoy eternal life.

The Holy Place and its furniture represents the probation state and the provisions which God supplies to enable the believer to remain faithful. The shewbread on the table represents the food which sustains the disciple during his life, i.e. the word of God upon which he must feed. The candlestick provides the light which enables the disciples to walk in paths of righteousness, and again this is the word of God. The altar of incense from which the savour of burning incense passes through the veil into the Most Holy represents the prayers of the faithful

(Rev.8:3). It is significant that the priests were required to continually maintain these elements in the Holy Place; so the disciples should eat the word and be guided by it daily, and pray continually to the Lord.

When Jesus died, the veil of the Most Holy was rent in two because it represented his flesh. It was necessary that the body of Jesus be broken in sacrifice to open up the way to immortality, and when he rose from the dead his body was changed so that he became incorruptible and entered, as it were, into the Most Holy. When he



returns he will “change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil.2:20-22) so that all his faithful disciples will enter into the immortal state represented by the Most Holy.

The Most Holy was where the LORD communicated with Israel v.22 and the only furniture in it was the ark of the testimony which represented Jesus and the saints when they become immortal, and through whom God will communicate with mankind. The lid of the ark was the mercyseat which again was representative of Christ, for he is our mercyseat, a covering for our sins: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation (cover or mercyseat) for our sins” 1Jo.4:10.

The mercyseat had cherubim above it with the four faces of lion, ox, man, and eagle to correspond with the four standards of the camp of Israel, for the saints are the Israel of God. These saints are the disciples of Christ and are required to develop characters like his so that they may also, in the future, have bodies like him. Significantly, therefore, these four animals represent the fourfold aspect of Christ which are presented to us in the record of Jesus’ life in the gospels: Matthew as a king (the royal lion), Mark as a slave (the ox of burden), Luke as a man (the man), and John as the heavenly Son of God (the eagle).

The materials of the tabernacle are also highly significant and worthy of study, for they also represent the character of the people involved in the purpose of God. For example, the fine linen clean and white represents the righteousness of the saints (Rev.19:8). All this detail cannot be explained here but it is important to recognise that God’s purpose is not so much the construction of a literal tabernacle or house for him to dwell in, but the creation of people in whom he will dwell: “Ye are... fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” Eph.2:19-22. God is seeking people with willing hearts v.2 to respond to his invitation to enter his household: “Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and

touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you; and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” 2Cor.6:16-18.

Week 16

Exodus 32

Saturday

Moses received the law and the tabernacle’s design from the LORD when he ascended Mount Sinai. His delayed descent caused the people to doubt he would ever return, and they turned away from God to pleasure and idolatry v.1. This echoes the warnings of Jesus that when he ascended to heaven some disciples would say: “My lord delayeth his coming” (Mat.24:48) and begin to misbehave, and so he strongly exhorted all his disciples to remain loyal, despite apparent delay in his return: “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” v.44.

The Apostle uses the people’s behaviour as a warning to the disciples of Christ not to fall away into disobedience and fleshly lusts during Jesus’ absence, as Israel did during Moses’ time away: “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” 1Cor.10:6-11.

Moses interceded on behalf of the people, expressing his willingness to be excluded from the book of life in their stead v.32. There is a book of life in which names are written (Phil.4:3), i.e. God remembers us for good, with the promise of eternal life. If we do what he asks us then our names will remain in the book and Jesus will be our mediator, as Moses was for Israel: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” 1Tim.2:5. “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I (Jesus) will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” Rev.3:5.