

Notes for the Study

BY ELMORE HARRIS, D. D.

THE ACTS (Concluded).

Refer constantly to outline on p. 23 of February issue.

"THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE WORLD."

D. **THE PURPOSE OF EVANGELIZATION:** Building up the Body of Christ—the Church. The letter to the Ephesians describes this process, which is historically unfolded in the Acts. The ascended Lord distributes His gifts to the infant church (Eph. 4:11, 12), "Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers for the fitting of the Saints unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the Body of Christ." This statement does not refer to the edification of believers through the ministry of the Word of life, but rather to the preaching of the gospel of Christ, that souls may be saved and thus added to the Body of Christ (the Church, Eph. 1:23), whereby the infantile Body of Christ (of which he is the Head in glory) may be developed to a maturity worthy of the perfection of the Head, our Lord Jesus Christ. This involved the gathering of a people from Jews and Gentiles through the proclamation of the glad tidings of a Saviour's love. *The Evangelization of the Jews* is described in Chapters 1-12 of the Acts, and in this section Peter, the 'Apostle of the Circumcision (Jews) is the central figure and Jerusalem, the Jewish Capital, is the central place, whence the lines of Evangelization radiate to Judea and Samaria. *The Evangelization of the Gentiles* is recorded in Chapters 13-28, and here Paul, the Apostle of the Uncircumcision (Gentiles) is the central figure and Antioch is the central place, from which missionary bands start and to which they return in order to report the trials and triumphs of the gospel.

Will the student carefully note the movement of the book along these lines? You will find that Jerusalem is the starting-point, as expressly indicated by our Lord and His greatest Apostle (Luke 24:47; Rom. 1:16), and in the first chapter is described the preparation for the founding of the Church in the completion of the foundation of the Church (Matt. 16:18, 21) in the earthly life of our Lord (1:1-3) (The Gospels set forth that foundation in the Person and Work of Christ. In the Acts we see the superstructure rising)—the Ascension, the beginning of the Heavenly life of the Church's Head (1:4-14) and the filling out of the Apostolate by the addition of Matthias. That Matthias was regarded as properly chosen and one of the Apostolic band seems clear from the change of their name. They are called "the Eleven" in Matt. 28:16; Acts 1:26; 2:14 and "the twelve" in Acts 6:2. Then follows the Founding of the church on the Day of Pentecost, which has been called "the Birthday of the Church", when believers were for the first time welded into "One Body" by the formative power of the Spirit of God, (1 Cor. 12:13), and furnished by the indwelling and fulness of that Spirit (2:1-21) for the work of Evangelization. In the Incarnation we behold "the Embodiment of the Son" (Heb. 10:5; Luke 1:35). In the Pentecost we see "the Embodiment of the

“Spirit” who came to them and with the Church “for the age” (John 14:16). Then follows in the remainder of the chapter the first putting forth of the Hand of the Risen Lord (Mark 16:20; Acts 11:21) in the conversion of the three thousand—the first additions to the newly-formed Church (2:47, R. V.; 5:14). Then are described in richest detail the First Miracle and its sequel (3:1—4:31), the First Adjustments of the Church (4:32—6:8) to the important practical questions of Finance Authorities and Division of Labour. The First Martyr of the Church, Stephen, is presented to us as a brilliant example of what the Spirit can do with a fully surrendered believer (6:9—7:60)—one who finally sealed his testimony with his blood and passed into the glory amid the splendor of a brilliant spiritual experience (7:55-60). Because a surrendered soul, he was “full of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 6:5; 7:55) and consequently “full of grace” (6:8 R. V.), “full of faith” (6:5; 7:55, 56), “full of power” (6:8; 7:54) and “full of love” (7:60; Matt. 5:44).

Prayer. Great Head of the Church, bestow upon me the fullness of Thy all-conquering Spirit, that I may be changed into Thine image day by day and from glory to glory and be empowered to speak Thy truth with conviction for Thy dear name sake.

- E. **THE PURPOSE OF EVANGELIZATION.** (Concluded). Study with care “the Transitional Period” in chapters (8-12). Do not fail to note that “the Gathering of the Gentiles” into the Covenant Church is the central theme of the Acts and determines the arrangement of its material and accounts for the selection of the writer and the person to whom it is dedicated. This was “the Mystery” committed to the Apostle Paul (Eph. 3:6-8) and the Acts was written by Luke evidently to set it forth. It was in the original great commission “Go, make disciples of all the nations” (i. e. “Gentiles”). No movement was made on the part of the Church at Jerusalem to comply with this command of the Lord. That Church was becoming self-centered and self-sufficient, until a tempest of persecution broke upon her and the “good seed” (Matt. 13:38) was scattered abroad. This resulted in the Evangelization of Judea (8:1-4); Samaria (8:5-25); the Jewish proselyte, the Eunuch of Ethiopia; the persecuting Saul of Tarsus (9:1-31), the prepared vessel for carrying the water of life to the Gentiles, Lydda and Saron. Then the evangelization of the Gentiles is definitely prepared for in the broadening out of Peter through the vision of the great sheet (10:15) and the consequent experience of the Gentile Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell on all the heathen company who believed (10:44, 45) and they were baptized in the Blessed Name. This tremendous advance in the carrying out of the purpose of God toward the “other sheep” (John 10:16) is followed by the broadening of the Church at Jerusalem, who, after hearing Peter’s report, glorified God because of the repentance of the Gentiles unto life (11:18) and the establishment of the New Centre of Gentiles; Evangelization at Antioch (11:19-26), and, finally, a prophecy of the opportunity to be given to Gentile Christians to exhibit the grace of generosity towards their unfortunate Jewish brethren (11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1; Rom. 15:25-27). Then follows a chapter (12) setting forth the death of James and the passing away of Peter as a recorded factor in the world’s evangelization. The Apostleship of the Circumcision in the hands of Peter is to all intents and purposes ended. All preparations are now made

for the inauguration of world-wide missions to the Gentile world, and now we enter on the account of “The Work of the Great Apostle to the Gentiles” at large (13:21:16) and in bonds (21:17—28:31). Since this is the central and all important subject of the Acts, we can understand why this book is dedicated to a Gentile Christian, 1:1; Luke: 1-4) named Theophilus (“A lover of God”), perhaps a man of high social position and wealth; why the Spirit should select for the writer, Luke, a Gentile physician, who wrote the “Gospel of the Son of Man” in which our Lord is linked with the race, and who was the intimate companion of the Apostle to the Gentiles until the end (2 Tim. 4:11). The true record begins in Acts 13:1 3, when the Holy Spirit in the Church at Antioch said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them,,,” and when “they, bening sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed,” Earlier events in the Acts are only preparatory. Remember that all this lay very near the heart of the Risen Lord. In that marvelous chapter (John 10), in which the Great Shepherd is gathering His flock from the Jewish fold or enclosure first (vs. 1-3), we find Him thinking of the sheep which are not included in that favored circle—the Gentile sheep, scattered far and wide without a shepherd. “Other sheep”, He adds, “I have, which are not of this fold—Them also I must bring and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd” (John 10:16. R. V.). The “one flock” is the “one body”, the Church of Christ, of which He is the glorified Head. Study carefully the unconscious prophecy of the cruel Calaphas (John 11:47-52: especially vs. 51, 52) and ask yourself in how far you are endeavoring by personal consecration of self, and gifts and prayers to satisfy the Saviour’s heart. “He shall see of the travail of his Soul and shall be satisfied.” “Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross” (Is. 3-11; Heb. 12:2). “Them also I must bring”. Shall He bring them through you and me? Or shall we go before Him empty-handed?

But note that it is ever “*The Jew first*”. Though he was the Apostle of the Gentiles, a Foreign Missionary. Paul continued to the very last, to labor and pray for his own people Israel, as a true Home Missionary. Study Rom. 9: 1-5 and Rom. 10: 1-3. Although in the face of the contradiction and blasphemy of the Jews in Antioch of Psidia, he said “Lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46), he by no means signified any intention of turning away from all Jews, for in chapter 14, his first objective in Iconium was “a synagogue of the Jews”. How many— so unlike him—with eyes far a-field see not the opportunities for service at their very feet! Is there not a danger that foreign missionaries may become so absorbed in the importance of the work in the regions beyond, as to withhold their interest and prayers from the colossal problems of Home Evangelization? What a lofty and sympathetically broad soul throbbed in the bosom of Paul! No wonder he found it no breach of humility to say, “Be ye, therefore, followers of me, even as I also am of Christ”, (1 Cor. 11:1). The last view the Acts gives us is that of a “hired house” in Rome—the great center of the world and a grand Apostle “preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ” to all that came unto him” both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 28:17-31).

Prayer. Blessed Lord, Thou dost bid us preach peace to the “far off” as well as to the “nigh”. Give us we pray Thee a heart that will take in the whole lost world, for which Thou hast died, and a sympathy which will not leave out of our prayers and efforts any one of the myriads of Thine “other sheep”. O that Thy life of unselfish devotion to the good of all may be reproduced in us by the energy of thy Holy Spirit, that God, the Father, may be glorified in us all.

Bible Class and Prayer Meeting Summary

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The 10th chapter of Acts is one of the pivotal chapters of the New Testament. It marks the point where the Gospel turns away from the Jew alone object of the New Testament ministry, to the Gentiles. It is held by one who would really comprehend the order and development of the counsels of God that from the baptism of Christ to the Conversion of Cornelius it is the Jew who is before the divine action. Jesus Christ was, from His baptism to His resurrection, "a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers", Rom. 15: 8. After His resurrection His ministry was to "His own which were in the world". Neither Jews nor Gentiles saw Him. Departing, He commanded His disciples to begin a world-wide ministry at Jerusalem. That ministry covers the first nine chapters of the Acts. The 10th chapter is the pivot upon which the testimony turns to the great Gentile world. The contrasts are most obvious, but the most important concerns the Holy Spirit. Before as the testimony was to the Jews, the Holy Spirit was given to believers out of Judaism after an interval, long or short, following conversion, and then only by the mediatorship of an apostle. But Peter, who had used the first key of the Kingdom on the day of Pentecost, opening the door of profession to the Jews, used the second key in the house of Cornelius, "the Holy Spirit fell on them when they heard the word". We no longer pray the Father for the Spirit, as during the earth-life of Christ; nor send for an apostle as if we were converts, but we receive the Spirit instantly on conversion.

For the week ending 5 March. Acts 10:1—13:52.

1. *The order of study.* (1). The prayer of Cornelius. 10: 2. must be remembered that Cornelius was a proselyte to Judaism in the sense of verse 2. (2). The obedience of Cornelius. 10: 7. The preparation of Peter. 10: 9-20. (4). The obedience of Peter. 10: 25. (5). Events in the house of Cornelius, and the sermon of Peter. 10: 26-43. (6). Peter's account. 11: 1-18. (7). The new center established at Antioch. 11: 19-30. (8). The deliverance of Peter, and the escape from Herod. 12: 1-23. (9). The call of Paul and Barnabas. 13: 1-3. Missionary experiences, and a missionary sermon. 13: 5-52.

2. *The Spiritual suggestions.* Mark the grace of God in the conversion of such a man as Cornelius to break down the bigotry of the Jew. (1). A Gentile could have been more acceptable to them. (2). Cornelius was in the best light he had when he abandoned heathenism for Judaism, so he was rewarded by more light. (3). No prejudice is so obstinate as religious prejudice. It required a thrice repeated vision to Peter that a Gentile could be saved by simply believing the Gospel. (4). Mark the simplicity of the message to the Gentiles in 10: 42. The missionary call: what it is, and how it works, 13: 1-5. It is an appeal as to the church; secondly, it demands the best the church can give; thirdly, the missionaries are to be sent forth by the church; but the Holy Spirit, not the church, guides and orders their service.

For the week ending 12 March. Acts 14: 1—17: 34.

1. *The order of study.* (1). Opposition by Jews and Gentiles on the grounds thereof, with the divine attestation of the gospel by miracle. (2). The evangelized cities are revisited for the confirmation of the converts in the faith, and for the regular organization of the churches by the appointment of elders. (3). The missionary return to the church which sent them out to report. (4). The great pivotal chapter is the 15th. The 10th of Acts is the great