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God, through His Son Jesus, provides eternal grace for our failures and human limitations.

Salvation In The Book of Acts. (2013)

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But also shows how you can know God for yourself.

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Salvation in the Book of Acts.

INTRODUCTION: since the overall and primary focus of this study is upon Scriptures (in most chapters of the book of Acts) that relate to salvation and are relevant to eternal life there are far too many different topics and titles to make a topics list, but I have faith that most who travel through each chapter will by the time they arrive at the end not only be enriched in their knowledge of salvation, but also enriched in God's love and God's grace in Christ.

Acts 1

Jesus Appears to the Apostles after His Resurrection.

Acts 1:1-3 ----- ¹In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach ²until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:6 ----- ⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Acts 2:21 ----- ²¹And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

From these verses we learn that: -

- Jesus lived the life he taught and was taken up to heaven.
- Jesus gave certain commandments to the apostles.
- Jesus after his death and resurrection appeared to his disciples for forty-days.
- The apostles knew there was a Kingdom to come.
- Jesus taught them about the Kingdom of God.

The commands Jesus gave to his apostles were to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations (Jews and Gentiles), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19) and to love their neighbour as themselves (Mark 12:31). James Jesus brother calls this commandment the royal law (James 2:8). The word, everyone embraces Jews and Gentiles, it matters not whether a person is born a direct descendant of Abraham, a Levite Priest, a Hebrew, rich or poor, noble or lowly whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. It should be mentioned here that there are two aspects to the Kingdom of God: -

1. God's present spiritual and global Kingdom being established by faith in the hearts and mind of very faithful brother and sister in Christ worldwide.
 2. The glorious Kingdom to come when Jesus returns in glory as King of kings and Lord of lords to establish God's King of righteousness, justice, joy and peace on earth.
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Acts 2

David Spoke of the Resurrection of Christ.

Acts 2:29-33 ----- ²⁹Peter says, "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne ³¹he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that

he was not abandoned to hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³²This Jesus God raised up and of that we all are witnesses. ³³Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

Even though David was a mighty king and warrior the strength in his life that held him together was his faith and his hope. He not only always saw by faith the Lord before him, but saw him at his right hand meaning by faith he trusted in Gods promise that in the Christ to come he would be resurrected and saved to eternal life and that God would not forget him in the grave, but raise him to eternal glory so that he would see the eternal Royal King the Holy One God had promised would come from his descendants. David knowing he would die and decay in the grave in contrast to the Holy One was confident that when he was raised to eternal life that just being in the presence of Christ would overwhelm him with happiness, gladness and joy (Acts 2:25-32).

David's faith was in the resurrection of God's Holy One: David understood God's eternal plan of salvation was to establish an everlasting Kingdom with a Holy One as King reigning over it. Though David could not have known the name of the future King being a prophet he foresaw that this King called the Holy ONE would be killed, but before his body could decay in the grave God would raise him to eternal glory. David trusted in Gods promise that He would raise up from one of his descendants a King to reign in Gods eternal Kingdom forever and had no doubt that God would not forget his body in the grave but resurrect him to eternal life and eternal glory. He held these promises ever before him meaning he kept them as the central and dominant thought of his mind and it was this hope that kept him joyful throughout the difficulties and troubles of life (Acts 2:25-32).

Finding happiness and joy in Christ: David's joy came from trusting in God's promise that God would raise him from the dead to eternal life and everlasting glory and that he would stand in the presence of the Christ, Gods promised Holy One and King of the eternal Kingdom. Christians today should find their joy in the same promise that David trusted in by being like David and keeping this glorious eternal promise and hope as the foundational desire of their heart and the foremost thought of their mind.

Receiving the promise of the Holy Spirit: at this time Jesus has been resurrected and is seated at the right had side of his heavenly Father. Peters words, "They are now seeing and hearing the promise of the Holy Spirit that Christ has received from the Father" (v33), refers to all those from the upper room who have been gifted with the ability to speak in other languages and are now proclaiming with enormous excitement and joy the glory of God and of Christ. The promise of the Holy Spirit is that God would count both Jews and Gentiles who have faith in Christ, righteous apart from religious works and grant them eternal life.

The entire focus of Peter's message especially when speaking about David has been upon God's promise that He would raise Christ (the Holy One) from the grave to eternal life and upon the hope David had in this promise that he also would be raised from the grave to eternal life, this means that the promise Peter has in mind refers to the gift of eternal life. This is the promise that Christ has received from his heavenly Father and the gift he is now pouring out on Jews and Gentiles alike. The miraculous gift of speaking in other languages that people understood was a sign and testimony that Jesus has the power to give eternal life to whoever comes to him.

- Jesus said, "Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal" (John 6:27).
- Jesus said, "I give them eternal life and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28).
- Jesus in prayer to his Father in heaven prayed, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him" (John 17:1-2)

Peter is saying that the promise that the crowd is seeing and hearing is the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy that God would pour out the Holy Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28). This means God is pouring out the Holy Spirit on Jews and Gentiles alike. God has given the one hundred and twenty in the upper room the ability to speak in a language other than their own that people understood to witness and testify that salvation and Gods favour are no longer limited to the Jews, but as Joel prophesied, "It shall come to pass that whoever who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved" (Joel 2:32).

This is the beginning of the early church that God is building in Christ by pouring out the Holy Spirit on all Flesh meaning that he is saving both Jews and Gentiles in the same way which of course is through repentance and faith in Christ.

The promise of the Holy Spirit is for all who are far off: the words, "The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off (v39), refer to the promise of eternal life and the words, "For your children" refers to the next generation and "For all who are far off" embraces all future generations until Christ returns. The promise in focus is not speaking in another language, that was simply a sign to testify to the unbelieving Jews that the promise of eternal life is not limited to them only, but embraces both Jews and Gentiles (all flesh).

The promise refers to God's promise that He will raise those in Christ from the grave to eternal glory. Everyone regardless of their birthright can receive this promise through repentance and being baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, whoever from the heart does these two things receive forgiveness of sins and the promise of the Holy Spirit which is righteousness (apart from religious works) that led to eternal life in everlasting glory (v38-39).

Repent and be Baptised for the Forgiveness of Sin.

Acts 2:37-38 ----- ³⁷Now when they heard this (Peters Sermon) they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

From this verse we learn that to be saved to eternal life a person must repent and be water baptized into Christ to receive forgiveness of sin. Whoever is repents and is water baptised will receive the gift of eternal life (i.e., the gift of the Holy Spirit).

Acts 3

Repent and Turn that your Sins may be Blotted Out.

Acts 3:17-21 ----- ¹⁷And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Repent: means to think differently, to reconsider afterwards and morally feel remorse guilt or shame

Blotted: means to obliterate erase and wipe away, in this context it carries the idea of forgiving and pardoning sin.

Refreshing: means a recovery of breath, figuratively a revival of life. The time of refreshing in this context can apply to the following two events: -

1. To that moment when godly repentance brings that reality of God and the knowledge that all sins are forgiven and the ongoing experience of continual life in Christ knowing righteousness that leads to eternal life is imputed as a free gift because of ones faith in Christ contrasted to striving to attain to righteousness by works and self-effort.

2. To the Lords return as King of kings and Lord of lords to establish God's Kingdom of righteousness, justice, joy and peace on earth.

Restore: (restitution in KJV) means, to build up and restore it can apply to restoring, the physical nature, the body, the character, the memory or a person's health, to the restoring of a person's vitality, a home, an organisation or to the restoring of laws (i.e., justice) and to restoring any kind of damage.

Peter accuses the Jewish crowd of not only denying the Holy and righteous One that their God glorified, but also of killing him because they asked Pilate to release a murder even though he wanted to release Jesus who God raised from the dead (v13-15). Then Peter makes two astounding statements: -

1. They killed Christ in ignorance meaning they did not realise he was the promised seed of Abraham and of David the Messiah and the Christ to come.
2. The evil they did in having Christ killed had already been told by the prophets, so in their act of ignorance they were in fact fulfilling Scripture (v17-18) thus as wicked and horrific as Jesus suffering was God in His foreknowledge had already spoken through the prophets that it would happen.

NOTICE: Peter says even the Jewish religious ruler who plotted the entire murder of Jesus acted in ignorance (v17), this shows the wisdom, wonder and majesty of God, the chief priests, Pharisees and scribes killed Jesus for their own selfish gain, but in actual reality they were fulfilling Scripture and bringing about their own destruction. This is because the moment Jesus rose from the grave to the right hand side of his heavenly Father they are not needed, since no-one needs a human priest, a temple or a religious system to go to God as Jesus is now the perfect and eternal High Priest for every sinner who is seeking God and for those who belong to his family.

Repent that your sins may be blotted out: the following comforting words of Peter, "Repent and turn again that your sins may be blotted out (v19-20) show how abounding God's grace is, this is a nation that agreed to the murder of God's only beloved Son and yet Peter tells them if they will repent and turn again to God the LORD will not only favour them, but also send to them their Messiah and King whom the prophets spoke of (v20). Sadly Israel as a nation did not repent and accept God's Son the Lord Jesus Christ their Messiah and Saviour of the world and even today as a nation they remain in spiritual blindness, but even this is in the foreordained plan of God.

The Jewish people and Jesus today: though the Jewish nation had the most convincing evidence, the most powerful preaching, the clearest call from Christ himself and from his apostles, ever since the first preaching of the Good News of the Gospel of grace multitudes of them have remained even to this day hardened and blinded to the glory of God's grace in Christ by their obstinacy and unbelief from generation to generation. In (2011) I attended a public meeting in which an Israeli lecturer who travelled the world speaking for the Jews today and about Israel's land and their history as recorded in the Bible. At the end of her lecture the meeting was opened up to the audience for questions. One lady asked: -

- How do the Jews view Jesus today?

The Jewish speakers' answerer was: -

- Our Messiah has not yet come.

There was a sudden silence over the meeting at this moment, then the same lady obviously a Christian quoted a few Scriptures to show that Israel's Messiah did come, the lecturer was kindly patient, but after a short while turned and picked up a Jewish Bible, held it in the air and said: -

- This is our Bible and there is no New Testament in it."

A man stood up and asked: -

- How do the Jewish people view a Jew who converts to Christianity?

The speakers replied: -

- We would consider that they have left the faith.

As she spoke it was clear that the Jewish people love God and love their Messiah the promised seed of Abraham and David they just haven't recognised him yet (and even this is in God's eternal plan) but it reminded me of the following fabulous and prophetic words of Zechariah: -

- The LORD will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be great, the land and the priests shall mourn, and all the families that are left each by itself shall mourn (Zech. 12:9-14).

When this momentous and beautiful moment takes place the entire world will change as we know it today, and a glorious New Age will begin, one of righteousness, justice, joy and peace because the King of peace will be the Head and Shepherd of all nations.

Heaven must receive Christ until the time of restoration: the words, "Heaven must receive Christ until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago" (v21) is stunningly amazing when one considers, that David being a king and prophet said: -

- The LORD said to my Lord (the Christ); "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool (Psalm 110:1).

And the author of Hebrews tells us: -

- From the time Christ sat down at the right hand of his Father he is waiting until God makes his enemies a footstool for his feet (Heb. 10:13).

This means that we are living in the age in which God is at work making the enemies of Christ his footstool meaning making them ready to submit to him. This does not necessarily mean that they are saved to eternal life, but it does mean they will declare him to be Lord and King. Paul in his letter to the Philippian church wrote that: -

- God has highly exalted his Son and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

Paul's words, "Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord," will occur when the Lord returns in glory as, King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11-16) to rule and reign from God's Holy City Jerusalem (on Mount Zion God's Holy Mountain) to establish God's Kingdom on earth during his glorious millennial reign.

In the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6) the dead in Christ and the faithful, who are alive, will be gathered together to rule and reign as kings and priests with the Lord over those nations who are left outside the Holy City of God. Christ the King united with his people will not only bring peace to the Middle East, but establish God's Kingdom of steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, joy and peace throughout the world and the glory of God will cover the earth.

Jesus will do justice to the poor and oppressed, he will be a faithful and compassionate King forever. He will not allow anyone to strike terror in the earth or use lies and deception to enlarge their own wealth and power. The land will abundantly produce and even the deserts will flourish. The animals will not feed on each other and even the lamb will be able to lie down with the wolf and everyone will eat of their own hands because all that they plant will produce. All nations the LORD has made will come and worship before the Lord Jesus Christ. They will glorify God's Name, proclaiming the LORD is great and does wondrous things and that He alone is God.

The book of Revelation states: -

- Jesus Christ, the faithful witness who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father is coming in glory and every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him and all kindreds of the earth (Revelation 1:5-7).

And in Revelation chapter five we are told that: -

- Christ was slain, and by his blood he redeemed a people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and made them a kingdom and priests to God and they shall reign on the earth (Revelation 5:9-10).

At the end of this glorious Kingdom age God descends to earth on a Great White Throne the sea, death and hades (the grave) give up the dead. They stand before God and are judged according to what is written in certain heavenly books according to what they have done.

Death and those counted unworthy are cast into the Lake of Fire a symbol of eternal destruction (i.e., total extinction) (also called the, Second Death) (Rev. 20:11-15). Christ hands the Kingdom over to his heavenly Father and God is ALL in ALL and ETERNITY begins in all its fullness and majestic royal glory.

For further information see titles: -

- Kingdom of God (ON WEBSITE MENU).
- The Second Resurrection or Great White Throne Judgment.

In, Resurrection (ON WEBSITE MENU).

God will Raise up a Prophet like Moses and the Seed of Abraham.

Acts 3:22-26 ----- ²²Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. ²³And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people. ²⁴And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. ²⁵You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' ²⁶God, having raised up his servant sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

The promised seed of Abraham is the Lord Jesus Christ he is the servant seed of Abraham in who all the families of the earth will be blessed and the servant prophet that Moses said in the following verse was to come like him.

- The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' And the LORD said to me 'They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him and whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him (Deut. 18:15-19).

Jesus Christ is the prophet and servant god raised up like Moses. The prophet Moses delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt (called the house of slavery), Jesus Christ is delivering Jews and Gentiles from the bondage of the universal law of sin and death which states: -

- The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

Travelling through the Old Testament we see that God through the prophets promised he would raise up His servant and as our journey through the Old Testament ends and we begin travelling through the New Testament we are presented with an Angel of the LORD telling a woman who found favour with God named Mary that: -

- The Holy Spirit will come upon her, and the power of the Most High will overshadow her and she will conceive in her womb and the child to be born shall be named Jesus and called the holy Son of God, and God the Most High will give to him the throne of his father David and his Kingdom will be eternal" (Luke 1:30-35)

And now Peter is telling the men of Israel that Jesus (the one they killed) (v15) is the seed of Abraham, the servant like Moses and the seed of David that God promised through Moses and the prophets that He would raise up (v22).

Israel's wickedness during Jesus generation: here we see the great love and patience God has toward His people, Peter says, "God sent Jesus to turn Israel from their wickedness so that He could bless them" (v26). The wickedness of Israel at this time was great as the following list shows: -

- Their religious rulers held the most honoured place of religious authority (Moses seat) but were blind guides and hypocrites not practicing what they told others to do. They were self-righteous and though appeared holy on the outside were full of greed and wickedness on the inside. They oppressed others and perverted justice for their own gain.
- They ignored the poor and those in need and thereby neglected the love of God. They were prideful, loved the best seats in the synagogues and hearing their followers exalting and esteeming them as men of importance.
- The Scribes and religious lawyers were loading people with burdens hard to bear that they themselves would not touch even with one of their fingers.
- They robbed people from the keys to God's knowledge and because they never entered into the LORD'S word themselves were hindering those who were seeking God. God's priests and religious authorities were not in the ministry to serve God, but for their own selfish ambition they were full of self-indulgence and lawlessness and put legalistic rules and laws above grace, compassion and mercy shutting the door to the Kingdom of God to those who desired to enter in.
- The religious rulers of Israel were leading the entire nation of Israel away from the LORD their God and His ways and when they did convert someone they made them worse than they were before and thereby were turning the people of Israel to a path of spiritual blindness, legalistic rules and a wrong way of living before God to such an extent that Jesus called them serpents and vipers (scorpions) (Matt. 23) (Luke 11:39-54).

This is how corrupt and wicked the LORD'S chosen people Israel who God treasured as His own child had become, yet not only did God not give up on them, He sent His most beloved Son to them that they might forsake their wickedness and turn again to the Lord their God and be blessed in all the eternal promise God had given them through the prophets.

Acts 4

The Corner Stone and the Resurrection of the Dead.

Acts 4:1-2 ----- ¹Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ²greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

Acts 4:11-12 ----- ¹¹This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you the builders which has become the cornerstone. ¹²And there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Acts 4:33 ----- ³³with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

The Sadducees were against the apostles teaching because they did not believe in the resurrection (some say this is why they are called Sad-U-See). The builders in this context, refers to the high priest Caiaphas and Annas, the chief priests and the religious rulers. They are referred to as the builders because they were in the privileged position of authority to oversee and build the Kingdom of God. The cornerstone was the most important stone of a building, not only did everything begin from the cornerstone, but if this stone was not exact the rest of the building would not rise up in a plumb line.

This is why Jesus is referred to as the cornerstone of the eternal spiritual temple that God is building in Christ made up of Jews and Gentiles. From these verses we learn that the apostle's testimony and message was the resurrection of Jesus and that there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved

Acts 5

God Raised Jesus as Saviour to Give Repentance of Sin.

Acts 5:29-32 ----- ²⁹But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Here we see the great faith of Peter and the apostles with him. The high priest and the party of the Sadducees had arrested the apostles and put them in prison for preaching Jesus, but an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and told them to go out and proclaiming Jesus.

When the high priest, the Sadducees, the officers, the council and the senate of Israel saw the apostles teaching the people after they had charged them not to speak of Jesus Peter and the apostles no doubt clearly aware they would most likely be thrown back in jail make the bold statement, "We must obey God rather than men," and then tell the high priest and the Sadducees that the God of their fathers raised Jesus whom they killed by hanging him on a tree and exalted him at his right hand as leader and Saviour to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Upon hearing this, the high priest and the Sadducees were enraged and wanted to kill the apostles (V17-33). From these verses we learn that the apostles valued serving God more than they valued their own lives and that their message was the death and resurrection to eternal glory of Jesus and repentance and forgiveness of sin.

From House to House Disciples taught Jesus.

Acts 5:42 ----- ⁴²And every day, in the temple and from house to house they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

Ponder for a moment: when the early church came together after Christ's death and resurrection it was made up of Jews who had been indoctrinated with Moses Law for nearly four-thousand years, Samaritans who had married foreign wife's and adopted their pagan practises, and Gentiles who knew nothing about God or the Old Testament Scriptures. These groups of vastly different mindsets were coming together in home churches to worship God. Though there was amongst their meetings a multitude of different views all had one thing in common, Jesus was central in their lives; he was the one that they were coming together for. They no-doubt loved talking about Christ and studying the Scriptures together, I suspect much like university students who when given an assignment get together in a spirit of friendship so they can learn from each other by sharing their thoughts, ideas and discoveries to improve their knowledge and their marks.

They don't argue and impose their thoughts onto the group, but simply share in a spirit of discovery their ideas, and all have the understanding that some ideas will be accepted and others may end up in the bin, but they have learnt through their school years that to improve their knowledge, enhances what they are studying and enriches their learning they need to be with others who have an interest in the same thing. Likewise the early church gathered together in homes of faithful brothers and sisters in the regions they lived in for the purpose of learning from each other and fellowship together.

House churches: church in the New Testament was in the home of a faithful brother or sister of Christ. The observant reader as they journey through the writings of the apostles and Paul will notice that though the word church is mentioned many times there is no mention of any church buildings. There is in the secular global world today a mindset that the church is a Sunday meeting in a religious building, but this is not the New Testament concept of church. During the early church era building God's church was not about financing opulent mega million dollar buildings, but rather about people gathering together to share their faith in any place they were able.

Never make the mistake of limiting the church to only the established religious institutions, denominations or church buildings, they may be a part of the body of Christ, but they are not the only part. There are many individual Christians in all countries of the world who meet in coffee bars, social outings and mostly their own homes to give thanks to Christ and share their discoveries of God's word and their spiritual experiences with Him. Many of these people are helping others and simply manifesting the reality of their faith to the people that come into their lives. God is not limited to any one pattern or organisation; He is far too creative for that.

Jesus church is global and is manifested in a vast variety of ways across the face of the earth. In many third world countries church is held outside under a tree (for shade) with its members sitting on the dusty ground often with dogs, chooks and other animals roaming around. Throughout history there has always been hundreds of thousands of unseen humble Christian brothers and sisters in Christ spending their time helping the poor and the less fortunate. The church is the reflection of Christ on earth and therefore should be walking in the same Spirit of love, kindness, compassion and grace etc. that Christ walked in while on earth.

New Testament Christianity is fluid and not restricted to a particular building or even a special day. The Christianity Christ taught is so exciting and real, it cannot be contained. It has no limitations and overflows into every moment of a Christian's life. The New Testament church is global, moving and manifested in the lives of all those who are faithful and who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ

For further insights into the global church see the title: -

- Church (The definition of a Church) in Various Topics (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Acts 7

God Does Not Dwell in Buildings.

Acts 7:48-50 ----- ⁴⁸Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands as the prophet says, ⁴⁹"Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? ⁵⁰Did not my hand make all these things?"

Stephen being fully aware that the high priest and the Jewish council believed that God dwelt in their royal and majestic and opulent temple decorated in gold, precious stones and curtains with its altar and religious emblems and furniture tells them that God does not dwell in buildings no matter how majestic, opulent and holy they may appear.

The dwelling place of Gods Spirit is in the heart of those who are by faith devoted to Christ and who seek peace, uphold justice and show mercy, compassion, kindness and grace to others. The apostle Paul wrote, "In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Ephes. 2:22).

Certainly when faithful brothers and sisters come together to worship in a building God's presence fills that building, but that does not mean that God is dwelling in the building, but that He is by His Spirit inhabiting the praises of those who love Him and are devoted by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. As soon as the congregation leaves so too does the presence of God's Spirit.

Old Testament Prophets Spoke of the Righteous One to Come.

Acts 7:51-53 ----- ⁵¹You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵²Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

The Jews (especially the religious leaders) believed that as long as they were circumcised in the flesh and strictly adhered to their ceremonial rites and holy days and kept their religious customs and traditions they were made righteousness before God, for them it mattered not what was in the heart or the lifestyle they lived, righteousness they believed was all about keeping outward religious rules and laws. Resisting the Holy Spirit refers to resisting Christ himself and the words he spoke and living in the fruits of the flesh (self, ego, pride, lust, greed and such like things in contrast to living in the spirit (love, compassion, mercy, grace, kindness, forgiveness and such like things).

NOTE: this entire chapter is focused on Stephen giving the entire history of Israel to prove to the unbelieving Jews that Jesus was who he and others claimed him to be. It is interesting to notice that Stephen's primary focus is not upon teaching the Old testament Scriptures or the history of Israel, rather he is using it to shine a spotlight on the truth that Jesus is the promised Messiah the Christ that the Scriptures speak of and the prophets said was to come to prove to the unbelieving Jews that Jesus is who he and the apostles claimed him to be.

Stephen ends his message telling the religious leaders that their fathers not only persecuted the prophets, but also killed the prophets who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, who they have betrayed and murdered even though they received the law which was delivered to them by angels and yet they did not keep it (Acts 7:52-53). Immediately after saying this, the religious Jewish crowd took him out of the city and stoned him.

It is interesting to notice: the Scriptures tell us that Jesus is seated at the right hand side of his heavenly Father (Luke 22:69) (Heb.8:1) (Heb.12:2), yet when Stephen was testifying of Christ to this murderous religious crowd the Scriptures picture Jesus standing up. This clearly is a beautiful vision of how moved Jesus was upon seeing Stephen standing up proclaiming his name in the face of such a religiously frantic and violent crowd (Acts 7:55).

Now here is the majestic glory of Stephens love and the strength of His faith, as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:59-60). Now that is great love and great faith, is it any wonder Jesus stood up for Stephen!

Acts 8

The Good News of the Kingdom and Water Baptism.

Acts 8:5 ----- ⁵Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

Acts 8:12 ----- ¹²But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women.

From these two verses we see that Phillips ministry was to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom and of the Lord Jesus Christ and to water baptise men and woman who believed.

The Lamb Led to the Slaughter.

Acts 8:32-39 ----- ³²Now the passage of the Scripture that the Ethiopian (a eunuch) was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." ³⁴And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁷And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart you may" and he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." ³⁸And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹And when they came up out of the water the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

From these verses we learn that Jesus willingly surrendered his life to his enemies to a brutal, bloody and cruel death so that whoever comes to him could be saved to eternal life. His trial was a farce and a perversion of Justice. To be SAVED to eternal life one must believe from the heart (meaning with all their being) that Jesus is the Son of God who died and rose again and be water baptised. Here is the majesty and wonder of the inspiration of God upon the prophets of old, Isaiah the prophet spoke of Christ being led like a sheep to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer thousands of years before it came to pass (Isaiah 53:7-8).

NOTICE: Phillip and the Ethiopian both went down into the water and came up out of the water showing water baptism is by full immersion when there is water available for the repentant sinner to be baptised. For further information concerning water baptism, see the title, "Water Baptism" (ON WEBSITE MENU)

Acts 9.

The Apostles Preached Jesus.

Acts 9:27-28 ----- ²⁷But Barnabas took Paul and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road to Damascus he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.

Acts 9:42 ----- ⁴²And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

Barnabas and Paul's ministry was to proclaim Jesus and turn people to him.

The King of the Kingdom: at this present time the Kingdom of God is a spiritual Kingdom being established by faith in the heart and mind of those who belong to Christ and faithfully follow him. When Christ returns in glory he will separate the wicked servants out of his Kingdom and then the glory of the sons and daughters of God will be manifested to the world and this present spiritual Kingdom will become a literal Kingdom on earth with Christ ruling and reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords.

It is interesting to notice that the focus of the apostles has not been upon the literal Kingdom to come, but upon the King of the Kingdom. This is because whoever belongs to the Kings family will inherit the Kingdom. Prior to Christ's death and resurrection the focus was on the literal Kingdom to come, but after the Lord's death the apostles, Peter and Paul shine the spotlight on the Lord Jesus Christ the King of the Kingdom. This is because the Kingdom is not the path to Salvation, but the inheritance of those who are saved, Jesus is the royal and golden path into the Kingdom whoever belongs to Christ are not only his friends and his brothers and sisters, but are also adopted children of God and since they belong to God's family they are naturally legal heirs to the glorious literal Kingdom to come.

Acts 10:34-35 ----- ³⁴Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

God shows no partiality means it matters not if a person is born a direct descendant of Abraham, a Levite priest, rich or poor, noble or lowly it makes no difference in regards to God's acceptance of them. This is because God will accept whoever humbles themselves in honest repentance and accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as their eternal saviour and their King and does what is right.

The fear of the LORD: The fear of the LORD is having a hatred of everything that harms another human physically, financially, sexually, verbally, emotionally, or spiritually and having a strong dislike of those who deliberately destroy the planet (i.e., arsonists who set forests on fire, companies who pour their toxic poisonous waste into rivers and such like things and having a strong dislike toward whoever deliberately treats animals cruelly it is about having a fear of doing any of these things, because they are all destructive and bring pain, hurt and harm to others.

- Jesus said, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

These words of Jesus shine a brilliant spotlight on the truth that God loves humans so much so that He gave his only Son to die for them. The fear of the LORD is about not hurting and harming others, it is about knowing that we are all going to stand before God one day and give an account of our actions, the fear of this judgment should motivate us to do the right thing and treat others with respect, honest justice and decency.

The fear of the LORD and Salvation: the reason a person is told to fear the LORD is because all humans have sinned and will one-day be judged by God. This fear should motivate all of us to seek God and his eternal salvation and forgiveness. That is why the Bible says the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom it motivates a person to seek God and His forgiveness. The apostle John said: -

- If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and if we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10).

Once a person finds the LORD and His forgiveness and knows His grace and His love then the heart and the mind is transformed and the passions are changed in such a way that they now consider God's testimonies more wonderful than fine gold. Added to this they now understand that God's laws are about protecting them and other humans from harm and impart wisdom and understanding to even the lowest in rank. The motivation to follow and continually seek God is no longer from fear, but from love because they now know and experience the love God's has for them.

The Fear of the LORD has two aspects: -

1. **An eternal aspect:** wisdom teaches that mankind is separated from God because of sin and without God a person has no hope of eternal life and will be judged accordingly. The fear of the LORD in this context is wisdom, because it motivates a person to seek God and eternal life.
2. **An aspect for the present moment:** the fear of the LORD in the present moment motivates mankind to obey God's Ten Commandments. This is because the spirit underlying the Ten Commandments is love because each commandment concerning mankind are all designed to protect the innocent from harm, physically, financially, sexually, verbally, emotionally and spiritually. Thus the fear of the LORD in this context is wisdom because if everyone feared the LORD humanity would live in harmony with each other. Sadly there is very little fear of the LORD in the world today and so we see rampant rebellion, crime and wars in most countries.

The Apostles called to be Witnesses.

Acts 10:39-43 ----- ³⁹And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

These verses show us that the twelve apostles were chosen to witness all the events that led up to Christ's death, the crucifixion and his resurrection so that they could testify to his life, his death and his resurrection from first-hand experience contrasted to someone else's testimony or text book head knowledge.

NOTICE: Jesus has been appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead this can carry the following two ideas: -

1. To the dead who have died in Christ and to those who will be alive when the Lord returns to gather those in his Kingdom to himself in the first resurrection (Rev. 19:11-16).
 2. To all-the world since those who deny the words of Christ are already judged by his words.
- Jesus said, "If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day" (John 12:47-48).

For further information see the title: -

- The Second Resurrection or Great White Throne Judgment.
- In Resurrection, (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Was Jesus hanged on a tree or on a cross?

Throughout history there have been sceptics who have used the following Scriptures to undermine the Bible because traditional Christianity proclaims that Christ was crucified on a cross.

- The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by *hanging him on a tree* (Acts 5:30).
- We (the apostles) are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by *hanging him on a tree* (Acts 10:39).
- Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is *hanged on a tree*" (Gal 3:13).

The argument of those who use these verses to undermine the Bible is futile since what is important to God's eternal foreordained plan of salvation for all mankind is that Christ laid down his life for the world and that he died and rose again to eternal glory, what he died on is irrelevant to God's plan and makes not the slightest difference to the Christian message of salvation. Added to this the use of the word tree and the cross can be harmonised in the following two ways: -

1. Since the word tree as used in these verses comes from the Greek word (xulon) which can refer to a literal tree or any other wooden article, obviously the cross was made from wood so in this sense it was simply a tree cut and chopped and made into the shape of a cross.
2. The words, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" are cited from the book of Deuteronomy in which the civil law of that era stated: -

- If a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God (Deut. 21:22-23).

These words were written in a time when men deserving death were hung on a tree and not crucified on a cross since crucifixion only began during the Roman era, Paul in (Gal 3:13) is not citing a prophecy of Christ, but a civil law that existed under Old Testament law. Added to this the expression hanged on a tree is simply a Jewish idiom that in this context means put to death as a criminal.

Acts 11.

To the Gentiles God has Granted Repentance that Leads to Life.

Acts 11:18 ----- 18 When they (the apostles at Jerusalem) heard these things (Peters vision of animals, reptiles and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles) they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Here God in glorious vision form is shining a brilliant floodlight on the truth that God through Christ's death and resurrection is now uniting Jews and Gentiles together to create one new nation in the Lord Jesus Christ made up of Jews and Gentiles. This is one of the most glorious visions of the Bible, prior to this God's focus was upon His chosen people Israel, added to this the Jews saw themselves as the chosen and holy race with God and the Gentiles as an unclean race without God and in this most majestic vision God is revealing to Peter that neither Jew or Gentile has any advantage since to enter Christ eternal Kingdom all (Jew and Gentile) must enter it by faith through the royal and golden door which is the Lord Jesus Christ.

This vision of Peters reveals to us that a Jew who denies Christ cannot enter into the Kingdom of their promised Messiah even if they are born a direct descendant of Abraham whereas a Gentile from even the remotest nation who by faith accepts Israel's Messiah the Christ is not only adopted into the family of God and enters the Kingdom of Christ, but will also inherit eternal life. It shines a spotlight on the truth all must come to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Believers were First called Christians in Antioch.

Acts 11:26 ----- 26 and when Barnabas had found Paul, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

Antioch: was a Greco-Roman city and the capital of the province of Syria in Turkey. It was a great metropolitan centre of over 500,000 people and one of the largest cities in the empire and greatest commercial centers of ancient times. The city though populated by a large and influential Jewish population was predominantly pagan with Hellenic cults of Zeus and Apollo and held to many ancient mystery religions. In this Syrian town called Antioch Christianity emerged from its Jewish chrysalis. After Stephen was stoned to death for proclaiming Jesus, Saul and the Jews who rejected Christ aggressively sought out Christians and not only persecuted them, but also threw them into prison. This resulted in disciples of the Lord being scattered throughout the surrounding regions.

Most only proclaimed Jesus to the Jews, but some proclaimed Jesus to the Hellenists and many were turning to Christ (19-21) so the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas was overjoyed when he saw the grace of God moving on those being added to the Lord. It seems Barnabas stayed awhile in Antioch and after teaching them for some time went and found Saul/Paul and brought him back to Antioch where he stayed for one year teaching a great many people in the church (v22-26).

It is interesting to notice that there is no mention of church buildings in the New Testament this is because the church is people not buildings. When the writers use the word church it refers to meetings in people's homes, there were no church buildings or cathedrals as we understand church today, during the early church era

all church meetings were in the homes of faithful brothers and sisters or by the seashore or the riverside (for further information see notes following the title, "From House to House Disciples taught Jesus" (Acts 5:42) (above).

NOTICE: Peter and the apostle's message was; God has granted repentance to the Gentiles that leads, to eternal life, this means that God accepts whoever comes to Him in honest humble repentance it matters not if they are a descendant of Abraham or born of the lowest of sinners whoever comes to Him in honest repentance and faith through the Lord Jesus Christ will be delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the Kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13).

Acts 13

From David's Seed God has brought to Israel a Saviour as He Promised.

Acts 13:22-31 ----- ²²And when God had removed him (Saul), he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' ²³Of this man's seed God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised. ²⁴Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' ²⁶"Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. ²⁷For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognise him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. ²⁸And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. ³⁰But God raised him from the dead, ³¹and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.

Paul knowing all Jews held David in high esteem now arrives in his exhort where he intended to go from the beginning which was to bring them to King David. Paul points out to his Jewish listeners in the synagogue at Antioch that after Saul God raised up David to be their king of whom God testified and said: -

- I have found in David a man after my heart, who will do all my will, (v22) then Paul tells his assembly, "From David's seed God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised" (v23).

Paul now begins to focus on the beginning of Christ's appearing to the nation of Israel by telling his Jewish congregation, "Before the promised seed of David came," God raised up John the Baptist not only to proclaim a message of repentance to all Israel, but also to tell them that the next great prophet to come to Israel after him would be the promised seed" of David, their Messiah and their Saviour the Christ. This is why Jesus said: -

- Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist (Matt. 11:11) (Luke 7:28)

Even though John did no miracles he was considered the greatest of all prophets because he had the privilege and honour of introducing Christ to the world.

The message of salvation: Paul then tells his Jewish congregation in Antioch that God has given Paul and Barnabas the message of salvation in Christ because the Jewish religious rulers (the chief priests, Pharisees and scribes) and those who lived in Jerusalem did not recognise him nor did they understand the words the prophets had spoken of him which they read every Sabbath in their synagogues, but instead fulfilled the words the prophets had spoken by condemning the promised seed of David, their Saviour and their Messiah the Christ even though they could not find him guilty of any crime or worthy of death.

Paul goes on to tell those in the synagogue at Antioch that the Jews at Jerusalem added to their evil by enticing Pilate to have their Messiah the Christ executed, but after being laid in a tomb God miraculously raised him from the dead and he appeared to a certain few who are now his witnesses to the people.

The Jews carried out all that was written of Christ: Paul's words, "When they had carried out all that was written of him" (v29) clearly shows that Judas betrayal of Jesus, the horror Jesus suffered, the spiritual blindness of the religious rulers, Pilate executing Christ and his death and resurrection were in in the foreknowledge of God since the foundation of the world. This is a stunning mystery to the human mind, but majestically manifests the wisdom of God. God has given mankind free will to do as they please but come what may in God's foreknowledge He is able to work man's free will in such a way that it is working within His Sovereign will and bringing about His eternal plan that He set in motion before the beginning of time. How true are God's words: -

- For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

NOTICE: the words "And those among you who fear God" (Acts 13:26) allows Paul's message of salvation in Christ that God gave to him and to the apostle to embrace whoever (Jews and Gentiles) may be in the synagogue even though they are not born a descendant of Abraham or of Hebrew or of Jewish descent.

The Good News of God's Promise.

Acts 13:32-37 ----- ³²And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, ³³this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, " 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.'³⁴And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, " 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.'³⁵Therefore he says also in another psalm, " 'You will not let your Holy One see corruption. ³⁶For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, ³⁷but he whom God raised up did not see corruption.

Corruption: (diaphthora) in this context means decay, decompose and rot.

Paul now tells those in the synagogue of Antioch that he, Barnabas and those with them are bringing to them the Good News that God has now fulfilled the promise He made to their fathers and by extension to them being the father's children by raising up their Messiah the Christ who is spoken of in the second Psalm. Here is the wonder, beauty and majesty of the Bible, Paul mentions the following few words of Psalm two, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you" (v33). No-doubt at the end of Paul's exhort the Jewish rulers at Antioch would have gone to their scrolls and looked this Psalm up and in doing so be astonished to find the entire Psalm is echoing the Lord Jesus Christ, his death and his final Kingdom. For further information see, "Psalm chapter two in, Commentary Old Testament (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Paul continues his brilliant exhort by referring to David's writings saying, God raised Christ from the dead to eternal life (no more to return to corruption) (v35) and told Christ that He would give him the Holy and sure blessings of David referring to David's throne over the Kingdom of God (v34).

The words: -

- You will not let your Holy One see corruption (v35)

Are cited from Psalm sixteen which says: -

- God will not abandon my (David) soul to Sheol, or let your holy one (Jesus) see corruption (Psalm 16:10)

These prophetic words of David mean that God would not allow Christ's body to decay in the tomb.

From these words of David it clear that he understood that God would not abandon him to the grave (meaning forget him), he was confident God would raise him, but also understood it would not be as quickly as Jesus was (i.e., in three days) in fact David words show that he understood that his body unlike Christ's would decay in the grave (v36).

NOTICE.

Though God Himself never changes the words, "David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation" (v36) shows that God does move differently in different generations. During the generation of Moses God worked awesomely with Moses and with Elijah's generation God moved differently again as He did with the generations of the, judges, the kings and the Minor Prophets. Now God during the generation of the apostles is moving through them by stunning miraculous healings in a way that He has never done with any previous generation or with any future generation.

Sleeping in Christ: David like all the faithful in Christ are spoken of as fallen asleep because their death is only temporary (Acts 13:36). When a person who belongs to Christ dies, the Bible says, that they have no knowledge and know nothing, they are totally unaware of it and are therefore in a perfect state of peace, this state is called sleeping in Christ and because they have no consciousness there, is no time. It is very similar to someone in a deep sleep there is no awareness of time, when the person wakes they have no idea of whether four, seven or twelve hours have passed.

Likewise because there is no time in death the moment a Christian dies is the moment they are in the Kingdom of God and with the LORD, for them it is instant, even though many years may have passed by in our world's time. David died thousands of years ago, but the moment he is resurrected will be like the moment he breathed his last breath, because for him there is no awareness of time, so it is for every Christian from death to Christ is instant.

Death to the Christian is similar to a person in a coma: a person in a coma has no consciousness of time, time does not exist to them, when they wake, they often think only a day or so has gone by, when in actual fact several years may have passed yet they think they are waking up, the same day, or next day after they went to sleep. The person in the coma or in death is totally unaware of any time that they have spent in the coma or being dead

Death to those who belong to Christ is much the same as the person in the coma, the dead or those who are sleeping in Christ have absolutely no consciousness of time so for them, the moment they die, is the moment they are instantly with the Lord, even though many years may have passed during the time they have been dead (i.e., sleeping in Christ).

It is the same principal as a person who goes into hospital for an operation: the patient is given an anaesthetic and put to sleep, surgeons cut them up and take bits out, over the next few hours, yet the patient is totally unaware of it they wake up and have absolutely no idea of the time that has passed, therefore when Paul says: -

- We are of good courage, and we would rather be away (absent in the KJV) from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8).

It is a true statement, even though he may have spent years sleeping in Christ.

NOTE: a second reason a Christians death is called sleeping in Christ is because their death is only temporary, being asleep in Christ means everyone who dies in Christ is kept in the eternal mind and memory of God.

Jesus said: -

- Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them falls to the ground without the father knowing it and even the hairs of our head are all numbered therefore we should not fear death because we are of more value than many sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31).

The entire person, (i.e., body, spirit, mind and consciousness) remains sleeping in Christ, until the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5) when all who are asleep in the Lord are woken up at the blast of the angels trumpet and raised from the dead to everlasting glory and clothed with an eternal and immortal body.

NOTE: some people find it difficult to comprehend God raising the dead, but think of it this way: we have super computers today that have in their memories literally trillions of bits of information and at the touch of a key any one of those bits is resurrected to us on a brightly coloured screen (soon it is most likely they will simply appear in the air), then with another touch of the key it all vanishes into the super memory and is gone, until we resurrect it again.

Knowing that God has given his creation a mortal mind and finite memory to be able to build such amazing computers should make it very easy to understand how God keeps us all in His immortal mind and eternal memory waiting for the right time to touch the supernatural keyboard of heaven and raise us once again to life. Added to this very few Christians have any trouble believing God created the universe that we live in so raising the dead in comparison is not such a difficult task for such an awesome, powerful and majestic God (Heb. 11:3).

The Gospel proclaims the Forgiveness of Sin.

Acts 13:38-39 ----- ³⁸Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything ³⁹from which you could not be freed by the Law of Moses.

Paul now reaches the climax of his exhort, telling his Jewish congregation sitting in the synagogue of Antioch that that he is proclaiming to them this very day that through Jesus forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to them and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything that the law of Moses could not free them from (v37-39). This does not mean that every faithful brother and sister in Christ will overcome every sin, but that they are freed from the condemnation of it, which is something the law cannot do since it declares without mercy or compassion, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23) and since not one of us can attain to the absolute perfect demand of the law it rightly declares us all guilty of breaking it and condemns us to death. The Good News of the Gospel proclaims that through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and by God's grace we are set free from the condemnation of the law and will be raised to eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

Everyone who believes is freed from everything: these words mean that every faithful brother and sister in Christ is freed from self-effort and religious works (i.e., adhering to ceremonial rites, holy days and keeping religious customs and traditions) to be saved to eternal life.

A Light to the Gentiles.

Acts 13:46-47 ----- ⁴⁶And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you (the Jews). Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

Paul and Barnabas tell the Jews at Antioch: -

- It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to them (46).

This refers to Jesus words to the apostles when he sent them out saying: -

- Go nowhere among the Gentiles, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 10:5-6).

Jesus himself said: -

- He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 15:24).

Jesus firstly took the Good News of the Gospel to the house of Israel and they not only rejected him, but had him crucified. Now Paul and Barnabas have taken the Good News of the Gospel to the Jews in Antioch and they not only contradicted what Paul was saying, but insult, abuse and condemn both him and Barnabas and incite leading men and woman of high standing in the city to stir up persecution against them (see previous verses).

NOTICE.

Paul and Barnabas boldly tell them that by turning away from the Gospel they are judging themselves unworthy of eternal life, showing that by rejecting God's Son a person brings judgment on themselves. The words: -

- I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth (v47).

Refer to the words of Christ when he said to Paul on the road to Damascus: -

- He has chosen him to be an instrument to carry Christ's name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15).

Matthew tells us that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from Israel and given to a people producing its fruits (Matt. 21:43). The Jews certainly showed they were not producing fruit fit for the Kingdom and therefore not worthy of eternal life, this is why God shifted his focus to the Gentiles to find amongst them those who will produce fruits fit to His Kingdom. Nevertheless Paul warned the Roman Gentiles that they should always remember: -

- If some of the branches (Jews) of the tree were broken off because of their unbelief and a wild olive shoot (Gentiles) were grafted in because of their faith the Gentiles should be careful not become proud otherwise they also will be cut off (Rom. 11:17-22).

This clearly shows that the two most important things to God and the way to bring joy to His heart is to have faith in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ and to develop the fruits of the Spirit (i.e., love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control and such like things) in ones' life (Gal. 5:22-23).

Acts 14

Through many Tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God.

Acts 14:2 ----- ²²Paul and Barnabas continued: strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

Today in some religious circles there is a Gospel in the world that proclaims if those embracing its teachings have enough faith they can by prayer not only bring into their lives the things that they need to prosper and succeed in this world, but also remain in perfect health and free from hardship the underlying message of this modern Gospel is that with enough faith a person can live a charmed life. This is not the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ or his apostles who proclaim, "Through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God" (v22).

Paul and Barnabas were so concerned for the spiritual well-being of those who had received their Gospel they went about strengthening and encouraging those in the faith who were suffering the many different kinds of hardships, tribulations and persecutions.

Continue in the faith: some teach that once saved always saved, but the fact Pauls found it necessary to strengthen and encourage brothers and sisters in Christ to continue in the faith clearly shines a spotlight on the truth that it is possible for some to turn away from their faith.

God's Covenant, Circumcision and Salvation.

Acts 15:7-9 ----- ⁷And after there had been much debate (About Gentiles being Circumcised) Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe. ⁸And God, who knows the heart bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

Amongst the nation of Israel the rite of circumcision was held in the highest of esteem because God had made the following covenant with Abraham and his offspring saying: -

- Every male among you shall be circumcised and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised it shall be an everlasting covenant and any male who is not circumcised shall be cut off from Israel because he has broken my covenant" (Gen. 17:10-14) (Gen. 17:23-27).

NOTICE.

Circumcision was a sign they were God's people and not a guarantee of salvation. We know this because Paul tells the Roman church that: -

- Faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness before he had been circumcised. Abraham received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he already had by faith while he was still uncircumcised so that God could make Abraham the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to the uncircumcised as well, to the circumcised who also walk in the footsteps of the faith Abraham had before he was circumcised (Romans 4:9-12).

Nevertheless though circumcised was a sign of God's covenant with Israel many in the Jewish faith had turned it into the means of salvation (i.e., as long as they were circumcised they were right with God) this is the reason for the lack of the fruits of the Spirit amongst many of the religious rulers of Jesus and Paul's generations. Certain Jewish men were teaching those (at Antioch) (v22) who believed the word of the Lord that it was impossible to be saved without being circumcised according to Moses Law. After Paul and Barnabas try to convince them otherwise (without success) they with some others go to Jerusalem to ask the apostles and the elders about this question.

The church, the apostles and the elders at Jerusalem welcome them, but those of the Pharisees who had believed in the word of the Lord were adamant that they still had to keep the Law of Moses to be saved therefore they reasoned it was necessary to be circumcised even if a person believed in Christ. The apostles and the elders could not come to any solid conclusion concerning the question of circumcision, so Peter stand up and says: -

- God, who knows the heart, bore witness to the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us making no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles having cleansed their hearts by faith (v8-9).

Peter is referring to the miracle he had witnessed in the house of Cornelius where Jews and Gentiles were gathered together (Acts 10:44-48). The Holy Spirit in this context refers to the gift of speaking in a language other than ones' own native language that others who spoke that language could clearly understand and the words: -

- God gave them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us (v8).

Refer to the day of Pentecost when God poured out this same gift of the Holy Spirit on the one hundred and twenty gathered in the upper room (Acts 2:1-11). Peter points out that though being Jewish he and the apostles believe they are saved in the same way as the Gentiles are which is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 15:11) so why would they want to place the bondage of circumcision and by extension the customs of Moses ceremonial law on Gentile disciples in Christ when

neither their Jewish fathers nor they have been able to maintain them? Peter's reasoning made so much sense no-one had any more to say, so they listened to Paul and Barnabas testimonies of the signs and wonders they had seen God do amongst the Gentiles.

For further information concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit, see: -

- Act 2.
- Acts 10.

Both chapters are in, Commentary NT (ON WEBSITE MENU).

God is, taking a People for his Name from the Gentiles.

Acts 15:13-20 ----- ¹³After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name. ¹⁵And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶"After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, ¹⁷that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things ¹⁸known from of old.' ¹⁹Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God ²⁰but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood.

James says he recognises that, "God has visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name" (v14) and then adds strength to what Peter had said by citing the words of the prophet Amos who told Israel: -

- God will rebuild and restore the tent of David that has fallen and its ruins so that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by His name (Amos 9:11-12).

James then advises the apostles and elders that they should not trouble Gentiles who turn to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ with circumcision or the customs of Moses except to give them a written letter advising them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality and from eating animals that have been strangled and from drinking their blood.

Pagan faiths and blood: during the apostles generations many pagan faiths used the blood of animals as a means of washing themselves spiritually clean. They would stand a bull on a steel grate four feet above the ground and the person to be cleansed would sit under it praying. A priest would slit the throat of the bull and the blood would flow over the person praying cleansing them of all sin (or so they believed) added to this horror it was common practise to drink the blood of an animal to receive the strength, life and power of that animal into themselves.

NOTE.

Many Jews at Jerusalem believed in Christ, but thought to be saved they still had to be circumcised and keep the religious laws and customs of Moses and in this manner were adding works to their faith. It should be noted they weren't adding anything evil to their faith in Christ it is because they were trusting in them for their righteousness and salvation that made their religious works evil.

For those who do not understand the depth of sin it is very easy to fall into a works type of mindset and fall away from trusting in our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in God's grace. Obviously Gentile Christians have no fear of adding circumcision and the customs of Moses to their faith their danger comes more through religious deeds that are accepted today such as reading a certain amount of Scripture everyday attending church and Bible meetings, praying, doing good works and such like things. All of these are good in themselves, but if anyone of them is being done to add to a person's salvation or maintain it, their faith becomes like the Christian Jews at Jerusalem which Paul called a perverted faith and another Gospel because it becomes salvation and righteousness by self-effort and works

and not by faith and by God's grace and therefore nullifies everything Christ achieved on the cross. The apostle Paul says it this way, "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" (Gal. 2:21).

Acts 16

What Must I do to be Saved?

Acts 16:30-34 ----- ³⁰Then he (the Jailer) brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³²And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Prior to these verses Paul and Silas were imprisoned for proclaiming the Gospel about midnight there was an earthquake so great the doors of the prison fell open and the chains of Paul and Silas were released. The Jailer knew he would be tortured or at least die a slow death if the prisoners had escaped so he preferred to kill himself quickly, but Paul stopped him. Obviously the jailer had heard the word of the Lord that the Paul and Silas had been proclaiming (most of the city had that's why they are in jail) so he falls at their feet saying: -

- What must I do to be saved?

Paul says: -

- Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.

The jailer then takes them into his house (probably connected to the jail) and Paul and Silas share the Good News of the Gospel with his family after hearing the word of the Lord all believe and go out of the house to be water baptised (sometime between midnight and early morning) then the jailer, his wife and family (full of joy) take Paul and Silas back into their house and give them an early breakfast.

Water Baptism: some today teach that after Christ's death and resurrection water baptism was done away with, but these verses clearly show that neither Paul nor Silas believed that to be true. Another teaching that this story shows to be false is the idea that it takes weeks to share the word of the Lord before a person is ready to be baptised. The jailers family clearly show that this thinking is also not true and that once a person repents and believes the Good News of the Gospel in Christ they are fit for Gods Kingdom and ready to be baptised.

For further information see the title: -

- Water Baptism (ON WEBSITE MENU).
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Acts 17.

Paul Proves Jesus is the Christ by from the Scriptures.

Acts 17:2-3 ----- ²Paul went in (a synagogue of the Jews.) as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ."

Reasoned: means to say or discuss thoroughly by disputing or preaching in an argument or exhortation. Paul as was his custom reasoned with the Jews (especially on the Sabbath days) explaining the word of the Lord and proving Jesus is the Christ (no-doubt using the Old Testament Scripture concerning Christ). Through reasoning Paul was able to persuade many Jews, devout Greeks and some leading woman of Thessalonica that Jesus was the Christ (v4).

NOTICE: the words "It was necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead" shine a spotlight on the truth that from the foundation of the world Christ's death and resurrection was in God's eternal plan for mankind's salvation from before time even began. God's foreknowledge is a stunning mystery to the human mind but majestically manifests the wisdom of God who has given mankind free will. By foreknowledge God is able to allow us to do as we please and come what may our free will is still mysteriously working within God's sovereign will and bringing about His eternal plan that He set in motion before the beginning of time such is the wonder of God's foreknowledge and wisdom. God in the book of Isaiah says: -

- My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Reasoning religious matters: sadly reasoning is a skill that is lacking in many churches today since congregations are not only told what to believe, but also discouraged to even consider another point of view and often if they do try to question something they are verbally condemned or considered a rebel amongst the flock, but this is not how brothers and sisters of the early church fellowshiped, rather they got together and reasoned with each other over the Scriptures to discover what they taught.

Remember their churches were made up of Jews who had been steeped in the customs of Moses for around four-thousand years, Greeks who had been devoted to their pagan gods and leading women of cities who had great authority and influence. Obviously they had certain teachers, but their teachers taught expecting their listeners to study and question what they had heard and they commended them for doing so. They encouraged their listeners to take the responsibility upon themselves to see if what they were hearing was so, rather than simply switching off their mind and accepting that what they were hearing was absolute truth (Acts 17:11).

Rome and the Christian Titles --- Lord --- Son of God --- Saviour.

Acts 17:5-7 ----- ⁵But the Jews were jealous and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob set the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them (Paul and Silas) out to the crowd. ⁶And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

Paul was proclaiming that Jesus was the Lord, Saviour and King and because of this certain Jews accused him and Silas of proclaiming another King besides Caesar this was a serious offence under Roman law. The titles, Lord, the Son of God and the Saviour were not pious terms in the first century, but titles of Caesar, when Christians were saying Jesus is Lord, Son of God and Saviour, Rome understood them to be taking the titles of Caesar and giving them to Jesus and so challenging the divine authority of the emperor.

To proclaim another king other than the king of Rome would certainly result in a battalion of Roman soldiers being sent to stamp out such blasphemy against Caesar and result in whippings, prison and in many cases even death should it become known to the Roman officials.

Examining the Scriptures.

Acts 17:11-12 ----- ¹¹Now these Jews (at Berea,) were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹²Many of them therefore believed with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.

Paul as was his custom goes to the Jewish synagogue and teaches Jesus, but to Paul's pleasant surprise there is an enormous difference between these Jews to those at Thessalonica, such a big difference that they are referred to as being noble meaning honourable, principled, admirable, praiseworthy and upright. The Jews at Berea were called noble because they received the word with all

eagerness, meaning they were excited to hear what Paul and Silas said about the Lord Jesus Christ, but they did not simply believe it because two great men were proclaiming it, they still went to the Scriptures to examine that what Paul and Silas were saying was true and for this they were commended.

NOTICE: even though Paul and Silas knew what they were teaching was the word of the Lord they did not impose or force it on their congregations, rather they encouraged their listeners to hold meetings to examine the Scriptures for themselves. They rested in the fact that the Holy Spirit will reveal the Good News of the Gospel to those who have a right and humble heart and truly desire above all things to know God, but would spiritually blind those whose heart is full of pride and selfish ambition to the beauty of God's grace found in the Lord Jesus Christ (perhaps God has designed His word to be this way).

From One Man all Nations on Earth Came.

Acts 17:26-32 ----- ²⁶God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring." ²⁹Being then God's offspring we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." ³²Now when they (the people in Athens) heard of the resurrection of the dead some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this."

Anyone who believes in a god will have strong emotions toward that god whether it is the true God or an illusionary god of the imagination. Throughout history nations have gone to war because they believed in an illusionary god or had a false concept of the true God; this is why Paul in his wisdom does not begin his exhort by condemning the idols and gods of the Athenians since this would only result in them turning against him, but rather focuses' on an aspect of their false religious system whereby he can introduce Christ without degrading and condemning those he is speaking to. The fact the Athenians had an altar, "To the unknown god" (v23) and actually worship this god shows how extremely superstitious they were.

In God we Live and Move and Have our Being.

The words, "In God we live and move and have our being," (v28) is an enormous mystery to the human mind. Sometimes we can enter a cathedral or church building that is so architecturally magnificent we feel God is there, yet Paul tells us God does not live in temples made by man and that all of us whether we believe in God or not live and move and have our being in God. This means that no matter whether a person is standing in the most beautiful religious building with its magnificent stained glass windows, church bells and cathedrals or whether a beggar is lying in the street both are in God because we are all living and moving in God and added to this wonder is Paul's statement: -

- God is not far from anyone of us (v27).

This statement of Paul's shines a spotlight on the truth that no matter who we are, what we believe and what environment we are in God is not far from anyone of us because even our very existence is in God, nevertheless though all humanity dwells in God does not mean that all humanity is saved to eternal life.

God is not served by human hands: the words, "God is not served by human hands" (v25) refers to temples and idols, there is nothing man can build no matter how majestic beautiful or opulent that will add to God since He is fully self-sufficient in Himself rather it is God who gives to us. Even the Bible is given to benefit mankind by firstly revealing to us who God is and secondly to guide us toward the paths of peace and living in harmony with each other which is summed up in God's royal law: -

- You shall love your neighbour as yourself (Matt. 22:37-39).

This means do not deliberately do harm to other humans. No sane person deliberately does things to inflict pain on themselves, loving others as you love yourself is not about feeling some warm and fuzzy emotion towards others, it is about not hurting others as you would not hurt yourself. The thing God hates the most is when we do harm to another person, physically, financially, verbally, sexually, emotionally, or spiritually and the thing God loves the most is when we do good to others. It is interesting to notice that the major crime that God points out in Noah's time and one of the main reasons for the flood was because of all the violence in the land.

NOTICE: from one man (Adam) God made every nation and determined boundaries and allotted periods of time. (v26) Though God never changes and the nature of man remains the same the way God deals in certain allotted periods of time does change. What God was doing during Moses generation was different to David's and Solomon's era and what God was doing through Jesus generation and the book of Acts is totally different to what God has done with any generation past or future and when Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords to establish God's Kingdom of righteousness, justice, joy and peace on earth what God will be doing in that era will be totally different again showing that though God Himself does not change He has appointed various ages of time for mankind and is working differently through each age.

Mankind should seek God: the words "Mankind should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward Him and find Him" (v27) implies that God is not easily found. God has in a sense hidden Himself so that only those with a right heart attitude find Him, but this does not mean only those who have lived a relatively righteous life will find him since the religious leaders of Jesus generation were outwardly righteous but Christ rebuked them whereas a woman caught in adultery he forgave. God is looking for what is in the heart of a person He is not deceived by outward behaviour (especially religious pomp, ceremony, customs and traditions) since these can be motivated by selfish-ambition, pride, ego, a person's wrong upbringing and religious teaching. Though God may not be easily found Jesus encourages everyone seeking God with the following words: -

- Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened because your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:9-13).

The Holy Spirit in this context refers to God's gift of righteousness, salvation and eternal life. Paul's words, "Even some of your own poets have said" (v28) show us two things: -

1. The enormous knowledge Paul had.
2. When sharing the Good News of the Gospel it can be beautifully supported by what the world believes since even though they may have no faith or believe in other gods as did the Athenians it does not mean that everything they believe is wrong or false.

God is not an image formed by art and the imagination of man: Paul tells the Athenians that "God is not an image formed by art and the imagination of man (Acts 17:29) referring to their idols. When a person worships an idol their imagination is involved, the idol is simply what links their mind to the god of their imagination. Though there is no power in idols there is power in human imagination. This is because the human nervous system does not have mind of its own, but simply responds to the mental movie played out on the screen of the imagination and affects the emotions and outward behaviour accordingly. If the idol they are worshipping is a symbol of a benevolent god they will naturally feel good emotions when worshipping that illusionary god, but if the idol is a symbol of a vengeful and wrathful god their emotions will respond in fear and terror accordingly.

This is the reason why emotions cannot be used as evidence that the God we believe in is the God of the Bible, but this does not mean emotions should be ignored.

Providing a person's faith is based on the words of Christ they should fully embrace the wonderful emotions the Good News of the Gospel produces in the heart of those who fully believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for righteousness and eternal salvation.

For further information concerning the imagination, see the title: -

- Demons in, Satan and His Family (ON WEBSITE MENU).

The times of ignorance God overlooked: the words, "God commands all people everywhere to repent" refers to Jews and Gentiles contrasted to just the Jews and the expression, "The times of ignorance God overlooked" refer to the era before Christ's death and resurrection. Prior to Christ appearing God was not concerned with the idols and gods Gentile nations were worshipping since the LORD'S primary focus and dealings was with Israel, but since Christ's resurrection: -

- God has visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name and has granted to them repentance that leads to life eternal" (Acts 11:18) (Acts 15:14).

This means that God's focus is now on Gentile nations and therefore He is not overlooking their ignorance or who or what they are worshipping.

God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness: the resurrection of Christ should assure everyone that God will judge the world and that the standard of righteousness that all mankind will be judged against is Christ (v31). Whoever denies Christ and falls short of living up to the sinless and righteous life of love, compassion, mercy, grace, kindness and forgiveness that Jesus lived is already judged because they have denied the one who has the power to give eternal life and not attained to the same perfect standard Jesus did.

This is brilliant; God does not need to personally judge us since we bring judgment on ourselves everytime we fall short of the sinless and righteous life Jesus lived. This is why the Gospel is called the Good News it proclaims that we are saved by faith and God's grace and that God imputes righteousness as a free GIFT to all who come to God through honest heartfelt repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ .

NOTE: if anyone thinks they attain to Jesus standard of love and righteousness they should read his famous Sermon on the Mount because if anyone does think this way they are either horribly deceived or full of self-righteousness. If we could attain to Christ's perfect standard of righteousness by self-effort then he died for no purpose. For information concerning Jesus Famous Sermon, see: (Matthew 5:20-48) in, Commentary New Testament (ON WEBSITE MENU).

How amazing is this? Though the people of Athens considered it wise, right and proper to worship a multitude of man-made wooden and gold idols and believe in many false gods, when they heard the truth concerning Christ's death and resurrection they considered it foolishness so much so that they mocked Paul and Silas (v32). This shines a brilliant spotlight on how deceived the human mind can be.

Acts 18

Paul is, Rejected by the Jews so He turns to the Gentiles.

Acts 18:4-6 ----- ⁴And he (Paul) reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. ⁵When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶And when they opposed and reviled him he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

On every Sabbath as was Paul's custom he went into the synagogue to reason with the Jews to persuade them to believe in Christ. Paul was fully aware of the danger he faced by proclaiming the Gospel to the Jews, but he was motivated by love for his kinsmen.

We know this because in the book of Romans he says: -

- I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom 9:3).

Eventually the opposition of the Jews became so great Paul gave up trying to save them and turned his attention toward the Gentiles.

A practical lesson: there is a lesson we can all learn from Paul's experience and that is this: when witnessing there can come a point in which it is better to give up and move onto others who are open to hearing the word of the Lord, rather than spend time on those who are not interested or are firmly fixed in what they already believe to be true.

Jews and Gentiles Believe and are Baptised.

Acts 18:8 ----- ⁸Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

This verse shows us the following two things: -

1. Not all Jews rejected Christ, Crispus being a ruler of the synagogue would not only have lost all his Jewish authority and standing by accepting Christ, but also be treated as one who had fallen away from the Jewish faith and rejected by his people as was Paul.
2. When Jews and Gentiles did believe they were water baptised. This clearly shows that the practise of water baptism was not done away with after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ as some today teach.

NOTICE: both Jews and Gentiles were attending the synagogues.

Apollos shows by the Scriptures Jesus is the Christ.

Acts 18:24-28 ----- ²⁴Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. ²⁵He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately. ²⁷And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed ²⁸for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

What a great testimony for Apollos; "An eloquent Jewish man, competent in the Scriptures" (referring to the Old Testament Scriptures) who though he knew only the baptism of John was zealous in the spirit and spoke accurately in the synagogues of the things that he did know concerning Jesus. Apollos arrives in Ephesus and speaks in the synagogue the things he understood concerning the Christ. Priscilla and Aquila (who Paul had lived with) (v1-3) after hearing Apollos realised he only understood the baptism of John (v25) so they took him aside to explain to him more accurately the way of God.

This most likely means that Apollos was still proclaiming John's message of repentance and water baptism because the Messiah the Christ is coming which means that Priscilla and Aquila would have explained to him the death and resurrection of Christ and the Good News of the Gospel and that God has poured out His Spirit on Jews and Gentiles alike. It is likely Apollos may have heard rumours and stories of a man being put to death by the Jews, but had never had it properly explained to him from the Scriptures until he met Priscilla and Aquila.

The Gospel of salvation: the Gospel begins with the universal law of sin and death which states, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23) meaning whoever sins is already judged and condemned to eternal death and since not one of us is

without sin we all stand guilty before this universal Law whereas the Good News of the Gospel states: -

- All who trust in Christ have been granted the free gift of God which is, “Eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 6:23), because, “The law of the Spirit of life has set them free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2).

The Gospel states that the universal law of sin and death has no power over those who believe in Christ and faithfully follow him they like Christ will be raised to eternal life and everlasting glory. The, focus of the Gospel is salvation from eternal death to eternal life by faith and grace it, is about believing in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and recognising that one falls short of God's Glory and absolute Holiness. It is about repentance, baptism and abiding in the faith. Throughout the entire history of mankind there has only been one man who has ever been able to attain to God's perfect standard. The Gospel is about recognising this reality, repenting before God and accepting His foreordained plan of salvation. The Gospel is about trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for one's own righteousness, looking forward to his return and being raised to eternal glory.

The majestic Good News of the Gospel states that whoever comes to God through repentance and faith in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ is not only approved of and accepted by God the Father but all their sins are forgiven, not because they are deserving of it, by any self-effort or religious good works, but because through faith in Christ righteousness is imputed from God to them as a pure and free gift, but this is not the end of the Gospel since God's promise also states that the faithful in Christ will be resurrected to eternal glory and everlasting life. Can there be any better news than this? This is the reason it is called the Good News of the Gospel.

Consider for a moment: if our world's top scientist and medical practitioners could invent a pill that would give people eternal life the billionaires of this world would write out a cheque no matter what the cost to buy them for all their family and friends, and almost all people of the world would sell everything they had to purchase one. This is the high value Paul placed on the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. To Paul and the faithful brothers and sisters who supported him there was nothing in this world more valuable for any man or woman to possess than the gift of eternal life.

How sad it is that in some modern churches today this high value of eternal life has been lost and replaced by a Gospel that focuses on a blessed, prosperous and successful life now in this mortal and corrupt world and messages that appeal to self, ego and pride. Especially when one considers what it cost God the Father and the high price his Son paid to purchase this gift of eternal life for all who would humbly accept by faith the Good News of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Apollos powerfully refutes the Jews in public: Apollos after having the Good News of the Gospel explained to him not only greatly strengthened those who believed but, also powerfully refuted the Jews in public showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus (27-28).

It is clear Apollos had a brilliant knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and now that he understood the Gospel and the death and resurrection of Christ everything the prophets had predicted under the inspiration of God and what the Scripture spoke of concerning Christ would no longer be hidden in clouded shades of grey in Appollos' mind, but would have come alive in magnificent colour and from this new found life he no-doubt skilfully and masterfully used the Old Testament Scriptures to show that Jesus was the Christ that they spoke of.

Following is some of the Old Testament Scriptures Apollos may have used to show to the unbelieving Jews that Jesus is the Christ that they speak of: -

Moses wrote of Jesus: -

- God would put enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between the serpent's seed and the woman's seed and that the seed of the serpent would bruise the heel of the woman's seed, but the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent's seed (Gen. 3:15) (the woman's seed in this verse refers to Christ).

For greater detail of this incredible and fantastic prophetic verse see: -

- Genesis 3:15.
- In, Commentary Old Testament (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Moses also wrote: -

- The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers — And I the LORD will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak all that I command him, it is to him you shall listen (Deut. 18:15-19) (the prophet like Moses is Christ).

In the New Testament Philip said to Nathanael: -

- We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (John 1:45). And Paul said, “He testifies both to the small and the great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass” (Acts 26:22).

The prophets wrote of Jesus: -

Isaiah prophesied, saying: -

- There will come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge with equity for the meek of the earth (Isaiah 11:1-4) (the shoot that came forth from Jesse refers to Christ).

Isaiah also prophesied that: -

A virgin will conceive and bear a son, and call his name Immanuel, (Isaiah 7:14) he will grow up before God like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground and have no form or majesty that we should look at him or beauty that we should desire him. (Isaiah 53:2) but the Spirit of the LORD God will be upon him because the LORD will anoint him to bring Good News to the poor; and to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound (Isaiah 61:1). At the end of his ministry he will give his back to those who strike, and his cheeks to those who pull out the beard; he will not hide his face from disgrace and spitting (Isaiah 50:6) (Isaiah is clearly speaking of Christ).

Jeremiah said: -

- The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness” (Jer. 23:5-6) (the righteous Branch is Christ).

Daniel wrote: -

- I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and a Kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his Kingdom one that shall not be destroyed (Dan 7:13-14) (the one that came like a Son of man refers to Christ).

Hosea prophesied of Christ calling Israel to return to the LORD their God that He may heal them then Hosea proclaims in his prophetic message: -

- After two days the LORD will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth. (Hosea 6:1-3) (His going out is echoing Christ’s death and as the dawn he will come is echoing his return).

Micah prophesied: -

- Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days (Micah 5:2) (the one to come forth is Christ).

Zechariah wrote: -

- If one asks him, “What are these wounds on your back?” he will say, “The wounds I received in the house of my friends” (Zech. 13:6).

And prophesied that: -

- A man whose name is the Branch will extend out from his place, and build the temple of the LORD (Zech. 6:12).

Zechariah also tells Jerusalem: -

- To rejoice greatly because their King is coming to them; righteous and having salvation, he is humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zech. 9:9).

Latter in his letter he pens the beautiful words: -

- The LORD will pour out on Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn (Zech. 12:9-10) (Zechariah clearly writes of Christ).

Malachi prophesied: -

- The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts, but who can endure the day of his coming, he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and refine the sons of Levi like gold (Malachi 3:1-3) (it is Christ who will suddenly come to his temple).

Paul when speaking of Jesus says: -

- The religious rulers of Israel did not recognize him (Christ) nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him (Acts 13:27) see also (Psalm 22) and (Isaiah 53)

Naturally there is many more, Jesus himself said: -

- I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book. (Hebrews 10:7).

The scroll of the book refers to the Old Testament and Jesus said to the Jews: -

- You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me (John 5:39).

The Jews held Moses and the prophets in enormously high esteem and not only meticulously kept the scrolls and studied them daily, but also read them every Sabbath day so they should have recognised their Messiah the Christ (especially the religious leaders) when he came since Moses and the prophets spoke and wrote about their Messiah the Christ to come throughout the Old Testament and especially since he was performing supernatural miracles that could only be done by a man who God's power was flowing through in such a majestic and awesome manner when did appear. This shows the utter spiritual blindness of the Jews and how foolish it is to be so dogmatic that our minds are not even open to consider what people might be saying. Paul when speaking of Jesus said: -

- The religious rulers of Israel did not recognize Christ nor understand the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him (Acts 13:27).

Now here is the majestic glory of God's eternal wisdom and God's eternal foreknowledge and God's sovereignty, even though the prideful, hypocritical and murderous religious leaders and Judas were acting from their own free will all that Christ suffered was not only in the perfect eternal sovereign will of God, but also according to His eternal plan of salvation that He planned and purposed in His eternal mind before the foundations of the world. We know this because Jesus said to his disciples: -

- We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished (Luke 18:31).

Everything that is written about Jesus applies to all things prophesied and spoken of him in the Old Testament. Who can understand such eternal wisdom? Clearly this is why the LORD proclaims: -

- For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Acts 19

Salvation, the Holy Spirit and Speaking in Tongues.

Acts 19:2-6 ----- ²And he (Paul) said to them (the Ephesians) "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." ⁴And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Paul comes across certain men who upon hearing the message of John the Baptist repented and were water baptised, yet they have not received the Holy Spirit nor have they ever heard any teaching about the Holy Spirit. Added to this they don't even know if there is a Holy Spirit so what does this all mean? To find the answer we have to understand that John's message was: -

- Make straight the way of the Lord, because after him comes the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:23-30).

Christ had not yet been revealed to the world, this is why John's message and baptism was about people preparing and making themselves ready for the coming Messiah by repenting and being water baptised. Paul confirms this by saying: -

- John baptised with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus" (v4)

Paul then lays hands on the twelve and the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. The baptism of the Holy Spirit resulted in the disciples being able to speak in a language other than their own native language which those who spoke that language understood.

The ability to speak in tongues: tongues means a language different from a person's own native language or previously unknown to the speaker. During the earlier ages it was common for the introduction of many of the older Bibles to begin by saying: -

Translated out of the Original Tongues and with the former
Translations diligently compared and revised by
His Majesty's special command A.D 1611.

Both the Greek and the English words tongue and language can refer either to the organ of speech in our mouths or the language that is spoken this is the reason languages is often referred to as tongues, because it is the organ (the tongue) that is speaking the language.

The following two verses show that the Bible uses the word tongue and languages interchangeably showing that the word tongue simply means language, Luke writes: -

- Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his *own language* (Acts 2:6 KJV).

Then in verse eight Luke states: -

- And we hear every man in our *own tongue* wherein we were born?

These two verses (there are many others) clearly show that those listening understood what those speaking in tongues were saying and that it was a proper language.

NOTICE: they weren't confounded because they couldn't understand what the people were saying, but because they heard them in their own language which those speaking had never learned and yet they understood what they were saying. No one has to speak in tongues to be saved to eternal life. During the time of the apostles the purpose of speaking in other languages that a person had not learned, but others who did speak it clearly understood was to evidence to the unbelieving Jews that God was now pouring out His Spirit on all flesh, meaning Jews and Gentiles alike.

Up until this time God only poured his Spirit out upon faithful Jews and it was only faithful Jews that God inspired to prophecy so when the unbelieving Jews heard the Gentiles prophesying and praising God in their own languages it was a sign to them that God was accepting Gentiles into His Kingdom.

For further information concerning speaking in tongues, see: -

- Acts 2 in Commentary NT (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Acts 20

Jews and Gentiles must Repent and Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 20:20-21 ----- ²⁰I (Paul) did not shrink from declaring to you (the church elders at Jerusalem) anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Much of Paul's ministry involved public meetings and meeting brothers and sisters in their homes. It is interesting to notice that though there are church elders there is no mention in the New Testament of church buildings, brothers and sisters in Christ who dwelt in the same region appointed from various home churches faithful men as elders to help oversee the many churches in the region and help in the ministry of the body of Christ.

NOTICE: Paul's message to the Jews and Gentiles was the same message it matters not whether a person is born a direct descendant of Abraham, a Hebrew, a Jew or a Gentile everyone must come to God in the same manner which is through repentance toward God and of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Whole Council of God and the Holy Spirit.

Acts 20:25-28 ----- ²⁵And now, behold, I (Paul) know that none of you (the church elders at Jerusalem) among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. ²⁶Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, ²⁷for I (Paul) did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Paul tells the elders that should they turn away from the faith he cannot be held guilty since he has told them the whole counsel of God. This does not mean that to be saved to eternal life we have to be taught the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation or that we have to understand the entire Bible. The whole counsel of God in this context refers to everything Paul taught concerning the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, his death and his resurrection. Paul cautions the elders to not only pay careful attention to their own faith, but also to the faith of those the Holy Spirit has appointed them to oversee.

Appointed by the Holy Spirit: means that they have been appointed by the apostles and by those the early church looked up to as faithful leaders in God's Kingdom, today whenever a Christian man or woman is appointed by others who are recognised by the body of Christ as faithful humble servant leaders it is right and proper to say they have been appointed by the Holy Spirit to the position or ministry they are serving God in.

God obtained the church with His own blood: these words are used by some to support the theory that Jesus is God, but this is misreading the verse. God did not die on the cross we know this because the Scriptures state that God is immortal and eternal and therefore cannot die. The very meaning of the word eternal is never-ending which means that God is an eternal Spirit without beginning and without end and cannot be killed or die especially at the hands of sinful, mortal human men. Rather the words, "God, obtained the church with his own blood," mean with the blood of his own Son. Christ was born of God and is His only beloved Son it is in this sense that Luke writes God obtained the church with His own blood meaning His own Son we know this because John writes: -

- For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Since the teaching that Jesus is God has such a strong hold on much of traditional Christianity the following will encourage and comfort faithful brothers and sisters in Christ who maybe in some doubt and unsure of what to believe concerning the Father and the Son. The Bible very clearly shows that even if Jesus was God no one has to know this to be saved to eternal life since there is not one verse in the entire Bible that states: -

- We must believe that Jesus is God to be saved.

Nor is there one verse from Genesis to Revelations that says: -

- Whoever believes that Jesus is God the Son will be saved.

In total contrast to this silence there are literally multitudes of Scriptures throughout the pages of the New Testament that very clearly proclaim: -

- We must believe that Jesus is the Son of God to be saved.

And that say: -

- Whoever believes that Jesus is the Son of God will be saved.

Surely if it was important to believe that Jesus was actually God to be saved to eternal life Jesus, the apostles and Paul would have told us at least once in all their teaching concerning salvation, but all we hear from Paul, the apostles and Jesus himself is them saying that we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God to be saved to eternal life. Jesus himself said, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). For further information see the title: "Trinity (The Doctrine of the Trinity)" in Various Topics (ON WEBSITE MENU).

The cost of purchasing the church to God was His Son and the cost to His Son was his life this should give everyone in the global Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ an idea of how much the Father and the Son love and value them.

Paul is Water Baptised to Wash away His Sins.

Acts 22:14-16 ----- ¹⁴Ananias, said to Paul, “The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the righteous one and to hear a voice from his mouth; ¹⁵for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

This is amazing prior to this Saul ravaged the church and entered house after house dragging men and women out and committing them to prison (Acts 8:3). He went about breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord and with letters from the high priest dragged men and woman confessing Christ out of the synagogues and had them bound and taken to Jerusalem to be tried by the Jewish council, imprisoned, wiped and even killed (Acts 9:1-2).

Now here is the amazing thing: this is the man God chose to take the Gospel to the Jews and Gentiles alike and to write a great majority of the New Testament. This is because it was not that Paul was motivated by jealousy as many of the Jews were or from an evil heart. Rather Paul's motivation was from his zeal for God and what he believed was the right way to protect the laws and faith of the Nation of Israel. Paul had been taught by Gamaliel (a Pharisee and eminent doctor of the law) in the strictest laws of Moses and was therefore so legalistic that he believed those who were confessing Christ were blasphemers to the laws and customs God had given to Moses and to the covenant that the LORD had establish with Israel.

This shows the power and horror of wrong belief especially when it is infused with a legalistic heart that lacks, mercy, grace and compassion which in Paul's case had been generated by attending a religious school that gave him a legalistic understanding of God, His laws and a wrong understanding what is important to God's heart.

God's will: for Paul was that he would be a testimony to the word of the Lord to everyone (i.e., Jews and Gentiles alike). Many today believe that after Jesus death and resurrection water baptism was done away with, but here we have Paul who had the most amazing encounter with Christ himself and who clearly believed everything Jesus said to him, still being told by Ananias a devout man according to the law and well-spoken of by all the Jews (v12) telling Paul to be water baptised and Paul himself being baptised. Since both Ananias and Paul placed enormous importance on being water baptised it is difficult (for me at least) to understand why anyone seeking the Lord would think it is not important for them to be water baptised especially since the founder of our faith was water baptised and all those who did believe after Christ death and resurrection throughout the book of acts were water baptised.

Paul's life shines a brilliant spotlight on the following four things: -

1. The enormous, terror, danger and destructive power of wrong belief.
2. There is no sin so bad or sinner so lowly who humbles themselves before God in honest repentance that God will not forgive.
3. God eyes see past a person's outward actions and perceive the motivation of the heart (i.e., Paul's outward action were totally wrong, but his heart motivation was right even though it was motivated by a wrong belief).
4. The importance of water baptism.

The Hope and the Resurrection of the Dead.

Acts 23:6 ----- ⁶Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial."

The word Pharisees means the separated ones they were rulers of the Jews and the most strict and by far the most influential sect of the three prominent societies of Judaism that were around at the time of Christ (the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essences). Pharisees loved to wear distinguishing garb so as to be easily recognised and were found everywhere in Palestine not only in Jerusalem. They influenced and brought into the Jewish faith: -

1. Legalism.
2. Formalised religion.
3. The organisation of the Jewish faith.

So that ultimately Pharisaism and Judaism became almost synonymous. They pledged themselves to obey all facets of the traditions to minutest detail and were sticklers to ceremonial purity. This developed into a feeling of superiority over other nations and people. From this superior feeling as well as religious emotion, pride found its most extreme expression.

The Pharisees were haughty and arrogant because they believed they were the only interpreters of God and His Word. They made life difficult for themselves and bitter for others, and despised those whom they did not consider their equals. Their teaching that salvation came by maintaining tradition and keeping the law had such a strong influence on the minds of their followers that God's grace was thought to come from self-effort rather than grace so it was only natural that such a religion would ultimately become a matter of externals and not a faith of the heart. For further information, see: "Pharisees" in, Bible Dictionary (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Sadducees: the word Sadducees means to be righteous they were the religious political party of the Jewish aristocratic priesthood. They held strictly to the written law and because they were more interested in maintaining the political status quo than in the religious purity of the nation they became the religious party favourable to the Roman government.

In these verses Paul is standing on trial before the Jewish religious council because of his teaching concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead.

NOTE: when salvation to eternal life is spoken of as the HOPE of the faithful in Christ, it is not called HOPE because it might or might not happen, but because it is unseen and yet future. The HOPE itself is guaranteed because it is based on God's promise and He cannot lie. The apostle Paul wrote; "In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began" (Titus 1:2).

The Christian hopes to be resurrected from the grave to be raised up to eternal life and everlasting glory to be made perfectly free from sin; to be everlastingly happy, but it is faith that gives these things a mental reality in the mind and it is under this influence of faith that those in Christ allow these unseen and yet future events to control their mind as if they were a reality now.

Acts 24

A Resurrection of the Just and the Unjust.

Acts 24:14-15 ----- ¹⁴But this I (Paul) confess to you (Felix the governor) that according to the way which they (the high priest Ananias, the elders, the Jews and Tertullus their spokesman) (v1-9) call a SECT I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law and written in the prophets ¹⁵having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

Paul told Felix that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. The Bible teaches that all those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ will be raised in the first resurrection and states that whoever attains to this resurrection the second death will have no power over them. Then at the end of Christ's glorious reign on earth as King of kings and Lord of lords we see God Himself descending on a great White Throne and the grave and the sea giving up the dead after which multitudes are seen standing before the Throne of God.

If these people's names are found written in the Book of Life other heavenly books are then opened and according to what is written in those books, according to what they have done those who are counted unworthy are cast into the Lake of Fire. Because of this the resurrection of the just and the unjust can refer to the following two resurrections: -

- 1 The first resurrection (Rev. 20:5-6) when Christ returns as, King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11-16) and all those sleeping in Christ and the faithful who are alive are gathered together to be with the Lord to be a Kingdom and priests to God and reign with the Lord establishing God's Kingdom of righteousness, justice, joy and peace on earth during Christ's glorious millennial Kingdom age (Rev 1:5-10). Prior to this first resurrection Christ will send his angels to gather out of his present spiritual Kingdom on earth all causes of sin and all law-breakers (Matt. 13:41) which clearly show that there will be a judgment of the just and the unjust at this resurrection.

NOTE: the unjust in this resurrection will be those who have used the Gospel of Christ for their own selfish ambition and used their followers as merchandise to extend their own religious empire, it refers to those who are confessing Christ, but rather than serve the Lord are like the Pharisees (i.e., religious on the outside, but full of hypocrisy and pretence on the inside).

- 2 The resurrection that takes place at the at the end of Christ's glorious Kingdom age when God Himself descends to earth on a Great White Throne and the sea, death and hades (the grave) give up the dead. They stand before God and are judged according to what is written in certain heavenly books according to what they have done. Death and those counted unworthy are cast into the Lake of Fire a symbol of eternal destruction (i.e., total extinction) (also called the, second death) (Rev. 20:11-15). Christ hands the Kingdom over to his heavenly Father and God is ALL in ALL and eternity begins in all its fullness and majestic royal glory.

For further information see title: "The Second Resurrection or Great White Throne Judgment," in, Resurrection (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Acts 26.

The Hope of the Promise God made to the Fathers of Israel.

Acts 26:6-8 ----- ⁶And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! (Agrippa) ⁸Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

Paul tells the King that he is standing on trial because of the promise made by God to the Old Testament fathers of Israel. The promise refers to the following promises the LORD made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their offspring after them. All these promises begin with Abraham. The LORD swore to Abraham: -

- He would make of Abraham a great nation and that he would be the father of a multitude of nations.
- He would make Abrahams name great, bless him, nations, and kings would come from him and He would give to him and to his seed after him all the land of Canaan/Israel for an everlasting possession.
- He would multiply his offspring as the dust of the earth and the stars of heaven so that they cannot be numbered and God will be their God.

The LORD confirmed these promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their offspring after them throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant promising Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

(Gen. 12:1-3) (Gen. 13:14-17) (Gen. 15:4-7) (Gen. 17:1-8) (Gen. 22:15-18) (Deut. 9:5).

Now the majestic wonder and beauty of God's promise is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul writes that the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith that is why it depends on faith in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all Abrahams offspring—not only to the adherents of the law (referring to the Jews), but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham (referring to the Gentiles), who is the father of us all (Jews and Gentiles), as it is written: -

- I have made you (Abraham) the father of many nations—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist (i.e., creation and the resurrection).

In hope Abraham believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told: -

- So shall your seed be (Gen. 15:5) (Rom. 4:18).

Paul tells us that: -

- The twelve tribes of Israel earnestly worshipped night and day hoping to attain to this promise (Acts 26:7).

And then gloriously points out that the Scripture does not say: -

- And to seeds referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your seed who is Christ (Gal. 3:16).

Some may think the promises made to Abraham was for the Jews only, but Paul magnificently explains in the book of Ephesians that the promises of God have been extended to all nations through being baptised into the Lord Jesus Christ and clearly shows that the promises made to Abraham and to his offspring the Lord Jesus Christ are not limited to the Jews only but embraces whoever will come to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:13, 16-18) (Gal. 3:16, 27). For further information see the title: “The Commonwealth of Israel” (at the end of this chapter).

Why is it thought incredible that God raises the dead? Paul almost seems astounded that it is so difficult for people to believe that God can raise the dead. It is stunning that many who believe God created all things have difficulty to believe He can raise the dead especially when reason and logic says raising the dead has to be a lessor task than creating an entire universe that mankind cannot find an end to and which is filled such a multitude of extremely different life forms they cannot be numbered.

Ponder for a moment: some people find it difficult to comprehend God raising the dead, but think of it this way: we have super computers today that have in their memories literally trillions of bits of information and at the touch of a key any one of those bits is resurrected to us on a brightly coloured screen (soon it is most likely they will simply appear in the air), then with another touch of the key it all vanishes into the super memory and is gone, until we resurrect it again.

Knowing that God has given his creation a mortal mind and finite memory to be able to build such amazing computers should make it very easy to understand how God keeps us all in His immortal mind and eternal memory waiting for the right time to touch the supernatural keyboard of heaven and raise us once again to life.

Added to this very few Christians have any trouble believing God created the universe that we live in so raising the dead in comparison is not such a difficult task for such an awesome, powerful and majestic God (Heb. 11:3).

Christ called Paul to Proclaim the Good News of the Gospel.

Acts 26:16-18 ----- ¹⁶Jesus said to Paul (on the road to Damascus): “But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷delivering you from

your people and from the gentiles— to whom I am sending you ¹⁸to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Prior to these verses Paul has told King Agrippa about his journey to Damascus and how he saw a light brighter than the light of the sun and heard Jesus speaking in the Hebrew language to him. Jesus appeared to Paul to send him to Jews and Gentiles to open their eyes to the Good News of the Gospel so that they may turn from darkness (spiritual blindness) to light (spiritual enlightenment) and from the power of Satan (self, pride ego and the influence of the world) to God (through Christ) that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified (purified and approved of) by faith in Christ.

This is the majestic Good News of the Gospel whoever comes to God through repentance and faith in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ is not only approved of and accepted by God the Father but all their sins are forgiven not because they are deserving of it, by any self-effort or religious good works, but because through faith in Christ righteousness is imputed from God to them as a pure and free gift. But this is not the end of the Good News since God's promises also state that the faithful in Christ will be resurrected to eternal glory and everlasting life. Can there be any better news than this? Thus the reason it is called the Good News.

To Receive Forgiveness of Sins both Jews and Gentiles Must Repent.

Acts 26:19-21 ----- ¹⁹Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision ²⁰but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. ²¹For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.

The heavenly vision refers to Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus when the Lord called Paul to proclaim the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike.

VISION: can relate to a spectacle gazed at by the eyes or a movie played out in the mind. In most cases God gives the picture or vision then the prophet speaks or writes it in their own words. Sometimes the same biblical event or experience is spoken of as an actual and real event, while at other times the same event maybe recorded as a vision (an image or mental experience within the mind).

A biblical vision is always under God's control and can appear as a movie played out on the screen of the imagination of the mind (similar to a dream) or it may appear as a hologram appearing in the air that is actually seen by the eyes of the prophet or to whoever God chooses to give the vision to. The vision communicates the LORD'S will or future events to the prophet who then proceeds to tell the vision to the people, sometimes in their own words and at other times in the exact words the LORD has spoken to them in the vision

Repentance and deeds in keeping with repentance: the Gospel of Christ commands that everyone repent. Repentance is essential it is the beginning of Christian faith because repentance changes the will. The rebellious will toward God becomes a will that desires to serve the Lord. Only repentance before God can change the heart in such a manner.

Repentance is the work of God in the heart because by repentance the heart turns to God to find mercy, surrenders to Christ as Redeemer and Saviour and with a heartfelt passion desires to forsake sin and live to honour both God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus himself told us to go into all-the world and proclaim this message of repentance over and over again.

The Old Testament Levitical law required Israel to continually offer for a sin offering slain animals over which they confessed their iniquities for the forgiveness of sin and freedom from guilt, whereas now, under the Gospel of Christ no Jew or Gentile needs to signify repentance in this way; since Christ unlike the animal sacrifices died once for all. This means no-one has to continually ask for forgiveness to be saved and accepted by God since every faithful brother and sister who is by faith in Christ are loved by God and saved to eternal life.

NOTE: this is not about repenting and feeling sorrow over offenses we many have done while in Christ that is another topic altogether. Here the focus is repentance that leads to eternal life in Christ it is that repentance that: -

- Delivers a sinner from the domain of darkness and transfers them into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col 1:13).

Once a sinner is transferred into this Kingdom they do not need to continually repent to get back into it, unless they have consciously and deliberately turned away from the faith and against Christ. Certainly we should feel sorrow and regret and change our behaviour when we act or behave in a manner that dishonours God and brings a bad testimony to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is not necessary to continually repent again and again to be saved to eternal life. In a natural family where love is the bond, the children often act in a manner that is not according to their parents best desire, but no loving parent casts their children who love them away simply because they did not attain to the high standard they desired, likewise it is with God, He does not cast out His children who love Him when they fall short of his glory.

Repentance is the beginning of entering into the eternal Kingdom of God it does not need to be laid again and again. Christian maturity, and spiritual strength and mental peace with God cannot be attained by lingering at the earliest stages of salvation. Those who are devoted to Christ can only move forward spiritually by accepting God's forgiveness and by trusting in God's grace. No one can be delivered from the domain of darkness and transfers into the Kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:13) without honest heartfelt repentance before God outward deeds fitting for repentance will evidence the honesty of a person's repentance. This is because genuine repentance before God and acceptance of Christ as Lord and Saviour affects the mind the heart and the will in such a manner that the repentant sinner rises from their regret and their sorrow with a transformed desire to live their life to honour God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ

Moses and the Prophets wrote that Christ Must Suffer.

Acts 26:22-23 ----- ²²To this day I (Paul) have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: ²³that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead he would proclaim light both to our people (the Jews) and to the Gentiles."

Paul tells Agrippa and those gathered in the meeting hall that he obeyed Christ and firstly declared the Good News of the Gospel to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. The words: -

- Moses and the Prophets said that Christ must suffer (v23)

Are clearly evidenced in (Psalm 22) and (Isaiah 53) the following words of Isaiah and Zechariah are just a few of the many throughout the Old Testament that speak of Christ's suffering.

Isaiah prophesied that: -

- A virgin will conceive and bear a son, and call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14) he will grow up before God like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground and have no form or majesty that we should look at him or beauty that we should desire him. (Isaiah 53:2) but the Spirit of the LORD God will be upon him because the LORD will anoint him to bring Good News to the poor; and to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;(Isaiah 61:1). At the end of his ministry he will give his back to those who strike and his cheeks to those who pull out the beard, he will not hide his face from disgrace and spitting (Isaiah 50:6). Isaiah is of course speaking of Christ.

Zechariah wrote: -

- If one asks him, 'What are these wounds on your back? he will say, 'The wounds I received in the house of my friends (Zech. 13:6).

- A man whose name is the branch will extend out from his place, and build the Temple of the LORD (Zech. 6:12).
- Zechariah tells Jerusalem “To rejoice greatly because their king is coming to them; righteous and having salvation, he is humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zech. 9:9). Latter in his letter he pens the beautiful words, “The LORD will pour out on Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn” (Zech. 12:9-10). (Zechariah clearly writes of Christ).

Christ must be the first to rise from the dead: the words, “Christ must be the first to rise from the dead” (v23) obviously does not mean he was the first person ever to be raised from the dead since Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite and a dead man who was put into the sepulchre of the Prophet Elisha, was restored to life as soon as he touched the prophet's bones. Christ himself had raised the widow's son at Nain, Lazarus and several others, but all these were raised to mortal life to die again whereas Christ was raised from the dead to eternal life and can die no more which means he was the first to rise again from the dead to return no more into the empire of death.

Christ was the first that rose from the dead to an immortal life, and so in this sense is the firstborn to be raised from the dead and the firstfruits of those that are asleep in Christ. The resurrection of Christ to eternal life is proof of the resurrection of the human body to return no more under the empire of death it is in this sense that Jesus is said, “To be the first that rose again from the dead,” The expression, “Those sleeping in Christ,” refers to those who have died while having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they are referred to as being asleep in Christ because their death is only temporary as they will be raised again to eternal life and everlasting glory. For further information see the title: “Falling Asleep” in Christ (following Acts 13:32-370 (above).

NOTICE: the words, “Christ would be the first to rise from the dead (v23) clearly shows us that no-one ascended to heaven prior to Christ's death. For further information concerning this, see the title: “Heaven” (ON WEBSITE MENU).

The following few verses show the prophets knew of the resurrection: -

The Lord said to Abraham: -

- Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me (Gen. 22:12).

Then in book of Hebrews we read: -

- Abraham considered that God was able even to raise his son from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back (Heb. 11:19).

David says: -

- The LORD will not abandon his soul to Sheol (the grave) or let your holy one (the Lord Jesus Christ) see corruption (Psalm 16:10).

These verses clearly show that certain Old Testament prophets understood the resurrection of their Messiah and King and that they themselves would be resurrected to eternal life. Nevertheless the primary focus of the majority of the Jewish people was upon God's promise that the Messiah, the Christ and their King would come through their natural bloodline and take their nation onto victory and triumph.

They did not expect him to come as the Lamb of God and the Son of God who would lay down his life down to his enemies, until Christ appeared and rose again. Not even the apostles fully understood what Christ meant when he said, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise” (Mark 9:31) until he appeared to them after his death and resurrection.

Moses and the prophets spoke of Israel's Messiah the Christ to come throughout the Old Testament. Jesus himself said: -

- I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book (Hebrews 10:7).

The scroll of the book refers to the Old Testament and he said to the Jews: -

- You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; but it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39).

It is very clear that the religious rulers of Israel should have recognised their Messiah when he came especially since he was performing supernatural miracles that could only be done by a man who God's power was flowing through in such a majestic and awesome manner. To view some of these glorious prophecies see the title: "Moses wrote of Jesus" following (Acts 18:24-28) (above).

NOTE: there are so many celebrated and famous prophecies that the faithful prophets of old spoke thousands of years before Christ appeared that stunningly show that the Bible is the inspired word of God for the following three reasons: -

1. Who from their own mind could ever imagine that God's own Son the promised Messiah, the Christ and Saviour of the world would ever have to suffer such a humiliating brutal, bloody and cruel death?
2. Who could imagine from their own mind that a man born of a woman would be raised from the dead to eternal life and everlasting glory? Certainly generations of old believed in life after death, but it was in the form of a conscious spirit being, not a human raised from the grave to immortality and eternal life.
3. Many Old Testament Scriptures give exact details of Christ's birth, his life and his suffering long before he appeared.

Yet all these things are prophesied and spoken of thousands of years before they ever happened

Repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with repentance (v20) shows that there should be outward evidence that testifies to a person's repentance and inward faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It does not mean we are saved by keeping the law and good deeds, but that keeping the law and good deeds evidence our inward faith. The faithful in Christ aim to keep the law not to get saved, but because they are saved. They understand that righteousness is a gift of God that comes through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and cannot be earned by self-effort.

They know that the law is splendid as a guide to an understanding of God's will, but as a means of reunion with God, the God we have sinned against, it is a hopeless failure nevertheless both law and grace go together, the law without the Gospel is diagnosis without remedy, but the Gospel without law is only the Good News of salvation for people who don't believe they need it because they have never heard the bad news of judgment, the law is not the Gospel, but the Gospel is not lawless (Rom. 3:19-20) (Eph. 2:13-22). The spirit behind the law is love, because each law protects a human being from harm. In the book of Romans Paul states: -

- Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:10).

The spirit of the law is to protect the innocent from physical, financial, sexual, emotional and spiritual harm, thus those who know God aim to keep the Law because it is the right and loving thing to do. It fulfils the Ten Commandments regarding man, and the royal law: -

- Love thy neighbour as thyself (Mark 12:31) (Jas 2:8).

It pleases God and brings a good testimony to His name and the name of, Jesus and the Christian faith. Those who belong to Christ aim to keep the law not to get saved, but because they are saved.

They understand that righteousness is a free gift of God that comes through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and cannot be earned by self-effort. Though the law is splendid as a guide to understanding God's will, as a means of reunion with God, the God we have sinned against, it is a hopeless failure nevertheless both law and grace go together, the law without the Gospel is diagnosis without remedy, but the Gospel without law is only the Good News of salvation for people who don't believe they need it because they have never heard the bad news of judgment, the law is not the Gospel, but the Gospel is not lawless (Rom. 3:19-20) (Eph. 2:13-22).

- Micah wrote: "What the LORD requires of mankind is to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with their God" (Micah 6:5-10).
- Isaiah says: "The LORD loves justice, hates robbery and wrong doing" (Isaiah 61:8).
- Jeremiah said: "Those who know God practise steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, because it is in these things that God delights" (Jer. 9:24).

The great prophets Micah, Isaiah and Jeremiah clearly show us that the people the LORD loves are not only those who acknowledge God, but who also uphold justice, do not lie, deceive or make promises they do not intend to keep, but speak the truth, do what is right, show respect and give help to others when able and make choices that lead to peace. These are the things the LORD delights in and that bring His favour.

Jesus famous Sermon on the Mount: the constant theme throughout Jesus famous Sermon on the Mount is doing what is right before God by seeking the way of peace in all situations. Jesus calls Christians to treat people fairly and with respect, dignity, decency grace compassion, kindness, mercy and to be quick to forgive. This means living a life that honours God and the Lord Jesus Christ is about doing all we can do to protect people from harm and being dominated by the thought, "What action can I take or do that will help and encourage this person." It is all about doing right to others.

This is the reason the message Jesus spoke on the mountain is referred to as, "The Famous Sermon" because the principals if followed not only by Christians but all humanity are the only way to peace (Matt 5). A wicked person is primarily one who deliberately and consciously denies the existence of God and does harm to other humans.

For further information on Jesus Famous Sermon see: -

- Matthew 5 in Commentary New Testament (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Acts 28

The Lord Jesus Christ the Hope of Israel.

Acts 28:20 -----²⁰For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you (the local leaders of the Jews) and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain."

The faithful of the Old Testament looked by faith toward the coming of their promised Messiah the Christ who would save their nation and rule upon the throne of David as their victorious and triumphant King so that they would be the head and not the tail of all nations. The hope of Israel refers to the Promised seed of the woman spoken of in (Genesis 3:15); the prophet and deliverer Moses said was to come like him; the promised seed of Abraham; the promised seed of David the Messiah the Christ the prophets under the inspiration of God said was to come and the righteous one the King the Old Testament Scriptures speak of which of course all refer to the Lord Jesus Christ, he was the one all the faithful fathers set their faith and hope upon.

Sadly when he did appear the builders of the Jewish faith at that time (the chief priests, Pharisees and scribes) did not recognise him. For further information see the notes following the title: "The Hope of the Promise God made to the Fathers of Israel" (following Acts 26:6-8) (above).

The Law of Moses and the Prophets Testify of Jesus.

Acts 28:23 ----- 23 When they had appointed a day for him (Paul), they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the Kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the prophets.

The local Jewish leaders in Rome desire to hear Paul's views regarding the sect called Christians because they are spoken against by the Romans and the Jews. Paul holds meetings in his hired home (v30) and people in great numbers come to him. The Jewish authorities had meticulously kept the writings of Moses and the prophets on Scrolls and read them every Sabbath in the synagogues, Paul having spent many years studying these spends his days and his evenings trying to persuade the Jews from the Old Testament writings that Jesus is their Messiah the Christ that Moses and the prophets spoke of. For Scriptures concerning what Moses and the Prophets wrote see the notes following (Acts 26:22-23) (above) under the title: "Moses and the Prophets wrote that Christ Must Suffer."

Paul lived two years in Rome Proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

Acts 28:30-31 ----- 30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Paul spoke to everyone who came to him at his own expense meaning Paul worked to support himself. In verse twenty-three we are told the Jews came to Paul in greater numbers so it is most likely he was lodging in a place that had a large room attached to it, perhaps much like the upper room that the one hundred and twenty were gathered in on the day of Pentecost.

The worldwide global church: the fact Paul was teaching the Scriptures in his own rented home shines a spotlight on the truth that we should never make the mistake of limiting the church to only the established religious institutions, denominations or church buildings, they may be a part of the body of Christ but they are not the only part. For further information concerning the global church see, the titles: "From House to House Disciples Taught Jesus" and the title: "House Churches following (Acts 5:42) (above).

Institutionalizing Christianity (the School of Tyrannus).

From time Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire and began to use the techniques of Roman paganism (temples, priests, pagan holidays etc.) to institutionalize Christianity most people have completely ignored one of the methods Paul went about church planting. Today recent movements have begun to try and recapture the ancient way of doing church, believing the Constantinian transition was not an improvement, but that it was ultimately destructive to church life and practice. Many involved in church restoration today see Paul's methods as extremely simple and essentially free of structure; just encourage people to meet in homes, release gifts and live life in community. Each of these elements has been very helpful, but some have neglected a necessary piece of Paul's strategy.

The following are the two different methods of planting a church that exist today: -

1. The traditional method of establishing a weekly worship service in a church building.
2. To ignore buildings and have weekly meetings in homes.

But in both these formats there is a third element that is missing which Paul used with tremendous success. The clearest glimpse of this missing element that Paul used when he wanted to plant churches in a city is found in (Acts 19). Luke records that after Paul abandoned his original method of working through the local Synagogue he rented space in the public school of Tyrannus and held daily discussions there for about a two year period. This is most likely what he was doing in Synagogues before this time and we know this was what he did during his house

arrest in Rome (Acts 28). Paul used his space in the public School of Tyrannus as a daily discipleship center which had constant activity flowing through it and he complimented these public gatherings by having training and fellowship meetings in individual house churches (Acts 20:20).

The primary focus in a city should not be on the churches themselves but on discipleship training through discussion. To establish this third element of church planting and long term faith means that the primary focus in a city would not be on the churches themselves, but on discipleship training through discussion.

Discussion-based training needs to replace sermonizing as a means to a long-lasting faith-building group discovery experience. In our modern society saturated with information readily available at the press of a key there needs to be a transition of each lesson from lecture format to discussion-based sharing, not only will people learn the word of the Lord this way but they are also fellowshiping with one another while doing it and as a result will grow together since they are learning not only the Scriptures, but about each other.

A second great benefit that results from this type of meeting is that people's needs are often revealed while discussing the Scriptures so those within the meeting can then respond accordingly.

The Kingdom of God, Past, Present and Future.

Paul proclaimed, the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ (v31). There are two aspects to the Kingdom of God: -

1. The present spiritual Kingdom that is being established by faith in the hearts and minds of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and faithfully follow him.
2. The literal and future Kingdom that is to come when Christ returns in glory as King of king and Lord of lords to establish God's Kingdom of righteousness, justice, joy and peace on earth.

The following shows that God's Kingdom has existed throughout history in different shapes and different forms. In the Old Testament it existed under Moses and the Judges in one form and under David and Solomon in another. Prior to Christ's death and resurrection the Jews focus was the promised literal and physical Kingdom of Israel to be restored on earth rather than the resurrection of Jesus and all those (Jews and Gentiles) who trust in his name being resurrected to eternal life. After Christ's resurrection the focus of the writers changed from the literal Kingdom to salvation in Jesus name and resurrection to everlasting life and eternal glory. Christ's resurrection ushered in a spiritual Kingdom that exists in the heart, mind and conscience of all who confess to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

At the end of this age when Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords he will separate out of this existing spiritual Kingdom the foolish and wicked servants from the faithful and wise servants and with the faithful and the resurrected who died in Christ majestically establish God's literal Kingdom of righteousness, justice, joy and peace on earth, then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father (Matt. 13:36-43) which means the Kingdom will take on another form, but even this is not the final shape of the Kingdom since at the end of this age God himself will descend to earth and be ALL in ALL then the Kingdom will take on it final and eternal form and ETERNITY will begin in all its perfect majestic royal fullness.

NOTE: it is the context that determines which Kingdom the writer is referring too. In the New Testament the Kingdom of God in Paul's mind is mostly the invisible spiritual Kingdom existing in the heart and mind of those who belong to Christ which is manifested in righteousness, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17).

For further information see the title: -

- Kingdom of God (ON WEBSITE MENU).

SUMMARY: Salvation in Acts.

The central focus of salvation and the Gospel also called the Good News that leads to eternal life is centred on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The author shine a brilliant spotlight on the following glorious truths: -

- The righteous one the Old Testament speaks of is Jesus.
- The hope of Israel and the promise God made to Abraham is revealed in Christ.
- Whoever is in Christ will receive the everlasting inheritance God promised to the seed of Abraham.
- Salvation to eternal life is in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Whoever (i.e., Jews and Gentiles) believes in the Lord Jesus will be saved.
- Jesus is the Saviour and Redeemer of the world there is no other.
- Jesus died and rose again to eternal glory in heaven.
- God through Christ visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name.
- Repentant sinners who turn to God will be saved through faith and by grace.
- The hearts of those who believe are cleansed by faith.
- The Kingdom at this present time is a spiritual Kingdom established in the heart and mind by faith in Christ Jesus.
- Those in Christ should endeavour to live a lifestyle in keeping with repentance.
- Those who have died in Christ will be raised to eternal life and everlasting glory.

The book of Acts primary focus is upon the whole council of God concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, the Good News of the Gospel and trying to convince people about Jesus.

The Author of the Book of Acts.

The book of Acts begins with the words, "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach (Acts 1:1).

The first book refers to the book of Luke we know this because it begins with the words, "It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus (Luke 1:3).

This shows us that the author of the book of Luke is also the author of the book of Acts which of course is Luke himself. Yet throughout the book of Acts the name of Luke is not mentioned, rather the author uses the words we and us, but included in these two words is of course Luke himself and whoever is with him at that time. It is a common Bible principal for the author of the Scriptures to hide themselves in their letter.

The writers very rarely use the word (*I*) they will often say, "That disciple with (*them*) or (*Him*) when they are referring to themselves, it is a style of writing that avoids boasting. The spirit of the world is driven by pride, ego and the desire to feel important, if someone of the world has contact with a famous person they want to boast about it to their friends, biblical writers often avoid this by hiding themselves in their writings.

The Commonwealth of Israel.

It is important to understand that the promised seed of Abraham and David is Christ, all the promises to Israel are now fulfilled in Christ therefore they are not limited to Israel only but extend and embrace all those who belong to Christ because God is now creating one new nation in Christ made up of both Jew and Gentiles. (Gentiles are everyone who is not a Hebrew or Jew) this means that Jews and Gentiles become one new nation in Christ (also called, a new man, a new creation, the church, the body of Christ and the Kingdom of God).

The Apostle Paul said: -

- Remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision (Jews), which is made in the flesh by hands—¹²remember that you (Gentiles) were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the *COMMONWEALTH OF ISRAEL* and *STRANGERS* to the *COVENANTS* of *PROMISE*, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you (Gentiles) who once were far off (from God) have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our (Jews and Gentiles) peace, who has made us both *ONE* and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he (Jesus) might create in himself *ONE NEW MAN* (or Nation) in place of the two (Jews and Gentiles), so making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile us (Jews and Gentiles) both to God in *ONE BODY* through the cross, thereby killing the hostility (between the Jews and Gentiles). ¹⁷And he (Jesus) came and preached peace to you (Gentiles) who were far off (from God) and peace to those who were near (Jews). ¹⁸For through him (Jesus) we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access in *ONE SPIRIT* to the Father. ¹⁹So then you (Gentiles) are *NO LONGER* strangers and aliens, but you are *FELLOW CITIZENS* with the *SAINTS* (the Jews) and members of the *HOUSEHOLD* of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone ²¹in whom the *WHOLE STRUCTURE* being joined together (Jews and Gentiles) grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you (Jews and Gentiles) also are being built together into a *DWELLING PLACE* for *GOD* by the Spirit (Ephes. 2:11-22)

Gentiles were separated from Christ, alienated from the, Commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus they have been brought to God by the blood of Christ. Jesus has made Jews and Gentiles both one by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances so that Jesus might create in himself one new man (Nation) in place of the two (Jews and Gentiles).

In Jesus both Jews and Gentiles are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Christ is the head of this new nation and its Jewish and Gentile citizens are now equal in status before God since in Christ we are all brothers and sisters in the same eternal family that God is now establishing in the Lord Jesus Christ throughout all nations of the world.

The practical application of what this means to you: -

If you belong to Christ, all the future and eternal promises God made to Israel also apply to you. The book of Revelation states: -

- When Christ returns in glory every eye will see him, even those who pierced him and all the tribes of the earth (Rev. 1:7).

And in Revelation chapter five we are told that: -

- Christ was slain, and by his blood he ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (i.e., Jews and Gentiles) and he has made them a kingdom and priests to God and they shall reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10).

End.