

Promise and Deliverance

Student Workbook

Volume 19
Level 4

Harvey De Groot

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Preface

When S.G. De Graaf wrote his four-volume series, *Promise and Deliverance*, he showed educators how to teach Bible stories from a redemptive-historical perspective. Rather than turning Bible stories into moralistic tales, De Graaf taught us how all the Bible shows God revealing himself as the God of the covenant, who is working out His redemptive plan for humanity and all of creation.

The 80 workbooks written by Harvey De Groot are meant to supplement De Graaf's work. They are divided by volume and level number: 20 volumes with four levels per volume. Workbook lessons are written at four levels so that families with students in various grades can study the same Bible stories during the week in preparation for their classes on Sunday. Prior to class, the Sunday School teacher should study the lesson in De Graaf's book. The teacher and students can go through the workbook during class.

The levels are divided according to the following grades:

- **Level One:** Grades K-1
- **Level Two:** Grades 2-3
- **Level Three:** Grades 4-6
- **Level Four:** Grades 7-8

Each volume contains 12 or 13 lessons, and each lesson has the following sections:

- **Reference:** The volume and lesson number in De Graaf's series.
- **Scripture:** The passage from Scripture on which the lesson is based.
- **Memory Verse:** A memory verse related to the lesson.
- **Lesson Truth:** A short statement to help the class focus on the main point of the lesson.
- **Lesson:** The lesson itself, which the teacher can read in class. For older grades, the teacher may opt to assign it as homework.
- **Questions:** Items to be discussed in class. For older grades, the teacher can assign these questions as homework but should also use them as a basis for class discussion. These are not the only questions that could or should be asked. Teachers should encourage students to come with their own questions as well.

This edition was written by Harvey De Groot and edited by his son Norlan De Groot.

Lesson 1

Exalted as King

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 4, Lesson 23

Scripture: Acts 1:4-14

Memory Verse: “And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” (Acts 1:4-5)

Lesson Truth: By His ascension Christ is the exalted King.

Lesson

Like a bolt of lightning, the spread of the gospel after Jesus ascended into heaven was unstoppable. It was unstoppable because the Father promised that the disciples would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. The disciples had to be trained to understand the true nature of God’s Kingdom. They had to be trained because they did not understand the times and the seasons, which only the Father had the authority to institute. The disciples had to learn to rely on the promise that the Father had given that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. After Jesus assured the disciples of the promise of the Holy Spirit, He was taken up from the earth as they watched. When a cloud removed Him from their sight, they were forced to live by faith and not by sight.

It had been forty days since Jesus was raised from the dead. During this forty-day period He had appeared to the disciples several times, but never to the world. Now, before He ascended into heaven, when the disciples were all together, He appeared to them again. This time, Jesus told them not to depart from Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father. The Lord then assured them about the nature of that promise. He told them that as John baptized with water, they would soon be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

When the disciples heard this assurance from the Lord, they indicated that they still did not fully understand the nature of God’s Kingdom. They asked Jesus if He was going to restore the Kingdom to Israel at this time. The disciples were still expecting the return of a kingdom similar to the kingdom of David. Jesus then helped the disciples understand that the nature and time God’s Kingdom was under God’s authority. Only God could know the times and the seasons for His Kingdom. The disciples had to learn to be obedient to their call and they had to learn to rely on God’s promises to fulfill their call. Jesus then assured them that they would receive power to be witnesses when the Holy Spirit came upon them. When the Holy Spirit filled them, they would be God’s witnesses, first of all in Jerusalem, then in Judea, and finally to Samaria and to the end of the earth. The disciples were to be witnesses, not to a kingdom like David’s, but to a Kingdom that would live in the hearts of mankind and be fully consummated in the new heavens and the new earth.

After Jesus spoke these words of assurance to His disciples a great transformation took place. This was the transformation of the disciples from sight to faith. As they stood and watched, Jesus was taken up into heaven. There the angels received Him with shouts of exultation as He took His place at the right hand of the Father. Now His Kingdom of grace extended to every nation and tribe and tongue. Jesus ascended into heaven not only to inherit heaven’s glory for Himself, but also for His people.

As a cloud removed the Lord from the disciple’s sight, the transformation occurred. The disciples now had to live by faith and not by sight. They could no longer see Jesus, but they knew that He reigned in heaven over all things. That must also be our walk of faith. We too must live by faith, knowing that our Lord reigns in heaven and that He also calls us to be His witnesses to the end of the earth. We can live with the assurance

that the angels gave to the disciples after Jesus ascended. The angels told the disciples that, “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11) Knowing that Jesus will return, can give us the same confidence and joy that the disciples experienced as they went back to Jerusalem. Our prayer should be the same as the disciples’ prayer; that the Lord would fill us with His Holy Spirit as He promised. We can then be witnesses for our exalted King to the ends of the earth.

Questions

1. From where were the disciples commanded not to depart? (Acts 1:4)
2. What did the disciples have to wait for? (Acts 1:4)
3. According to the words of Jesus, who had baptized with water? (Acts 1:5)
4. What would the disciples soon be baptized with? (Acts 1:5)
5. According to Jesus, who alone has the authority to know the times and the seasons? (Acts 1:7)
6. According to Jesus, from whom would the disciples receive power? (Acts 1:8)

7. Where would the disciples be called to witness after they received power? (Acts 1:8)

8. What did the two angels promise the disciples concerning Jesus? (Acts 1:11)

Lesson 2

The Organization of the Church

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 4, Lesson 24

Scripture: Acts 1:15-26

Memory Verse: “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” (Acts 1:21-22)

Lesson Truth: The working of the Holy Spirit can be expected in organizing the church according to the Word of the Lord.

Lesson

The church of the Lord Jesus is referred to as the body of Christ. Immediately after Christ ascended into heaven, the body of believers gathered to wait for the promised Holy Spirit. They continued in prayer that the Holy Spirit would come upon them as the Lord promised. It was at this gathering that Peter stood up and reminded the believers of the need to organize the church. In this organization of the body of believers, they prayed for the Holy Spirit to guide their method of choosing an apostle. The believers could expect the guidance of the Holy Spirit if they organized the church in accordance with the word of God.

After Jesus went to heaven, the apostles, along with some of the women, continued in prayer and waited for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter made this gathering aware that they were short one apostle. This shortage came because of the betrayal and death of Judas. Peter reminded the believers that the defection of Judas was a fulfillment of Scripture. David had written in Psalm 41 that a friend of Jesus who had eaten His bread had lifted up his heel against the Lord. This friend was Judas, the one who betrayed the Lord and led others to arrest Him. Peter also reminded this body of believers that David had not only predicted that Judas would fall away, but he also told the church what had to be done with this vacancy. Psalm 109 was the church’s guide for the replacement of Judas.

This Psalm says, “Let his days be few, and let another take his office” (Psalm 109:8). Judas betrayed the Lord and judgment was visited upon him. He hanged himself, and when the rope broke, he fell to his doom. The money Judas returned for betraying Jesus was used to purchase a burial plot which became known as the Field of Blood. To be sure the falling away of Judas was predicted, but the Psalmist also indicated what the church had to do to replace Judas. They had to find someone to take his place. The church was given the authority to select a replacement for Judas. Judas had broken the church organization, and now for the Lord’s honor the organization of the church had to be restored. We must also understand that it is the Lord who gives the church authority to do its work today. For that reason, the church must live in obedience to God’s will. Thankfully, He makes His will known to the church through the Scriptures.

The body of believers waiting at Jerusalem knew two men who were qualified to fill the office of apostle. In order to be qualified for this office these men had to be witnesses of the teachings, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus. Both Joseph and Matthias had followed Jesus in His teaching ministry. They had witnessed His death and resurrection, so they were qualified to be apostles. Still, the believers wanted the Lord of the church to decide which one should replace Judas. As they prayed, they said, “You O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show us which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:24-25). This body of believers then prepared to cast lots with a prayer that in this way the Lord would show them the man of His choosing. When the lots were cast, they pointed to Matthias. The believers unanimously agreed to place him in the office of apostle.

In this way the apostles filled the vacancy caused by the defection of Judas. The spirit and the conduct of the apostles and believers in Jerusalem is our model for doing the business of the organized church today. We too must pray for the leading of the Holy Spirit. The church today must understand that God has given His Holy, inspired Word as a guide in organizing His church.

Questions

1. Who stood up to speak to the church gathered in Jerusalem? (Acts 1:15)
2. Who foretold in Scripture that Judas would fall away? (Acts 1:16)
3. What was the name of the field that was purchased with the money Judas received for betraying Jesus? (Acts 1:19)
4. According to the book of Psalms, what were the apostles to do with the vacancy created by Judas? (Acts 1:20)
5. Who did the apostles find that were qualified for the office of apostle? (Acts 1:23)
6. Who did the apostles ask to show them which of the two should serve? (Acts. 1:24)

7. Who fell from the office of apostle by his transgression? (Acts 1:25)

8. What method did the apostles use to select the apostle of the Lord's choosing? (Acts 1:26)

Lesson 3

The Spirit of Communion

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 4, Lesson 25

Scripture: Acts 2

Memory Verse: “And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.” (Acts 2:18-19)

Lesson Truth: With the Holy Spirit the love of God is poured out in the hearts of His people.

Lesson

The disciples had been waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit as Christ had promised. They were together on the day of Pentecost, a feast day on which the men of Israel had to present themselves at the sanctuary. On this special feast day, the Lord sent the Holy Spirit with signs and wonders. The transformation of the apostles was so spectacular that the multitude was taken by surprise. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit ushered in the beginning of the last days. The apostle Peter assured the throngs that the living Christ had poured out His Spirit on people of every nation. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit created a new fellowship consisting of people from every tribe and nation and tongue.

After the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples continued to wait and pray for the Holy Spirit as Christ had promised. Not until the Spirit of communion was poured out on the apostles would they be ready to go to the ends of the earth to bring the gospel of salvation. Now, ten days after the Lord's ascension, the day of Pentecost had come, and the disciples were together in one place. Because it was Pentecost, Jews from every nation were gathered in Jerusalem. This was the occasion the Lord chose to send His Holy Spirit on His disciples. This was the time the Lord chose to reveal a covenant that would surpass the covenant that God made at Mt Sinai. It would surpass this covenant because it would be for peoples of all nations.

Imagine the excitement and awe in the hearts of this gathering of disciples when they heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind. This sound filled the place where they were staying and suddenly, in addition to the wind, they saw tongues of fire rest on each one of them. They soon became aware that the Holy Spirit accompanied these signs. The Holy Spirit filled each of the disciples, so that they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit spoke to them. Now that they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they were equipped to proclaim His salvation. In this way they became a light in this dark world.

Because it was Pentecost many devout Jews had returned to Jerusalem from every nation. With the attention of the crowds piqued, they heard the sound of the wind. Then to their utter amazement the Galilean apostles began speaking, and each of the visitors in Jerusalem heard them speak in their own language. Many thought that this was a sign from God, while others mocked the disciples and said they were drunk. God's grace was working in the hearts of some, while others continued in stunned unbelief. It was to this multitude that Peter stood up and shared the truth from the book of Joel in the Old Testament.

Peter assured the crowd that the disciples were not drunk, but were part of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. Joel prophesied that the last days would be ushered in when the Lord poured out his Spirit on all flesh. It was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that caused the disciples to speak so that people from every nation could understand them. This was the Spirit of the Christ whom the Jews had taken by lawless hands and had Him crucified. It was the Spirit of the Christ whom God raised from the dead because it was impossible for death to hold Him. It was David in Psalm 16 who assured the Old Testament believers that Christ would be raised from the dead. God would not allow His Holy One to see corruption. Peter then

urged the house of Israel to understand that God made this Jesus, whom they crucified, the Lord and Christ.

When this many of the people were convicted of their sins they asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). In response Peter urged them to repent and to be baptized in the name of Christ Jesus for the remission of sins. Three thousand people believed that they were part of the covenant in Christ Jesus and were baptized. These people became the new fellowship who continued in the apostle’s doctrine, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. They lived in such close communion, that each of them shared their possessions with the others. From this first congregation of believers, the church of Christ Jesus has spread to the ends of the earth. Through the power of the Holy Spirit this church includes people of every nation.

Questions

1. What was the feast called that brought The disciples together in Jerusalem? (Acts 2:1)
2. What amazing sound did the disciples hear in the house where they were sitting? (Acts 2:2)
3. What other amazing sign appeared upon each of them? (Acts 2:3)
4. What strange phenomena occurred when the disciple began to speak? (Acts 2:4)
5. From where had the devout Jews come to Jerusalem for the feast? (Acts 2:5)

Lesson 4

Revealed to Jerusalem

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 4, Lesson 26

Scripture: Acts 3:1–4:31

Memory Verse: “If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands before you whole.” (Acts 4:9-10)

Lesson Truth: Christ is revealed to Jerusalem as the One who is alive for evermore.

Lesson

Before the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, He told the disciples that they would receive the Holy Spirit. When they had received the Holy Spirit, they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. The healing of the lame man at the temple gate became a witness for the Lord in Jerusalem. Peter and John gave witness to the power of the Lord’s resurrection, which they said was according to the Scriptures. Their witness brought them into direct conflict with the Sanhedrin, who warned them not to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. However, the Lord gave them boldness to be His witnesses, shaking the ground in answer to their prayers.

Peter and John had an opportunity to give witness to the power of the Lord’s resurrection as they went to the temple at the hour of prayer. As they came to the temple gate called Beautiful, they saw a man who had been lame from birth asking for alms. When Peter and John saw the man, they asked him to look at them. When he gave his attention, Peter, speaking in the name of the resurrected Jesus, shared an amazing word. He said to the man, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: ‘In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’” (Acts 3:6). Imagine the reaction when Peter took the man by the hand, and he stood up and walked. Peter and John did not give him money, because they had something far greater to give: the restoration of his life. Not only was the lame man now able to walk, but he was also restored to communion with God. The power of the Lord’s resurrection was now revealed in healing the lame man.

The lame man was healed so that the Lord Jesus Christ could be revealed to all of Jerusalem as the living Lord. This is the way that it took place. The man kept following Peter and John, praising God as he went. The people recognized him as the lame beggar, and they asked how it was possible that he had been healed. They knew that Lord Jesus had made the blind to see and the lame to walk, but how was this man healed? Peter and John knew it was time for the Lord to be revealed to all of Jerusalem. Peter proclaimed that they did not give the man the power to walk. It was the Son of God, whom the Jews had delivered up to be crucified, and who was raised from the dead, that made it possible for this man to walk. Peter testified that Christ Jesus was the revelation of God’s covenant. He proclaimed that they were witnesses of His resurrection. He became the sovereign Lord of life. Peter then added that because this man was brought to faith in the Lord Jesus and His resurrection that he was able to walk. Through the healing of the lame man and Peter’s proclamation of the resurrection, Christ Jesus was revealed to Jerusalem.

The healing of the lame man and Peter’s words brought the disciples into conflict with the Jewish leaders in the Sanhedrin. They thought that Jesus had been done away with on the cross, but Peter’s words would make the people believe that He was alive. These leaders had Peter and John arrested and put in custody until they could decide what to do with them. The following day they brought them out for questioning. They asked by what power and by what name they had made the lame man walk. Peter, being filled with the Holy Spirit, answered that it was by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had crucified,

whom God had raised from the dead, that this man stood before them whole. This enraged the Sanhedrin, but what could they do? They decided to threaten Peter and John and command them not to speak in the name of Jesus. Peter then asked them to judge whether it would be right for them to listen to the Sanhedrin rather than to God. He said they would continue to speak about what they saw.

When Peter and John were released they immediately went to find the gathering of believers. This group of believers called on the name of the Lord in prayer. The amazing thing is that they did not first pray for protection, but they prayed for boldness to witness to the resurrection of Christ Jesus. They knew God answered that prayer, for at that moment the building they were in was shaken. But even more, they were filled with the Holy Spirit so that they could be bold to reveal the Lord Jesus to Jerusalem and the world.

Questions

1. Who was going up to the temple to pray at the hour of prayer? (Acts. 3:1)
2. How long had the man asking for alms been lame? (Acts 3:2)
3. When the man asked Peter and John for alms, what did Peter say to him? (Acts 3:6)
4. What did the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees do to Peter and John? (Acts 4:3)
5. What question did the Jewish leaders ask Peter and John about healing the lame man? (Acts 4:7)

Lesson 5

A Holy Fellowship

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 4, Lesson 27

Scripture: Acts 4:32–5:11

Memory Verse: “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” (Acts 4:32-33)

Lesson Truth: The Holy Spirit creates a new holy fellowship.

Lesson

The fellowship of believers in Jerusalem had grown to approximately five thousand people. The Holy Spirit revealed to this new fellowship that they were one. This group was so conscious of the needs of one another that they were willing to share everything they owned. But sadly, even in this new fellowship, Satan entered the hearts of one couple and convinced them to lie to the Holy Spirit. In a remarkable way, they were disciplined by the Holy Spirit, which brought fear on the entire fellowship.

After the Sanhedrin commanded Peter and John not to speak in the name of Christ Jesus, they released them. Peter and John immediately sought the group of believers in Jerusalem and together they prayed for boldness to speak the word of the Lord. The presence of the Holy Spirit was evident in this group in a remarkable way. They were so united in the Holy Spirit that they believed they should share their possessions. By faith, this fellowship of believers knew that they were one, and they shared not only their spiritual gifts but also their material possessions.

One especially devout and honorable man led the fellowship in demonstrating his enthusiasm to share his wealth. He sold a piece of land and brought the money he received to the apostles to be used for the needs of the group. His motivation for doing this was so honorable that the apostles gave him the name Barnabas, which meant Son of Encouragement. The Holy Spirit had worked this liberality in the heart of members, such as Barnabas, so that the apostles could help the poorer members of the fellowship. The sharing of spiritual and material possessions was a manifestation of the faith and unity of these believers. But sadly, not all the members were motivated by the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

One couple apparently wanted to receive the honor that had been given to Barnabas because of his generous spirit, but they also wanted to keep things for themselves. This husband and wife agreed to a plan that they thought would make them look good and at the same time give them some personal wealth. They decided to sell a piece of land and keep part of the proceeds for themselves. However, they wanted the credit for giving everything to the apostles for the needs of the fellowship. In order to do this, they agreed to lie. They decided to say the price for the land they sold was less than the price they received. In this way they could pretend that they were giving everything, as Barnabas had done, and still keep some for themselves. The tragedy of this plan was that Ananias and Sapphira thought they could lie to the Holy Spirit. This was a couple that had seen the work of the Holy Spirit in the fellowship of believers. They were impressed with the Spirit's work, but they never really knew the Holy Spirit. They chose to dishonor the Spirit by their deception and selfishness.

When Ananias came to bring his gift to the apostles, the Holy Spirit helped Peter understand his deception. Peter asked Ananias why Satan had entered his heart so that he wanted to lie to the Holy Spirit. He assured Ananias that it was not mandatory for him to sell his land and bring it to the apostles. Nor was it mandatory for him to give all the proceeds of the land. What was mandatory was for him to be honest! If he wanted

to keep part of the income from the land, he should not pretend that he was giving it all. Peter informed Ananias that he had not only lied to men but to God. At that moment Ananias fell down and died.

About three hours later Sapphira, Ananias' wife, came in, not knowing what had happened to her husband. When Peter questioned her about the land they sold and the gift that her husband brought, she told the same lie her husband told. Peter's only question for Sapphira was, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?" (Acts 5:9). Then Sapphira died just as her husband had died. Now the believers knew that they were part of a holy fellowship that had been born of the Holy Spirit. It was a fellowship that issued from God's covenant that He would dwell among His people.

Questions

1. What did the new fellowship at Jerusalem do with their possessions? (Acts 4:32)
2. Of what event in the Lord's experience did the apostles give witness? (Acts 4:33)
3. What did the apostles do with the proceeds of sold possessions they were given? (Acts 4:35)
4. What was the name given to Josep after he brought the money of the land sale to the apostles? (Acts 4:36)
5. What were the names of the couple that tried to deceive the Holy Spirit? (Acts 5:1-2)

6. According to Peter, who had filled Ananias's heart so that he would lie to the Holy Spirit? (Acts 5:3)

7. What happened to Ananias after he heard Peter's words? (Acts. 5:5)

8. According to Peter, what deceitful thing had Ananias and Sapphira agreed to do? (Acts 5:9)

Lesson 6

Jerusalem Filled with His Name

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 4, Lesson 28

Scripture: Acts 5:12–6:7

Memory Verse: “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us! But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’” (Acts 5:28-29)

Lesson Truth: Through the Holy Spirit, Jerusalem is filled with the name of Jesus Christ.

Lesson

The holy fellowship in Jerusalem continued to grow until the Jewish leaders complained that Jerusalem was filled with the name of Jesus. In opposition to this holy fellowship, the Jewish leaders arrested the apostles. However, they soon found that opposition and prison walls could not stop the work of the Holy Spirit. The Jewish leaders thought that they should put the apostles to death as they had put Christ to death. Then one Pharisee appealed to the secret counsel of God. He did this as an unbeliever. The apostles were then beaten instead of being killed. They rejoiced at being found worthy to suffer for the name of their Lord.

The work of the apostles in Jerusalem was drawing people from surrounding cities. They came to bring their sick and tormented friends and relatives to the apostles for healing. The crowds were so big that some of them were not able to get near the apostle Peter. However, they were so convinced that the Holy Spirit had given him the power to heal that they were satisfied if they could just lay the bed of their loved one in Peter’s shadow. Because of the healing and teaching of the apostles the holy fellowship in Jerusalem grew to a multitude. The growth of this holy fellowship made the high priest and the council angry.

The council became so angry that they arrested the apostles and threw them in prison. Little did they understand that it is impossible to stop the work of the Holy Spirit. That night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, released the apostles, and told them to go back to the temple to speak the words of life. The next morning when the Sanhedrin met and sent for the apostles, they were dismayed to learn that the jail was empty. Their dismay grew when they were told that the apostles who had been in prison were teaching in the temple. This miraculous power of the Lord to deliver His apostles from prison should have alerted the Jewish leaders that they were dealing with the power of the Holy Spirit. Sadly, these leaders were blind in their unbelief. Instead, they had the apostles brought before the council and asked them, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? (Acts 5:28). They added that the apostles had filled Jerusalem with the name of Jesus. The apostles then answered by saying, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). They continued by proclaiming Jesus to the council. They reminded the council that the Jesus whom they crucified, God raised from the dead and exalted Him to His own right hand. There He is the Prince and the Savior who could bring repentance and forgiveness to Israel. The council members responded to the apostle’s teaching about grace with extreme anger. They began to plot to kill the apostles. One Pharisee named Gamaliel asked that the apostles be dismissed while they discussed the situation. He then appealed to the secret counsel of God.

Gamaliel reminded the Sanhedrin that if the teaching of the apostles was from men it would soon disappear. However, if it was from God then the Sanhedrin could not stop its spread. This caused the Sanhedrin to forget about killing the apostles, but they did have them beaten and once again forbade them to teach in Jesus’ name. The apostles rejoiced when they were beaten because they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. The persecution of the apostles brought the holy fellowship in Jerusalem even closer. The power of the Holy Spirit continued to work in their hearts, so they continued to preach and teach in Jesus’ name.

As the fellowship grew, the apostles were reminded that the needs of some of the widows were not being met. They then asked the fellowship to find seven honorable men to serve the fellowship by taking care of these needs. In this way God's Word spread through Jerusalem and the number of disciples multiplied greatly. The grace of the Lord Jesus also worked in the hearts of a great many priests, and they became obedient to the faith. Through the Holy Spirit, Jerusalem was filled with the name of Jesus!

Questions

1. Through whose hands were many signs and wonders done among the people? (Acts 5:12)
2. Who were added to the Lord so that there were multitudes of men and women? (Acts 5:14)
3. What happened to the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits? (Acts 5:16)
4. What was the attitude of the high priest and the Jewish leaders to the disciples' teaching? (Acts 5:17)
5. What did these Jewish leaders do with the apostles? (Acts 5:18)
6. How did the Lord deliver the apostles? (Acts 5:19-20)

7. What question did the high priest ask the apostles about teaching in Jesus' name? (Acts. 5:28)

8. What was the apostles' response to the high priest's question? (Acts 5:29)

Lesson 7

In Newness of the Spirit

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 4, Lesson 29

Scripture: Acts 6:8–8:4

Memory Verse: “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of Freedmen...disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.” (Acts 6:8-10)

Lesson Truth: The service of God in newness of the spirit is glorious.

Lesson

Stephen was one of the men chosen by the holy fellowship in Jerusalem to take care of the needs of the poor and the widows. He was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, who did great wonders and signs among the people. The Holy Spirit helped Stephen understand that the gospel would go out to all nations. However, when he shared this view, there were those of the Synagogue of the Freedmen who disagreed with him. Stephen shared with them the testimony of history, which brought a murderous response. By God’s grace Stephen was able to die a victorious death. Following Stephen’s death, God allowed persecution to scatter the believers so they would bring His word to the Gentiles.

Following the imprisonment of the apostles and their subsequent release, the holy fellowship in Jerusalem continued to grow. Seven faithful men were chosen for diaconal work in the fellowship so that the apostles could continue to preach. One of these faithful deacons was Stephen. Through the power of the Holy Spirit Stephen understood that the gospel was not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. Sadly, when he shared this insight with others, partisan Jews took issue with him. Even more sadly, they induced men to claim that Stephen blasphemed the name of God because they could not resist his wisdom. These unscrupulous Jews had no answer for the Spirit by which Stephen spoke, so they drummed up false accusations. They accused him of saying that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the temple and change the teachings of Moses. When Stephen was asked if these things were true, he answered by giving them a testimony from history relating God’s plan of salvation from Abraham through the Lord Jesus Christ. As he did so the council members saw his face as the face of an angel!

In his testimony from history, Stephen recalled how God called Abraham out of the land of Mesopotamia and promised him the land of Canaan. He reminded them that all the patriarchs believed this promise because they insisted on being buried in Canaan. Yet the people did not have this same faith as was evident when they resisted the leadership of Moses. Even while Moses was communing with God on the mountain the people stooped to worship an idol. Still, God was ever faithful and gave the people a tabernacle when they were in the wilderness to remind them of His presence. It was David who requested permission to replace the tabernacle with a temple. Solomon built this temple and then sadly, the people enclosed God within the temple walls and made Him equal to men. They should have known that the temple could never contain God because heaven is His throne, and the earth is His footstool. Stephen then reminded the council that God’s chosen people had always resisted the work of the Holy Spirit and persecuted the prophets.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Stephen then revealed the most damning resistance to the Holy Spirit. They persecuted the prophets who told of the coming of the Just One and have become His betrayers and murderers. He reminded them that they received the Law by the direction of the angels, but they did not keep it. When these partisan Jews heard Stephen’s speech, they were incensed. They gnashed their teeth at him and cast him out of the city. Once he was out of the city, they stoned him to death. As they hurled stones at him, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God. He saw Jesus standing at God’s right hand and prayed saying, “Lord Jesus receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). Then in a final litany of faithfulness

Stephen said with a loud voice, “Lord do not charge them with this sin” (Acts 7:60). Stephen was victorious in his death!

As the people stoned Stephen, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a zealous Jew named Saul. He became a persecutor of the believers wherever he found them. Saul even dragged believers from their homes and committed them to prison. God allowed this persecution as a way to scatter the fellowship of believers. Amazingly those who were scattered preached the gospel wherever they went. Stephen saw this dispersion as a new spirit. This new spirit would break people of Israel from temple worship and help them see that God dwells in the temple of the human heart.

Questions

1. Because Stephen was filled with faith and power, what could he do among the people? (Acts 6:8)
2. What was it of Stephen that his accusers could not resist? (Acts. 6:10)
3. What false charge did these accusers induce men to bring against Stephen? (Acts. 6:11)
4. What was the unusual appearance that was evident as Stephen sat before the council? (Acts 6:15)
5. According to Stephen’s quote from Isaiah what is God’s throne and his footstool? (Acts 7:49)

6. Whom did Stephen accuse the children of Israel of resisting when he faced the council? (Acts 7:51)

7. What did Stephen see as the people gnashed their teeth at him, preparing to stone him? (Acts 7:55)

8. What intercessory prayer did Stephen make on behalf of the people as he was dying? (Acts. 7:60)

Lesson 8

Victory over Magic

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 4, Lesson 30

Scripture: Acts 8:5-25

Memory Verse: “But Peter said to him, ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money’ You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.” (Acts 8:20-21)

Lesson Truth: Samaria delivered from magic by the Word of the Spirit.

Lesson

After Stephen was stoned to death, Paul continued to persecute the church, which caused the believers to scatter. Philip was one of the believers who went to Samaria. When he arrived, he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. Philip’s preaching was well received despite the teaching of a man named Simon. Simon was a man who practiced magic and had many followers. Thankfully, when the people heard the gospel from Philip, they submitted in faith. When the apostles heard that the gospel had been preached in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to pray that the gift of the Holy Spirit might also fall on the people of Samaria. Sadly, they also had to speak a word of judgment against Simon the magician because he thought he could buy the gift of the Holy Spirit.

As Saul, who is also known as Paul, continued to persecute the church, many of the believers fled from Jerusalem. A deacon named Philip also fled from Jerusalem and went to Samaria. When he arrived, he preached the good news of Jesus Christ. Philip also performed many miracles and cast out evil spirits in the name of the Lord. The Samaritans were a mixed race of people due to the intermarriage of Jews with non-Jews. They knew about the God of Israel who had revealed Himself through Moses, but they had set up their own form of worship. Even more disturbing was the magic that a man named Simon practiced among the Samaritans.

Simon was a magician who claimed that he could enlist divine powers. The Samaritans believed that Simon could manipulate God to have some control over His powers. However, when Philip preached the gospel of the Lord Jesus, the Samaritans learned that men have no control over God. Instead, God rules over mankind in grace. Philip told the Samaritans that God had come to men by His sovereign grace in Jesus Christ. He called the people to submit to God’s grace by faith. It was amazing that many of the people of Samaria did submit to God’s grace in faith. This required that these people had to reject the teachings of Simon the magician and accept by faith the grace of Christ Jesus. How could this happen? It was only through the work of the Holy Spirit that this change could take place. When the people realized the change that took place in their hearts and lives through the work of the Holy Spirit, they were filled with joy. They learned that their freedom came from communion with God, which can only be obtained by faithfully submitting to His Word. Now the people of Samaria knew that the old man of magic had died, and they were new creatures in Christ Jesus. Therefore, many of them were baptized in the name of Christ Jesus. Even Simon the magician was baptized; however, Peter later told him that his heart was not right with God.

When the report of Philip’s preaching and baptisms reached the apostles in Jerusalem they responded with joy. Immediately they sent the apostles Peter and John to Samaria to pray that these believers might also receive the Holy Spirit. After the apostles prayed that the Holy Spirit would fall on the Samaritans, they also laid their hands on them. Through the laying on of the apostle’s hands the people of Samaria did receive the Holy Spirit. Now they were not only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, but they were also filled with the Holy Spirit.

Then a sad thing happened. Simon the magician saw that the Holy Spirit filled the people when the apostles laid their hands on them. He was so enamored with this power that he asked Peter and John if he could purchase this power for his own use. He wanted to be able to dispense the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter responded to this request by telling Simon that his money should perish with him, because he thought he could buy this gift of God. Peter urged Simon to repent and to pray that God would forgive the wickedness of his heart. Simon asked the apostles to pray for him, but we are not told if this was a true conversion. This is also a call for each of us to ask God to send His Holy Spirit into our hearts. We must ask the Spirit to deliver us from the lure of magic and manipulations. We must ask to be delivered by the Word of the Spirit.

Questions

1. To which city did Philip go to preach the gospel of Christ? (Acts 8:5)
2. How did the multitudes respond to Philip's preaching? (Acts 8:6)
3. Who was the man that practiced magic or sorcery in the city of Samaria? (Acts 8:9)
4. What rite was administered to both men and women who believed in the name of Jesus? (Acts 8:12)
5. Who did the apostles in Jerusalem send to Samaria? (Acts 8:14)

Lesson 9

The Way to the Gentiles

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 4, Lesson 31

Scripture: Acts 8:26-40

Memory Verse: “Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot.’ So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’” (Acts 8:29-30)

Lesson Truth: Through the work of the Holy Spirit Jew and Gentile meet each other in the covenant.

Lesson

The story about Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch tells the incredible truth of the way our covenant God reached out to include Gentiles in His covenant. God’s covenant people come from the ends of the earth and include people of every nation and tribe and tongue. In this story, Philip was given the opportunity to proclaim the gospel to this high-ranking official from Ethiopia. Jews and Gentiles would learn that in the covenant that God made with man they are one body.

Philip had been blessed as he preached the gospel at Samaria. Multitudes came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and were baptized. The people in Samaria were part Israelite and part Gentile so they knew something about Israel’s God. Now God called Philip to proclaim the gospel to an Ethiopian official who was entirely a Gentile. God used this means to demonstrate that His covenant is for all people from every nation, for everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. Philip knew that to be in the service of the Lord Jesus required unquestioned obedience. That is why he was ready to obey when an angel of the Lord spoke to him and said, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza” (Acts 8:26).

When Philip reached the road going to Gaza, he saw a chariot carrying an official from the court of Candace, the queen of Ethiopia. This official, who oversaw the treasury of Ethiopia, had been at Jerusalem to worship. The Holy Spirit had worked in his heart to bring him to Jerusalem. The Spirit had also prompted him to take a copy of the prophecy of Isaiah along to read. However, as he rode in his chariot and tried to read from Isaiah, he could not understand what he was reading. The Holy Spirit then spoke to Philip and told him to overtake the chariot and to present himself to the Ethiopian official. Philip obeyed the instructions of the Holy Spirit and was about to see the way that God would transmit the promises of His covenant to include Gentiles as well as Jews.

The Ethiopian official must have been disappointed as he tried to worship at Jerusalem. Because he was not a Jew, he was permitted to come only into the court of the Gentiles. Even though he must have longed for an intimate communion with God, he had to worship from afar. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit worked in his heart and prompted him to want to read the book of Isaiah. The Holy Spirit wanted to bring this Gentile, who had come from the end of the known world at that time, into communion with God in His covenant. We should always be amazed at the way the Holy Spirit brings people from every nation into fellowship with God.

When Philip came near the chariot, he heard the official read from the prophet Isaiah. He was reading from Isaiah 53. Luke wrote down what the official read: “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth” (Acts 8:32-33). Philip asked the Ethiopian if he understood what he was reading. The official answered, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:31). Then, he invited Philip to sit with him in the chariot and asked him whom the prophet Isaiah was speaking about. Was he talking about himself or was he referring to someone else?

These questions of the man from Ethiopia gave Philip the opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, beginning with Isaiah's prophecy. Philip knew that the Holy Spirit had brought this man to want to hear the gospel. He also knew that Gentiles would share God's covenant relationship with mankind. When Philip shared the gospel story, the Ethiopian eunuch asked if he could be baptized. Philip answered that he could be baptized if he believed. The official then answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). He then commanded the chariot driver to stop, and he went into the water with Philip and was baptized. After the Ethiopian was baptized Philip was taken away. However, this man knew that he and all believers from every nation were one in fellowship with Israelite believers. This was the way that the Holy Spirit brought Jews and Gentiles together in the covenant of God's grace.

Questions

1. Who spoke to Philip and told him to go to the road that led to Gaza? (Acts 8:26)
2. From where had the man in the chariot come? (Acts 8:27)
3. What prophecy was this man reading? (Acts 8:28)
4. What question did Philip ask the man in the chariot? (Acts 8:30)
5. What was the man's answer to Philip's question? (Acts 8:31)

6. What did Philip preach about to the man in the chariot? (Acts 8:35)
7. What did Philip require of the eunuch before he could be baptized? (Acts 8:37a)
8. What was the eunuch's confession to Philip? (Acts 8:37b)

Lesson 10

Called to Be a Bearer of the Word

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 4, Lesson 32

Scripture: Acts 9:1-30

Memory Verse: “And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished said, ‘Lord what do you want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’” (Acts 9:5-6)

Lesson Truth: The calling of the Spirit to be a bearer of the Word of God.

Lesson

God’s grace is beyond our understanding when we see Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of the Lord’s disciples, chosen to bring the Word to the Gentiles. Saul continued to show hostility to the gospel of the Lord Jesus until he encountered Christ on the road to Damascus. After three days of blindness Saul’s eyes were illumined so he could see what God called him to do. Later, he went through a time of testing in order to prepare him to do the work of the Lord among the Gentiles.

From our perspective, Saul of Tarsus would not have been chosen as the one to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. He continued to breathe threats against the disciples of the Lord Jesus. Saul went to the high priest to ask for letters that he could take to the synagogues in Damascus that would give him permission to arrest the followers of Jesus. He wanted to bring these followers of Jesus to Jerusalem to be judged. Saul was a well-trained Pharisee who was convinced that the followers of Jesus were in error. He was also convinced that the gospel of the Lord Jesus had to be stopped. Saul was so committed to earning his own salvation as a true Pharisee, that he wanted to round up Christians. He was hostile to the gospel that proclaimed that salvation was a gift of God’s grace. The gospel of grace was opposite from everything he had been taught. But it was also God’s grace that chose Saul to bring His Word to the Gentiles. God’s grace was sufficient to make this persecutor of Christians into a dynamic apostle to the Gentiles.

It happened as Saul neared Damascus with the letter of permission to arrest the Christians. Suddenly, a light from heaven shone around him and he heard a voice asking, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Saul responded by asking, “Who are You, Lord?” (Acts 9:4-5). The Lord answered that He was Jesus whom Saul was persecuting. Then an amazing transformation had to take place within Saul. The splendor of God’s grace was terrifying to Saul because he was hostile to that grace. Saul believed that he had to earn his salvation by keeping the Law. He could not understand how salvation could come as a gift of God’s grace. Yet when the Lord made Saul understand that he was the Lord’s persecutor, he was struck down. Now Saul responded to that grace by trembling in astonishment and by asking, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” (Acts 9:6). The Lord told Saul that he should go into the city of Damascus where he would be told what he was to do. When Saul got up from the ground, he opened his eyes but was unable to see. The men who were traveling with him led him to Damascus where he remained blind for three days.

We are then made aware of another miracle of God’s grace as we learn that the Lord appeared to Ananias in a vision. Ananias, a disciple of the Lord Jesus, was instructed to go to the street called Straight. There he was to find Saul of Tarsus, who was praying. This message must have brought chills to Ananias because he knew about Saul of Tarsus. He knew that Saul was the persecutor of Christians. Still, when the Lord told Ananias that Saul was His chosen vessel to bring the gospel to the Gentiles; he obeyed the Lord. He went into Damascus and found Saul and laid his hands on him telling him that the Lord restored his sight and filled him with the Holy Spirit. Then something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes. These were not only scales of blindness, but also scales of unbelief. Saul now believed that through the Lord’s grace there was forgiveness for his sins, so he was baptized.

Following this transformation from Saul's life of works to his life of grace, the Lord put him through a time of testing. When Saul preached the gospel of Christ in the synagogues, the Jews plotted to kill him. Again, the Lord's grace allowed Saul to escape those who wanted to kill him by having disciples lower him in a basket outside the city walls. When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he found the disciples there did not trust him and did not believe that he was a disciple. Thankfully Barnabas believed that Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus was real, and recommended him to the apostles. The apostles sent Saul to Tarsus, where the Lord groomed him to carry His Word to the Gentiles. In His grace the Lord chose Saul, the persecutor, to preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Who continued to breathe threats and murder against the Lord's disciples? (Acts. 9:1)
2. What did Saul want to do with those of the Way that he found in Damascus? (Acts 9:2)
3. What happened to Saul when he came near Damascus? (Acts 9:3)
4. What question did the voice ask of Saul? (Acts 9:4)
5. When Saul understood that the voice he heard was the Lord's voice, what did he ask? (Acts 9:6)

Lesson 11

Everlasting Life

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 4, Lesson 33

Scripture: Acts 9:31-43

Memory Verse: “But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.” (Acts 9:40-42)

Lesson Truth: By His Spirit Christ grants everlasting life.

Lesson

Following the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who became known as Paul the apostle, the churches had a time of peace. The believers walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and their numbers multiplied. It was during this growth of the churches that Peter went to the towns of Lydda and Joppa. At Lydda he healed a paralyzed man, and at Joppa he raised a saint named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas.

As the churches grew in this time of peace, the apostles set out to visit the believers in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. The apostle Peter visited the saints at Joppa and Lydda. At Lydda he found a believer by the name of Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years. He had endured years of suffering and was unable to take part in the activities of the church at Lydda. He probably suffered the agony of hopelessness in the eight years that he was confined to his bed. But those who know the Lord Jesus Christ know that He restores life. Imagine the joy in Aeneas’s life when Peter came to his house and said, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Arise make up your bed” (Acts 9:34).

Also imagine the joy in the hearts of the other believers when they saw Aeneas rise from his bed. God’s Word tells us that this event was so electrifying that all who lived at Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord. This healing was a revelation of the powerful life granted to believers by the Holy Spirit. Believers today can share that joy because they know that the Lord Jesus came to give life in all its fullness.

The news of the restoration of Aeneas at Lydda apparently also reached Joppa. At Joppa there was a saint by the name of Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. The people of Joppa knew Dorcas for her generous spirit. Many widows had benefited from Dorcas’ goodwill and were able to show garments that she had given them. Dorcas was apparently a person whose hands were always busy making garments to give to those in need. But sadly, Dorcas became sick with a serious illness, and she died. Following her death, her friends washed her and placed her in an upper room. Her death brought sorrow to the believers at Joppa, especially to the widows for whom she had done so much.

The believers at Joppa heard about the restoration of Aeneas at Lydda, so they immediately sent two men to find Peter and begged him to come to Joppa. Peter was willing to return to Joppa with these men and was confronted with the widows weeping in sorrow. They showed Peter the many tunics and other garments that Dorcas had made and given to them. Then Peter asked the people to leave the upper room where Dorcas’ body was lying. After the people left, Peter knelt down and prayed. He then he turned to the body and said, “Tabitha (Dorcas) arise” (Acts 9:40). Incredibly Dorcas opened her eyes and sat up when she saw Peter. Peter then presented Dorcas alive to the saints and widows at Joppa.

How did the people in Joppa respond to this miracle? Many came to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the people in Joppa also knew that Christ Jesus has power over life and death. They knew that life in the Holy Spirit is victorious over death. This is also the message for believers today. The purpose of our lives

is to be fruitful for God through all eternity. In giving our lives for the Lord's sake we know that we will never die.

Questions

1. Following Saul's conversion, the churches in which provinces had peace? (Acts 9:31)
2. Who was the apostle that went through the country and came to Lydda? (Acts 9:32)
3. What was the name of the paralyzed man that Peter found at Lydda? (Acts 9:33)
4. According to Peter who was able to heal the paralyzed man? (Acts 9:34)
5. Who was the woman at Joppa who was filled with good works and charitable deeds? (Acts 9:36)
6. What sad thing happened to this woman? (Acts 9:37)

7. Who was standing by weeping when Peter came to Joppa and went to the upper room? (Acts 9:39)

8. What incredible thing happened when Peter prayed and told the body to arise? (Acts 9:40)

Lesson 12

The Cleansing of the Gentiles

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 4, Lesson 34

Scripture: Acts 10–11

Memory Verse: “And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” (Acts 10:42-43)

Lesson Truth: Through the Holy Spirit all nations are cleansed in the covenant.

Lesson

The cleansing of the Gentiles is a remarkable story of the dramatic change that had to take place in the hearts of the Lord’s disciples before they would accept the Gentiles as part of the covenant. God showed His grace by instructing the apostle Peter to accept the Gentiles as covenant children. Peter was the leader and spokesman of the Jewish followers of Jesus. God showed Peter in a vision that He was able to cleanse the hearts of Gentiles as well as Jews. He then used him to convince the Jews in the church at Jerusalem that Gentiles were also included in the covenant. Once the disciples at Jerusalem understood that God shows no partiality, but redeems all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the church grew among the Gentiles.

The Lord used two amazing encounters to change the hearts of His disciples to be ready to accept Gentiles as part of His covenant. The first encounter we learn about in today’s story is the Lord’s encounter with a faithful Roman centurion named Cornelius. Cornelius was devout man of prayer, who feared God and gave generously of his possessions. God chose to reveal Himself to this devout Gentile in a vision. In his vision an angel addressed him and told him that his devotion, his prayers, and his giving had come up to God as a memorial. God showed His grace to this Gentile and now wanted him to be instructed in the truth of the covenant. Therefore, the Lord told him to send some of his men to Joppa to find Simon Peter and bring him back with them. Simon Peter would tell Cornelius what he should do.

The Lord not only appeared to Cornelius in a vision, but He also appeared to Simon Peter. In the vision that Peter saw, he had to be taught that God’s covenant was not restricted to the Jews. This was a difficult lesson for a zealous Jew like Peter. He was so certain that only the Jews were clean like the clean animals offered in sacrifices. The Lord graciously showed Peter a new and better way. In his vision Peter saw what looked like a large sheet descend from heaven. In this sheet were all kinds of four-footed animals, birds, and creeping things. Peter then heard a voice say to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat” (Acts 10:13). Peter rebelled at this command, reminding the voice that he had never eaten anything common or unclean. Now it was time for Peter to be instructed about God’s grace. In his vision he heard the voice say, “What God has cleansed you must not call common” (Acts 10:15). In his vision Peter saw this scene three times. Each time he was told that what God had made clean he could not call unclean. And even as Peter wondered about the meaning of his vision, the men who were sent by Cornelius were at the door. The Spirit of God told him to go along with these men as they requested, and not to doubt that God had sent them. The next day Peter went with the men to Caesarea and found Cornelius, along with many of his friends and relatives, waiting for him.

Peter began by telling this gathering that it was unlawful for a Jew to keep company with Gentiles. But he added that God had shown him that he should not call any man unclean whom the Lord had made clean. Peter declared that God does not show partiality but accepts people of every nation who fear Him. He then shared with the Gentiles at Cornelius’ home that God sent His Word of peace through Christ Jesus to the children of Israel. But this Jesus is the Lord of all! Peter told them how God anointed the Lord Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power. He told them that the apostles had witnessed the passion and death of the

Lord. But they also witnessed His resurrection from the dead. This was the Lord Jesus that the prophets had said would grant remission of sins to all those who believe in Him. While Peter was speaking to these Gentiles, the Holy Spirit came upon them. When Peter and those who were with him saw this, they were astonished. Now these circumcised Jews were ready to baptize the Gentiles at the home of Cornelius.

However, just as it was difficult for Peter to believe that Gentiles could be part of the covenant, it was also difficult for the church at Jerusalem. Peter described in detail how God appeared to him in a vision and instructed him not to call unclean what the Lord had made clean. He told them of the faith and the presence of the Holy Spirit at Cornelius' home. This convinced the believers at Jerusalem that God had granted repentance and life to the Gentiles. It meant that believers who were dispersed because of persecution by men like Saul could share the gospel with Gentiles. Now Barnabas found the converted Saul at Tarsus and brought him to Antioch. The first congregation of Gentile believers was organized at Antioch. It was at Antioch that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ were first called Christians. That is the amazing story of the cleansing of the Gentiles. Now we know that repentance and forgiveness are for people of every nation.

Questions

1. Who was the devout Gentile from Caesarea who always prayed? (Acts 10:1-2)
2. Who appeared to the Gentile from Caesarea and told him to send for Simon Peter? (Acts 10:3-5)
3. What hour did Peter go up on the housetop to pray? (Acts 10:9)
4. In his vision, what did Peter see in the sheet that descended from heaven? (Acts 10:12)

