

God's Calling in the New Testament

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- I. God called John the Baptist - Luke 1:5-25; 57-80; 3:1-20
- II. God called Mary, the mother of Jesus Luke 1:26-56
- III. God Called the Twelve Disciples
 - A. Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John while they were fishing and mending their nets - Matt. 4:18-19, 21
 - B. The disciples left everything to obey the call and follow Jesus - Matt. 4:20, 22
 - C. Jesus called the twelve disciples to be with him and learn of him
 - D. After Jesus death, resurrection and ascension, the disciples who obeyed His calling received the Spirit and became apostles in the church - Acts 2:1, 14, 41-47
- IV. God called the needy persons in the gospels
- V. God called the seeking persons in the gospels
- VI. God called the loving persons in the gospels
- VII. God called the serving persons
- VIII. God called Stephen
- IX. God called the Ethiopian eunuch
- X. God called Cornelius
- XI. God Called Saul of Tarsus
 - A. Saul was a persecutor of the Christians and a destroyer of the churches - Acts 7:58; 8:1, 3; 9:1-2, 13-14, 21
 - B. The Lord Jesus called Saul - Acts 9:3-4
 - C. Saul obeyed the Lord's call, received the Holy Spirit, was baptized, and became a brother in the church - Acts 9:5-19, 26-28
 - D. Saul became the Apostle Paul who preached Christ, built up the churches, and wrote fourteen Epistles of God's New Testament Economy - Acts 9:20, 29; 11:26; 13:2-3; 15:41; 18:22-23; 20:7, 17
- XII. God called Timothy
- IX. God called the apostle John and gave him the Revelation

[These New Testament examples need to be expanded by adding other N.T. characters positive and negative, i.e.. those who obeyed God's calling and those who did not. It would be very profitable to have one year on the O.T. characters and another year on the N.T. characters.]

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

INTRODUCTION

This series of lessons is to follow the series of lessons on God's Calling in the Old Testament. Having seen some of the most important persons called by God to fulfill His purpose during the Old Testament age, we will now proceed to present some of the most important persons called by God to fulfill His purpose in the New Testament age.

Once again, our focus is not merely to teach the children the outward facts concerning the persons called. We would like to impress them with the fact that as God needed those disciples and one day called them to love, follow, and serve Him, *He is also calling the children today*. We hope to infuse them with the examples of those faithful founders of the church so that they would take them as their "heroes" and patterns, aspiring to live as they lived.

As there are several different passages or stories concerning the New Testament characters in each lesson it is probably not possible to adequately cover each one in one short class time. The preferable method would be for the children's parents to spend some time with their children during the week reading the passages together with their children and explaining the meaning to them. Then the class time could be more profitably used for reviewing, highlighting the main points, and sharing corporately.

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GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT CALLING

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GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson One

IN THE GOSPELS: JOHN THE BAPTIST

Burden to Impart:

John was called by God to turn His people's heart to their coming Savior, the Lord Jesus. God sent John the Baptist to end the Old Testament age and to begin the New. John told God's people that they should not trust in their religion or heritage to save them (Matt. 3:9). They must repent of their sins, be baptized, and believe in Christ.

Memory Verse: "For this is he who was spoken of through Isaiah the prophet, saying, A voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight" (Matthew 3:3).

Facts to Teach: [Scripture reading: Matt. 3:1-10; extra, Luke 1:5-17, 57-80]

1. The Bible has two great sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament tells us about what God did before the Lord Jesus came. It tells us how God called out a special people for Himself, for His salvation, and His purpose. These people were the children of Israel, the Hebrews; or as we say today, the "Jews." The New Testament mainly tells us what God did after the Lord Jesus came to the earth. In the New Testament we see how God once again called out a people for Himself, for His salvation, and His purpose. God's people in the New Testament are the Christians, the Church.

2. The New Testament began at a time when God's people, the Jews, had turned their hearts away from Him. They had become disobedient, sinful, hard-hearted, and rebellious. They had failed God's calling.

3. In order to prepare His people for the coming of their Savior, the Lord Jesus, God sent a special prophet named John the Baptist to them. John would speak God's word to them and tell them of their sins. He would also tell them of their need to repent, be baptized, and believe in Christ. He was bold, frank, and filled with God.

4. John was born of godly parents. His father served God as a priest in the temple. John's coming was so important that it was foretold hundreds of years earlier in the Old Testament (Isa. 40:3-4). John was born by a special miracle of God, for His parents were very old. He was filled with God's Spirit even from his birth.

5. John had a very hard job to do. He had to turn the hearts of God's people back to the Lord (Luke 1:16). That meant that John himself had to be fully turned to the Lord. John loved the Lord with all of his heart and lived absolutely for Him. For this reason he was different. He lived in the wilderness. He ate wild honey and locusts. He seemed like a wild man to some. But to those who listened to him, he was the voice of God crying in the wilderness, "Repent!" Those who repented showed it to all by their baptism (Matt. 3:6).

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Two

IN THE GOSPELS: Andrew and Peter

Burden to Impart:

The Lord is calling disciples, those who would follow Him. Although Jesus first met Andrew and Peter at the Jordan River, He went back to Galilee to find them and call them again to follow Him. This time He performed a miracle to deeply impress them. He was calling them away from their lowly job of catching fish to work together with Him to do the very highest job in the universe: to catch men for God.

Memory Verse: "And He said to them, Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And immediately, leaving the nets, they followed Him" (Matthew 4:19-20).

Facts to Teach:

1. Two young brothers named Andrew and Simon had walked a long way from their hometown in Galilee to hear God's servant, John the Baptist. Coming from godly Jewish parents (Acts 10:14), they felt drawn to John. Andrew even became a disciple (John 1:35-42).

2. One day John saw the Lord Jesus walking by and declared, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The Savior that John had been preaching about and preparing the people to receive, had finally come. Two of John's disciples (Andrew and John) realized that the time had come for them to leave him and follow their Savior, the Lord Jesus.

3. Andrew and John stayed with Jesus that day. Andrew quickly found his brother, Simon, and led him to Jesus. To his surprise, Jesus already knew both his name and his father's. Simon did not know that Jesus knew him before the world began (1 Pet. 1:2). The Lord changed Simon's name to Cephas, or Peter, which means a stone. By following Jesus, Simon would be transformed into a person as solid as a rock. Peter and Andrew became the first two apostles (sent ones).

4. Later, Jesus came to Peter's hometown (Luke 5:1-11). After preaching to a crowd at the seashore from Peter's boat He told Peter to sail out into the deep. There, in the frightening sea, the Lord performed a miracle. They caught so many fish that the nets began to tear. Even worse, their boats began to sink.

5. Fear and astonishment took hold of Peter and the rest. Peter realized that a miracle had happened so he fell down at Jesus' knees and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord!" Peter felt unworthy of Jesus because He realized that he was a sinner. He also realized that Jesus was his "Lord."

6. Jesus comforted Peter, telling him that he would no longer catch just fish. He would be used by the Lord to "catch men." The Lord was again telling Peter something about his future, that he would be used by God to "catch" many men for the Lord and His kingdom.

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Three

IN THE GOSPELS: James and John

Burden to Impart:

The Lord Jesus not only wanted to call Peter and Andrew to follow Him, He also wanted to call their cousins and friends, James and John. Although James and John may have been the youngest disciples the Lord called, they later became apostles (sent ones) for the Lord. They both loved the Lord very much, preached His gospel, and were faithful to Him for the rest of their lives.

Memory Verse: "... He saw two other brothers, James ... and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father mending their nets, and He called them" (Matthew 4:21).

Facts to Teach:

1. Andrew and Peter had two cousins who lived near them in Galilee, James and John. They were partners in fishing as well as close friends (Luke 5:7, 10). Andrew and John seemed to be the more drawn to seek the Lord, for they had apparently left their hometown and were so touched by the preaching of John the Baptist that they stayed with him and became His disciples (John 1:37,42; Matt. 4:22 note 1).

2. John and Andrew met the Lord Jesus by the Jordan River through John the Baptist (John 1:35-37) and began to follow Him for a short time. Later, they returned to Galilee to continue their fishing business with their father, Zebedee (Matt. 4:21).

3. After His baptism and forty days of trial and temptation in the wilderness, Jesus went to Galilee to find His first few disciples, Andrew, Peter, James, and John. He first found Andrew and Peter and called them. He then went to their cousins, who were nearby, and also called them to follow Him.

4. James and John were mending their broken fishing nets when the Lord called them. Perhaps these were the nets that had broken due to the miracle the Lord performed when they caught so many fish that their boat nearly sank (Luke 5:1-11).

5. John was probably the youngest disciple the Lord called. In their youth John and James sometimes argued as to who was the greatest (Mark 9:33-34). They also wanted the Lord to promise them that they could sit in a special place beside Him when He entered into His Kingdom (Mark 10:35-41). This upset the other ten disciples. The Lord called them the "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). This may indicate that they were rather hot-tempered or impulsive.

6. Though they were young, John and James loved the Lord very much. The Lord one day told them that they would both be killed because of their love for Him (Mark 10:39). This did not cause them to be afraid or to leave the Lord. They followed Him faithfully all of their lives. John later became the writer of five books of the New Testament.

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Lesson Four

IN THE GOSPELS: The Twelve Apostles

Burden to Impart:

Twelve disciples were chosen by the Lord to be His Apostles. They were especially trained by Him so they could be His helpers.

Memory Verse: "...He called His disciples to Him; and He chose from them twelve, whom He also named apostles" (Luke 6:13).

Facts to Teach:

1. Many people followed the Lord Jesus: some out of curiosity (John 2:23-24), some to be healed or fed (John 6:26), and some out of love and faith. A small number followed the Lord closely and learned of His teachings and way of life. These became His "disciples" (Matt. 5:1).

2. As the Lord's ministry grew, He needed some fellow-workers to help Him speak to the people and share the burdens with Him (Matt. 9:36-38). The Lord was so burdened that He spent the whole night in prayer to God before He chose any helpers. Then, out of many disciples, the Lord chose twelve to be His "apostles" (Luke 6:12-17a). An "apostle" is "one who is sent" to fulfill some purpose.

3. These twelve were chosen and appointed by the Lord so that they might "be with Him" in a special way, and that He might "send them to preach" His Word (Mark 3:14). They followed the Lord wherever He traveled. They went with Him by foot and by boat. They watched His way of life and learned of Him (Matt. 11:29). They also suffered hardships and persecutions with the Lord. The Lord told them, "You are those who have remained with Me in My trials." For this reason they will also be rewarded with His kingdom and will "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" in the kingdom (Luke 22:28-30).

5. The twelve apostles not only learned from the Lord by His example and life, they also were trained by Him in many ways. Sometimes He would correct them for their mistakes (Mark 9:38-39) and rebuke them for their lack of understanding (Mark 8:33) and faith (Luke 8:25). He also trained them by waking them up at times to pray (Matt. 26:40).

6. They listened daily to His teaching. He taught the multitudes in parables, but He spoke to His Apostles plainly so that they would understand every word (Matt. 13:9-11). The Lord Jesus did not write a book of His teachings and give it to His Apostles. He taught them by speaking to them all the words that His Father had given to Him (John 17:8). They needed to know His Word and teaching well, for it was up to them to teach all of His disciples the things He had commanded them after He ascended.

7. Having been especially trained by the Lord in their way of life and in His teaching, the Lord could send out the Apostles to do His work and to preach God's Word. He gave them authority over unclean spirits and the power to heal every disease (Matt. 10:1-8).

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Lesson Five

IN THE GOSPELS: The Apostle Peter and the Apostle John

Burden to Impart:

The special experiences Peter and John had with the Lord caused them to become the two most useful Apostles among the twelve. Over the years they became strong men of God who could bear the Lord's burden and share in His work with Him. They became "pillars" in the church (Gal. 2:9).

Memory Verse: "Jesus takes with Him Peter and James and John, and brings them up into a high mountain by themselves alone. And He was transformed before them" (Mark 9:2).

Facts to Teach:

1. Of the twelve Apostles, three were especially close to the Lord, and were brought into some experiences that the others did not have. These were Peter, James, and John. These experiences caused their testimonies to be extra-ordinary. James' witness for the Lord was so prevailing that he was the first apostle to be sought out by the enemy and martyred (Acts 12:2). Peter and John both lived on for a longer time and were used by God to write some of the books of the New Testament.

2. On one occasion the Lord asked His disciples who they thought He really was. Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" The Lord told Peter that he was blessed, for only God could have revealed that secret to Him (Matt. 16:16-18).

3. Then the Lord told Peter that He would give him the keys to His kingdom (Matt. 16:16-19). The Lord entrusted a great responsibility to Peter. He later used these "keys" by preaching the gospel and opening the door of faith for thousands of people to believe in the Lord Jesus and enter His heavenly kingdom (Acts 2:37-41; 10:44-48). He truly became a great "fisher of men" as Jesus had foretold (Matt. 4:19).

4. On another occasion Jesus brought Peter, James, and John apart from the rest of the Apostles to a high mountain. There He revealed Himself to them in all of His glory (Matt. 17:1-9). No other person ever saw His glory like this while He was on earth, only these three. Then He charged them not to tell any one else of the vision until He rose from the dead. This was a special experience He shared only with them.

5. Once, when a young girl had died, the Lord Jesus only allowed Peter, James, and John to accompany Him when He performed the miracle of raising her from the dead (Mark 5:37).

6. Also, before the Lord Jesus went to the cross, He took Peter, James, and John aside with Him and spoke to them alone the deepest things on His heart concerning His sorrow (Matt. 26:36-38). It seems that they had a deeper fellowship with the Lord than the rest of the Apostles.

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Lesson Six

IN THE GOSPELS: Matthew (Levi)

Burden to Impart:

God's calling is not based upon a person's goodness or righteousness, it is based upon His own selection and love (Eph. 1:4). Matthew was a despised tax collector, a "publican," one who loved filthy money even more than his fellow countrymen. But the Lord loved him, chose him, and called him. Matthew was immediately set free from the love of money. Along with his call, he received a new heart, one that loved the Lord and wanted above all else to follow Him.

Memory Verse: "...Jesus...saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the customs office, and says to him, Follow Me. And he rose and followed Him" (Matthew 9:9).

Facts to Teach:

1. The Lord's calling of His disciples was not based on any natural virtue. Some that He called were good, and some were not so "good." He called all those whom His Father had chosen for His kingdom (John 17:6; Eph. 1:4; Titus 3:5).

2. One of those called by the Lord was a tax collector named Matthew (or Levi). Tax collectors were despised by the Jews for two reasons: 1) they were considered as traitors to their countrymen because they collected their tax money for the Roman empire, and 2) they often overcharged the people and kept the extra money for themselves.

3. The Lord purposely went to Matthew's place of work to find him. Although Matthew was a tax collector, he was selected by the Father to be in His heavenly kingdom. The Lord looked upon Matthew as he sat at the tax office and then called him, saying, "Follow Me" (Luke 5:27).

4. In one instant a great miracle happened. Matthew, a slave of money and sin, was set free. As he looked back into the eyes of the Lord Jesus he was set free from the love of money and everything else. Matthew instantly "leaving all...rose up and followed Him."

5. So great was Matthew's joy and gratitude that he prepared a great feast for the Lord at his house and invited many of his friends to come and meet the Lord. As they ate together and talked some others came and blamed the Lord for eating with "tax collectors and sinners." Jesus answered them saying that He had not come to call the "righteous" (for there are none). He had come to call "sinners" (like Matthew and his friends) to repentance.

6. Matthew loved the Lord and was very thankful that the Lord had come to call even such a sinner as himself to be one of His disciples. Matthew faithfully followed the Lord, and was even chosen by the Lord to be one of the twelve Apostles. Matthew's gospel was the first permanent record of the life of Jesus.

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Lesson Seven

IN THE GOSPELS: Judas Iscariot - The False Disciple

Burden to Impart:

The Lord allows all kinds of persons to follow Him, even some false ones. The weaknesses of the Lord's disciples did not prevent them from following Him faithfully. He was able to work in the lives and hearts of each one of them, except Judas. Judas' problem was not weakness, it was falsehood and hypocrisy. Although he was so close to Jesus, He never called Him "Lord," only "rabbi."

Memory Verse: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me...and see if there be any wicked way in me..."
(Psalm 139: 23-24).

Facts to Teach:

1. None of the twelve apostles that the Lord called were "perfect." Peter was too outspoken. Thomas lacked faith. He even disbelieved the Lord's resurrection! James and John were so "fiery" and impetuous that the Lord called them the "sons of thunder." There are no perfect disciples for the Lord calls us as we are. Yet, as we follow Him, we gradually become like Him.

2. Of the twelve Apostles that the Lord chose, all were faithful to the Lord except one, Judas Iscariot. To have weaknesses is one thing, to be a false disciple is another. Although the Lord knew that Judas was a "devil" (John 6:70-71) who would one day betray Him, He purposely chose Judas to be with Him. Having been so close to the Lord Jesus, Judas surely has no excuse for rejecting Him. It was his own choice.

3. Judas was trusted to take care of the disciples' money box, but he yielded to Satan and became a thief (John 12:6).

4. One day while one of the Lord's disciples poured her greatest treasure upon Him (a flask of precious ointment), Judas rebuked her and exclaimed, "Why this waste? Why was this ointment not sold...and given to the poor?" (Matt. 26:8; John 12:5-6). He did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief and wanted to steal the money. He did not love the Lord Jesus. He was a false disciple, a pretender, and a hypocrite.

5. Just before the Lord's death Judas let Satan into his heart and then made a deal with the priests to betray Jesus and deliver Him up to them for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15-16; Luke 22:3). When at the last supper the Lord told His disciples that one of them would betray Him (He did not say which one), they all fearfully asked, "I'm not the one, am I, Lord?" Judas pretentiously said, "I'm not the one, am I, Rabbi?" He knew he was, but he pretended he was not. Judas never called Jesus "Lord," only "Rabbi," or teacher.

6. Judas finally delivered up Jesus with a false kiss (Luke 22:48). Though he later regretted, he did not turn his heart to the Lord or ask for forgiveness. Rather, he hanged himself (Matt. 27:5).

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Lesson Eight

IN THE GOSPELS: Mary the Magdalene

Burden to Impart:

One of the most loving and faithful disciples of Jesus was a woman who had been possessed with seven demons, Mary the Magdalene. With great gratitude for her salvation, she ministered to the Lord and accompanied Him in all of His sufferings and trials from Galilee to the cross. The Lord Jesus appeared in resurrection to her first.

Memory Verse: "And having risen early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary the Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons" (Mark 16:9).

Facts to Teach:

1. Although the twelve Apostles were all men, the Lord also called many women to follow Him. The Lord's most notable female disciple was Mary, the Magdalene (from Magdala, John 19:25).

2. When the Lord met Mary Magdalene in Galilee she was possessed with seven demons (Luke 8:2). She probably became demon possessed by worshipping idols. After she was set free from the demons she had no other desire than to follow the Lord wherever He went. Her one desire was to be one of His disciples and helpers. One way that she and other women helped Jesus and his disciples was by supplying them with money (Luke 8:3).

3. Mary followed the Lord and His disciples in His ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem (Matt. 27:55-56). Though she was not a blood relative, the Lord considered her to be one of His sympathizing sisters because she gave up everything to do God's will (Matt. 13:48-50). She also suffered with the Lord in all of His trials and rejection (Luke 22:28).

4. Even when the Lord was crucified Mary did not forsake Him. She and other women followed Him all the way to the end (Matt. 27:55-56). They even lingered around after His death to watch His burial. They they went home to prepare spices and ointments (Luke 23:55-56).

5. Having kept the Sabbath, Mary's love for the Lord brought her back to the tomb on the first day of the week even before dawn. She brought the spices and came with other women to Jesus' tomb. However, the stone was rolled away and Jesus' body was gone. When they entered the tomb they saw two angels who told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. After reporting this to the disciples they all returned to the tomb to confirm her word (Luke 24:9-12). Seeing that it was true, they were all perplexed and went back home. Mary, however, stayed at the tomb alone (John 20: 10-18). The Lord Jesus came to her and spoke her name. She was the first one the Lord Jesus appeared to in resurrection. It was not to Peter, nor to John, but to Mary. Even before He ascended to the Father, He had to appear to Mary! What a disciple!

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Lesson Nine

IN THE GOSPELS: Martha

Burden to Impart:

All those who receive the Lord and His salvation need to firstly learn to listen to His Word and know His heart. Then they will be able to serve Him in a way that is proper and pleasing to Him.

Memory Verse: "...Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; But one thing is necessary; for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42).

Facts to Teach:

1. A dear family of Jesus' close friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, lived in a poor village outside of Jerusalem named Bethany. Once, Martha received the Lord as a guest into her home (Luke 10:38-42). She was very busy preparing things for the Lord and His disciples. Martha had a disposition to do things for the Lord; to serve and work hard. However, she needed to learn how to serve the Lord in a way that pleases Him; not in her own, natural way.

2. While Martha was so busy, her sister, Mary, was apparently doing nothing at all! Actually, she was paying attention to their guest. She was seated at the Lord's feet and was listening to His word.

3. To serve is good. But Martha was so busy that she was actually "distracted" from the Lord Himself. She began to reason and think negative thoughts like, "Why doesn't Mary stop being so lazy and help me? Can't she see how much there is to do? Why do I have to do everything? Why doesn't Jesus send her to help me? Doesn't He care about me?" She was getting angry and irritated. She felt she was doing everything good and right, and her sister, Mary, was all wrong. Even Jesus seemed to be wrong in Martha's eyes, for He seemed to not care about her need of help!

4. Finally, Martha could not hold in her disgust any longer. She did not complain to Mary, but to Jesus. She came over to Jesus, and "standing over Him," began to rebuke Him. After rebuking the Lord and expressing all of her opinions to Him (that He didn't care about her, etc.), she next proceeded to tell the Lord what He should do. He should "tell her (Mary) that she should do her part with me." How strong a person was Martha! How opinionated! How demanding! How right she thought she was! She invited the Lord in as a "guest," but now she was rebuking Him, insulting Him, and telling Him what to do! Though Martha loved the Lord, she did not know how to serve Him properly yet. She did not know how natural and fleshly she was.

5. The Lord gently corrected Martha in His answer. He pointed out to her that she was too anxious and busy. She had missed the most important thing in her service, to listen to the Lord's word so that she would know the Lord's heart and desire.

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Lesson Ten

IN THE GOSPELS: Mary (Martha's Sister)

Burden to Impart:

Those who respond to God's call to receive the Lord Jesus and His salvation, should out of love and gratitude pour out everything they have and are upon Him.

Memory Verse: "...Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her" (Matthew 26:13).

Facts to Teach:

1. When the Lord Jesus came down to Jerusalem he would not stay in Jerusalem over night, He stayed at Bethany (Matt. 21:17). Although Jerusalem used to be called the "city of God," they had no room in their hearts for Jesus, for they rejected Him from being their Lord. But in a poor village nearby, Bethany, Jesus had some dear disciples who not only received Him, they loved Him very much.

2. It was in Bethany that the Lord Jesus performed the greatest miracle of His ministry. He had raised Martha and Mary's brother, Lazarus, from the dead. Lazarus had not been dead for only an hour or two. He had been dead for four days and had begun to rot and stink. This, however, was no problem to the Lord Jesus. He resurrected him. (This will be looked at in detail next year, in the next series.)

3. With Lazarus we see the greatness of the Lord Jesus' power. With Martha we learn how the Lord's disciples should serve Him. And with Mary we see how the Lord's disciples should love and treasure him above everything else.

4. Before the Lord went to the cross He told His disciples at least three times that He would be killed in Jerusalem. For some reason none of the disciples comprehended what He was telling them, except Mary. It seems that only Mary, the disciple who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His word, understood the Lord's heart. She somehow realized that she would see her Lord no more, that He was going to die in Jerusalem that week. So she grasped the only opportunity she would ever have to honor the Lord before His death: she poured out her life-time treasure, a flask of exceedingly expensive and precious ointment, upon the Lord Jesus. Though others criticized her for being foolish and "wasteful," the Lord approved Her (Luke 14:3-10).

5. So precious was her offering to the Lord that He said that wherever men spoke of His great sacrifice for them, they would also speak of Mary's love and sacrifice to Him (Matt. 26:26:13; Mark 14:9). The Lord was telling us that all who believe in Him and receive His salvation should respond like Mary, and pour out their all to Him.

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Eleven

IN ACTS: The Twelve Apostles on Pentecost

Burden to Impart:

As those who are called by the Lord learn to be one, pray together, and stand together to speak the Lord's Word, God will give to them the Spirit, the boldness, and the power that they need to fulfill their commission to preach the gospel.

Memory Verse: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Facts to Teach:

1. Before the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, He charged His disciples to go into all the earth to preach the gospel and to make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:19). They were to begin at Jerusalem (where they lived), then spread to all Judea, then Samaria, then go even to the most remote part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

2. Such a great commission could never be accomplished by their own ability or strength. They needed God. They needed God's Spirit to fill them and empower them. So they gathered together to pray. About 120 of them prayed for ten days (Acts 1:14-15) straight.

3. Then, when the feast of Pentecost had begun, God poured out the Holy Spirit upon them all. They heard a noise out of heaven like a mighty rushing wind and tongues of fire appeared and sat on each of them (Acts 2:2-4). God's Spirit had been poured out upon them all to fill them with power and boldness so that they could speak His Word and bear witness of the resurrection of Jesus before all the people. Indeed, their tongues became like tongues of fire!

4. They were assembled in Jerusalem, the very city that had just fifty days earlier rejected and crucified Jesus. The city was crowded with Jews from many lands who were visiting to keep the feast of Pentecost. This was the hardest place in the world to testify, but the time had come.

5. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples all began to speak and testify. God enabled them to speak in languages they had never learned, so that everyone would understand them. Then the twelve Apostles gave testimony. Peter was the spokesman, but he did not stand alone. He stood "together with the eleven" (Acts 2:14). He boldly preached to the people, charging them with having crucified Jesus. They were so convicted and subdued that they asked the Apostles, "What should we do?" Peter told them that they must "repent and be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38).

6. That day three thousand people received the Apostles' witness and were baptized. This was the beginning of the church life.

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Twelve

IN ACTS: The Appointment of Seven Serving Ones

Burden to Impart:

In order to avoid serious problems in the church, caused by the needs of the saints not being met, there need to be some serving ones to help. These must have a good testimony among the believers, must walk closely with the Lord and contact His continuously, and must have wisdom and be able to work together with others in coordination.

Memory Verse: "Now brothers, select seven well-attested men from among you, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we shall appoint over this need" (Acts 6:3).

Facts to Teach:

1. Within a short time after Pentecost there were over five thousand believers (Acts 4:4). The Apostles and disciples spoke God's Word with boldness. Their testimony of the resurrected Christ spread throughout Jerusalem like wildfire.

2. Peter and John were arrested, beaten, and charged to speak no more about Jesus, but they could not be stopped (Acts 4:17-20; 5:40). They obeyed God's command, not men's. God gave great power to His Apostles to do signs and wonders, to heal the sick, and to cast out demons. Believers were added by the multitudes (Acts 5:14).

3. So great was the people's joy of salvation and love to the Lord that they sold their houses and gave the money to the Apostles so it could be used for the church's needs (Acts 4:34-35).

4. However, because of the multiplying of the disciples, some needs were not taken care of equally among the saints. This caused murmuring (Acts 6:1). Some widows among the Greek believers were overlooked in the daily dispensing of food or money. They began to murmur against the Hebrew believers. They felt there was partiality and unfairness. If this was not taken care of, the Lord's testimony was over. A bitter, complaining, and divided church cannot have the Lord's blessing or power. This would have eventually led to a division between the Greek and Jewish believers.

5. To solve the problem, the twelve Apostles called the multitude, of the disciples together and told them to select serving ones (Acts 6:3). By taking care of the practical needs of the saints these helpers would enable the Apostles to continue their ministry of the Word. These men were "well-attested," very upright, honest, and trusted among the disciples. Also, they were "full of the Spirit," which means that they walked closely with the Lord, loved the Lord, and contacted Him continuously in their daily life. They were "full of wisdom," which means they had patience, understanding, and experience in dealing with difficult situations with the Lord's help. Lastly, there were "seven," not one. They needed to learn to coordinate and work together to serve the Lord and the church. No one was the "boss."

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Thirteen

IN ACTS: Stephen, the Church's First Martyr

Burden to Impart:

The testimony of God's faithful witnesses and martyrs is the seed of the church. Such lives and testimonies will remain forever.

Memory Verse: "And they stoned Stephen as he was calling upon the Lord and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" (Acts 7:59).

Facts to Teach:

1. While God was doing wondrous things with the Apostles and the gospel was spreading like wildfire with many thousands of zealous Jewish converts being added to the church, the Jewish religious leaders were rising up to oppose. They hated the Apostles and the church because they were jealous (Acts 5:17). Thus, Satan was able to fill their heart and use them to attack the Christians.

2. Stephen, one of the seven serving ones appointed by the Apostles (Acts 6:5), was not only filled with the Spirit and wisdom, but was also full of grace and power. Through Stephen God did great wonders and signs among the people (Acts 6:8). While preaching the gospel, some of the Jews argued and resisted the truth. Being unable to withstand the wisdom and Spirit with which Stephen spoke they became infuriated and began to lie about what Stephen was saying. They stirred up the Jewish leaders against him, who then arrested him and brought him before the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:9-12). This was the highest Jewish authority, which had also condemned the Lord Jesus to death.

3. They lied against him and falsely accused him, but they all noticed that his face was "as the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). Their faces were like the Devil's, filled with anger and hatred. His was as an angel's, filled with love and peace.

4. Finally they gave him a chance to speak. He calmly related to them a detailed history of how God had repeatedly called their forefathers to follow and obey Him, but they refused and disobeyed (Acts 7). Then he looked at the whole crowd of them and, not being afraid to speak the truth, he boldly told them that they were the same: "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in hearts and ears," and always resisted the Holy Spirit, as their fathers did (Acts 7:51-52). Then he boldly charged them with the murder of the Lord Jesus.

5. Instead of receiving the truth and repenting at Stephen's testimony, they became enraged. God, however, was pleased and allowed Stephen to look directly into their eyes, where he saw the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of God. When he declared this to them they became crazed with anger, shouted, covered their ears, dragged him out of the city, and stoned him to death. Stephen was not silent, nor was he cursing them. He was calling loudly upon the Lord Jesus. They all heard. Then, his last words could never be forgotten as he screamed out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Then he fell "asleep" (Acts 7:54-60).

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Fourteen

IN ACTS: Cornelius

Burden to Impart:

God is not a respecter of persons. His salvation in Christ is not only to the Jewish people, but to everyone who believes in Jesus.

Memory Verse: "To this One all the prophets testify that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43).

Facts to Teach:

1. Peter was the leading apostle in the early days of the church. The Lord used the Apostle Peter's preaching as the keys of His kingdom (Matt. 16:19) to open the door of faith for about 3,000 Jews on the day of Pentecost. He also used Peter to open the doors of faith for the non-Jews, the Gentiles, in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48).

2. Since the Apostles mainly preached the gospel to the Jews, the Lord had to do something special to cause them to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The Lord did this by two miracles. Firstly an angel appeared to a pious Roman soldier in answer to his prayers and told him to send for Peter, who was in a nearby town (Joppa). Then the Lord gave a vision to Peter which indicated that he should contact the Gentiles, whom he considered to be "unclean." Peter saw a great vessel like a sheet full of animals and reptiles descend from heaven. The Lord told him to, "Rise up, Peter, slay and eat." Peter, answering according to the Jewish law said, "By no means, Lord," for he considered the animals to be unclean. Then the Lord answered, "What God has cleansed, do not consider common." Later, Peter understood that since the Lord Jesus had died on the cross for all men, God would save whoever believed in Him, not only the Jews, but the Gentiles also.

3. By these two miracles Peter came to Cornelius' house and found a group of people awaiting him, Cornelius' relatives and intimate friends. When Peter preached to them the good news about the Lord Jesus and they received his words, something wonderful happened. God poured out the Holy Spirit upon them, as He had done upon the Jewish believers on Pentecost. They were filled with God's Spirit, miraculously spoke in other languages, and magnified God.

4. Thus, with such evidence of God's having accepted and saved these Gentile believers, they baptized them all.

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Fifteen

IN ACTS: Saul of Tarsus

Burden to Impart:

The Lord calls and raises up whoever He wills, according to His own sovereignty and mercy. Hence, Saul of Tarsus, the chief opponent of the gospel was called, saved, and became a zealous lover and follower of the Lord.

Memory Verse: "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace..." (2 Timothy 1:9).

Facts to Teach:

1. As the Lord's faithful witness, Stephen, was being stoned to death, a young man named Saul was standing nearby. He was approving of Stephen's death and helped by watching the garments of those who dragged him outside the city to stone him. Saul joined the great persecution that had begun against the Christians at Jerusalem. He believed they were lying about Jesus in saying that He was raised from the dead. In his ignorance he hated the Christians and gave all of his strength and zeal to eliminate them. He devastated the church, entered house after house, dragged off both men and women who called upon the Lord, and delivered them to prison (Acts 7:58--8:3).

2. Saul was not an evil "gangster." He was a sincere Jew who wanted to defend his fathers' religion. Because of his ignorance and unbelief he hated the name of Jesus and wanted to destroy all who preached or called upon His name (1 Tim. 1:13). Saul began to take the lead in the persecution, even obtaining authority to go to foreign cities to arrest and bring the Christians back to Jerusalem in chains (Acts 9:1-2; 26:11). This insulting, destructive person was being used by Satan to destroy the church and persecute the followers of Jesus.

3. Though Satan was using Saul, God had chosen him before the foundation of the earth to be a special vessel to bear the Lord's testimony before Jews, Gentiles, and even kings (Acts 9:15-16). This one who had caused God's people to suffer so much was destined to suffer together with them faithfully for the rest of his life.

4. While on his way to persecute the Christians in Damascus, Saul was surprised by a visit from the Lord Jesus, the very One he did not believe existed. A heavenly light, beyond the brightness of the noontime sun, shone around Saul and those with him, causing them all to fall to the ground (Acts 26:9-16). A voice which only Saul understood said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Saul asked two questions to this great heavenly voice. The first was, "Who are You, Lord?" When this heavenly One answered, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting," Saul realized that he was a great sinner. He was persecuting the Lord and the Lord's people. His next question was, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). Realizing that everything he had done against Jesus was wrong, Saul now wanted to know what he should do.

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GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Fifteen (Continued)

5. He was to go to Damascus and wait for the Lord to give Him further instructions. But when Saul arose from the ground, He was blind. The glory of the Lord's light blinded Saul. The powerful persecutor had been broken down by Jesus. As a vanquished foe he was led blindly and humbly to Damascus (Acts 22:11). He spent the next three days neither eating or drinking. He was praying. Then the Lord appeared to a disciple in a vision and sent him to Saul to pray for him. After that Saul's sight was restored, he was baptized, and he immediately proclaimed in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. Thus, the chief persecutor of those who called on the name of Jesus became one of His callers and followers (Acts 22:16).

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Sixteen

IN ACTS: The Sending Out of Barnabas and Saul

Burden to Impart:

Those whom the Lord would use in His great work must first be prepared by learning to serve faithfully in their own local church.

Memory Verse: "And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2).

Facts to Teach:[Scripture reading: Acts 11:25-26,30; 12:25; 13:1-4]

1. Although God had opened the door of the gospel to the Gentiles, the Jewish believers only spoke the gospel to the Jews (Acts 11:19). Some, however, spoke to the Greeks at Antioch and a great number of them believed and turned to the Lord.

2. When the church in Jerusalem heard of this they sent out Barnabas to visit them and encourage them. Needing help to take care of this new church, Barnabas went to Tarsus and found Saul, and brought him back to Antioch. They stayed at Antioch for about one year. The testimony of the disciples was so strong that the people there first called them Christians (Acts 11:19-26).

3. When the Jewish Christians in Judea needed money the church in Antioch helped them, sending money to them with Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:30). The Lord was making Barnabas and Saul into a team which He could use to serve the churches together.

4. One day as several prophets and teachers in Antioch were praying together and ministering to the Lord, the Holy Spirit told them (through their fellowship together) to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a special work He had called them for. They were to go out together to visit many Gentile lands and preach the gospel (Acts 13:1-4). This was a new beginning for the church, for now the gospel would be fully preached to all the nations, to "the remotest part of the earth," as Jesus had commanded (Acts 1:8).

5. While on this journey Saul changed his name to Paul. In the beginning of their gospel ministry Barnabas, the older brother, took the lead and Paul followed. After a short while the Bible shows us that Paul began to take the lead in their journey and Barnabas followed. There was no jealousy or competition between them to be the leader. They both worked together to serve the Lord in the gospel and allowed the Spirit to lead them in everything (Acts 13:13).

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Seventeen

IN ACTS: Mark's Failure and Silas' Selection

Burden to Impart:

Although we may sometimes fail the Lord in fulfilling our Christian responsibility, it does not mean that we should quit or give up. In God's calling it is not how we begin that counts, it is how we end. So if we fall, we should rise up and go on again.

Memory Verse: "Luke alone is with me. Take Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for the ministry"
(2 Timothy 4:11).

Facts to Teach:

1. When the church in Jerusalem was suffering during a great famine, the church in Antioch sent them money for relief through Barnabas and Paul (Acts 11:28-30).

2. Barnabas and Saul decided to bring Mark (or John Mark), a young disciple in Jerusalem who loved the Lord, back with them to Antioch (Acts 11:25). Mark was Barnabas' cousin (Col. 4:10).

3. When the Lord called Barnabas and Paul to go out on their first journey of ministry to bring the gospel to other lands, they brought Mark along with them as their attendant (Acts 13:5). Mark was a young man, so he came along to help Barnabas and Paul, who were older. To accompany two older Apostles and servants of the Lord on such a mission should have been considered a great privilege and opportunity for Mark.

4. However, Mark did not last long. They firstly sailed to the island of Cypress (about 100 miles). Then they passed through most of the island by land (about 90 miles), preaching the gospel. They met some opposition (Acts 13:6-12). But compared to the very fierce opposition Paul later met with, it was almost nothing. The journey seemed to be too tough for Mark, for at this point he left Barnabas and Paul and sailed back home to Jerusalem where his mother lived (Acts 13:13; 12:12).

5. When Paul and Barnabas were later going on their second journey of ministry, Barnabas again wanted to take his younger cousin Mark with them. Paul, however, would not agree. He did not feel that it was suitable to bring Mark with them (Acts 15:35-39). Perhaps Mark left them the first time because he was not grown up enough to bear such a burden or to endure such hardship, as was required by the Apostles.

6. The contention was so sharp that Paul and Barnabas separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark along with him and sailed away to Cypress. Paul chose another young disciple, Silas, to join him in the gospel work. The brothers prayed for Paul and Silas and sent them out with their blessing to carry on the Lord's work of establishing the churches (Acts 15:40).

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GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Seventeen (Continued)

7. Though Mark left Paul again, he was later recovered and came back to Paul. Perhaps he was strengthened in the Lord through his close fellowship with Peter (1 Pet. 5:13). Mark became a faithful co-worker with Paul and was useful to Paul in his ministry even until Paul's imprisonment and death (2 Tim. 4:11). Mark eventually even became one of the writers of the four Gospels.

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Eighteen

IN ACTS: Timothy

Burden to Impart:

Like Timothy, we should learn the Lord's Word and live a Christian life while we are young so that we will be able to become the most useful to the Lord and His servants when we become older.

Memory Verse: "Let no one despise your youth, but be a pattern to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12).

Facts to Teach:

1. As Paul and Silas journeyed and visited the churches to strengthen them, they met a young disciple named Timothy. Timothy was known and respected by the saints in at least two different churches because of his godly Christian life and testimony (Acts 16:1-3). Little did Paul know that Timothy would become his closest companion and most useful co-worker for the rest of his life.

2. Timothy was not just saved "off of the street" one day. He was raised up with the Scriptures since his babyhood. Though his father seems to have been an unbelieving Greek (for he never had Timothy circumcised), his mother and his grandmother believed in the Lord and in His Word. Just as Timothy's grandmother Lois had imparted her sincere and genuine faith into Timothy's mother, Eunice had also imparted her faith and knowledge of the Lord into Timothy through her way of life and by teaching him God's Word (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15). Timothy had a rich background as a believer.

3. By his natural disposition it seems that Timothy was not an aggressive, bold, strong person like Paul. He seems to have been somewhat fearful and timid (1 Cor. 16:10; 2 Tim. 1:6-7). We can see that not all of the Lord's servants are bold and daring like Peter and Paul. But all that would serve Him must be proper in their Christian living and testimony.

4. Timothy closely followed Paul (2 Tim. 3:10). By being with Paul and listening to him as he spoke God's word he had received a rich deposit of the truth within him (2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:2). Timothy had the same kind of heart and love as Paul did: he genuinely cared for the saints and the churches and sought after the Lord's interests (Phil. 2:19-23). When Paul could not personally visit a church he would send Timothy, for he could trust him to faithfully teach both what Paul taught and the way Paul lived (1 Cor. 4:16-17). As a spiritual son to Paul (1 Tim. 1:2), Timothy was approved and served as a child with a father. Paul even called him "God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ" (1 Thes. 3:2).

5. When Paul was imprisoned in the later years of his life for his testimony, many of the disciples forsook him, even some of his fellow workers (2 Tim. 1:15; 3:10). But Timothy served with Paul faithfully till the end (2 Tim. 3:13, 21).

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Nineteen

IN ACTS: Lydia and the Jailor of Philippi

Burden to Impart:

God's salvation is able to convert the foe into a friend, a harassing jailer into a beloved disciple. God causes all things (even earthquakes) to work together for good for His called ones.

Memory Verse: "...Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

Facts to Teach: [Scripture reading: Acts 16:8-34]

1. As Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke traveled visiting the new young churches and preaching the gospel, the Lord one night gave Paul a vision. He dreamed that a man from Macedonia (Europe) was calling him and saying, "Come over into Macedonia and help us!" (Acts 16:9-10). Paul and his company immediately sailed there, concluding that God had called them to preach the gospel there.

2. They came to a leading city called Philippi. On the Sabbath they went down by the river where people often gathered for prayer. There Paul shared the gospel with a woman named Lydia and the Lord opened her heart. She was so touched that she was baptized and her whole house (Acts 16:12-15). The door had been opened to Europe.

3. A tormented woman who had a demon followed Paul for many days, crying out things and disturbing him. Paul finally cast the demon out of the woman. When the woman's masters realized that they could no longer make money on her (for she used to be a fortune teller), they laid hold on Paul and Silas, dragged them off to the marketplace, falsely accused them, and had them beaten with rods and thrown into prison (Acts 16:16-23).

4. In the prison, Paul and Silas met the jailer. He wanted to be sure there was no possible way of escape, so he threw them into the inner prison and secured their feet in stocks (an instrument of torture with holes to hold the prisoner's wrists, ankles, and neck). How painful! And how pitiful! Beaten, imprisoned, and in stocks for casting a demon out of a woman! Yet Paul and Silas could not be stopped. At midnight, unable to sleep, they prayed. Then they began to sing praises to God. All the prisoners were listening (Acts 16:24-25).

5. Suddenly, a great earthquake shook the very foundations of the prison, opened every door, and loosened every prisoner's chain. The jailer supposed that the prisoners had fled. This would mean that he would be executed for failing to guard them. Instead of waiting to be executed shamefully, he was going to kill himself by falling down on his sword. When Paul saw this he told him to stop, for they were all still there. The jailer then tremblingly asked Paul the way of salvation. That night the jailer and his whole family were saved and baptized. The jailer washed their beaten backs and set a table before them. He and his family rejoiced greatly to be saved.

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Twenty

IN ACTS: Aquila and Priscilla

Burden to Impart:

The Lord calls the couples and families who love Him (like Priscilla and Aquila) to provide a warm home, full of hospitality and love, for his servants, his saints, and his church.

Memory Verse: "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life...and greet the church in their house"
(Romans 16:3-5).

Facts to Teach:

1. As Paul continued on his second journey of ministry he came to a city in Greece named Corinth. Being in a new territory for the gospel, it seems that Paul was both without money and without a place to stay. Surely he prayed for the Lord to provide for his needs and to lead him. Paul met a Jewish couple named Aquila and Priscilla. They had just recently come from Italy, having to leave because of persecution of the Jews. Perhaps this gave them a sympathetic heart for Paul's needs. They allowed Paul to live with them. And because they and Paul were tentmakers by trade they worked together (Acts 18:1-4).

2. Paul stayed with them for a year and six months. They must have learned a lot about the Lord and His ways through Paul during that time. They felt greatly blessed to have the company of such a man of God as Paul with them. Paul also felt blessed that the Lord had given him so dear a couple to stay with, who received the Lord's word and backed him up in his labors in the gospel. During that time Paul preached and testified diligently at Corinth, and the Lord raised up a church there (Acts 18:8-11).

3. When the time came for Paul to move on in his gospel journey he did not leave Corinth alone: Aquila and Priscilla went together with him. The Lord had knit their hearts together in the fellowship unto the gospel. They wanted to accompany Paul and participate in the spread of the gospel. Paul brought them to the city of Ephesus and left them there while he went on his journey. In Ephesus God used them to gain a man for the Lord who became an apostle: Apollos. Apollos was already speaking about the Lord and the Scriptures to the Jews, but he only knew of the baptism of John. This couple gently took him aside and shared with them some of the treasures of God's Word they had learned from Paul. This beloved couple of tentmakers turned the powerful Apollos to the Lord's way so he could help build the churches (Acts 18:18-19, 24-28)!

4. From Paul's epistles we see that this couple served the Lord by opening up their warm home for the saints to meet in. When they lived in Ephesus not only Paul stayed with them, but the church met at their house (1 Cor. 16:19). When they moved to Rome, the church there also met in their house. They were known and loved by all the churches for they had even risked their lives for Paul so that he could carry out his ministry for the Lord (Rom. 16:3-5a).

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Twenty-One

IN THE EPISTLES: Epaphroditus

Burden to Impart:

The Lord's servants need the consoling fellowship and material supply of the brothers and the churches in order to carry on their service and warfare. This cause is worth risking our lives for.

Memory Verse: "...For the work of Christ he drew near even unto death, risking his life, that he might fill up your lack of service toward me" (Philippians 2:30).

Facts to Teach:

1. The Lord called the Apostle Paul and commissioned him with an enormous task: the apostleship of the nations (Gal. 2:8). This required him to be daring and bold. He went from country to country telling the people about the Lord Jesus and His salvation. Some people hated and persecuted Paul, while others left everything to accompany and support him in the carrying out of his burden. Paul could not do it all on his own.

2. Wherever Paul went he could boast that he never asked the newly saved ones or the churches for money for his personal needs. He boasted that in preaching the gospel he made it without charge (1 Cor. 9:18). He left his daily needs for money and food up to the Lord and devoted all of his life and energy to the preaching of the gospel and care of the churches. However, when it was necessary, Paul would use his skill as a tentmaker to supply his needs and the needs of those with him (Acts 20:33-34).

3. The Lord's servants should be taken care of by the saints whom they have enriched with the Word of God (1 Cor. 9:3-11). However, sometimes the saints are negligent or forgetful of their spiritual responsibilities before God and do not send His servants any supply. This is what happened to Paul when he was in prison. He could not make tents there, and he was in need.

4. The church in Philippi remembered Paul's need and sent a trustworthy brother, Epaphroditus, to bring their gift to him in the prison. Paul considered this gift as a sweet, well-pleasing sacrifice to God. And Epaphroditus was like a priest who brought this timely offering and presented it to God by giving it to Paul.

5. Epaphroditus risked his life in order to bring the gift to Paul. He became very sick and nearly died for the work of Christ, that he might make up for the lack of the saints' service to Paul. The only reason he lived was because God had mercy on him, and on Paul also, so that he would not have sorrow upon sorrow.

6. Epaphroditus was a comforting brother to Paul while he was in prison. He was also a fellow-worker, and a fellow-soldier, for he was not just working for the Lord, he was fighting against Satan at the risk of his life to help meet the servant of the Lord's need. Paul said such a person should be held in honor by all.

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Twenty-Two

THE JEWS' REJECTION OF GOD'S CALLING

Burden to Impart:

Because of jealousy the Jewish leaders rejected Christ, their Savior, and because of unbelief the Jewish people have rejected God's calling to them until now. Because of their rejection of Christ, God in mercy opened the door for the Gentiles to be saved.

Memory Verse: "...It was necessary for the word of God to be spoken to you first; since you thrust it away and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

Facts to Teach:

1. God's chosen people were the children of Abraham, the Jews. The Lord Jesus sent his disciples to the Jews first, not to the Gentiles (Matt. 10:5-6). God sent His Son and the Apostles to the Jews first, for they had received His oracles (Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4-5).

2. When Christ ministered He was not opposed by the Gentiles, but by the Jewish leaders: the scribes, the Pharisees, the elders, and the high priest. They saw the signs that Jesus did and should have believed on Him and received Him as their Messiah. Instead, their evil hearts were jealous because many people followed Him and believed on Him (John 11:45-47). Thus, having rejected their Savior, they plotted His death and had Him crucified by the Romans.

3. After the Lord's resurrection and ascension He poured the Holy Spirit down upon His disciples so they could testify of Him to the people. They firstly testified to the Jews in Jerusalem. Although thousands of Jews believed on the Lord through their testimony, their leaders again were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles, threatened them not to speak of the name of Jesus, and beat them (Acts 4:2-3, 5, 16-18; 5:40). They finalized their rejection of Christ by stoning Stephen (Acts 6:12; 7:59).

4. The Apostle Paul also preached the gospel firstly to the Jews. Due to their jealousy they again rejected his testimony and persecuted him continuously. Nevertheless, this was according to God's plan, for their rejection of Christ forced His servants to preach to the Gentiles. Many Gentiles gladly received Christ as their Lord and welcomed His Word (Acts 11:18; 13:44-48).

5. The Jews did not receive Christ because they did not believe on Him. They did not have faith. Instead, they trusted in their own righteousness and goodness (Rom. 9:32-33). Having rejected Christ, their hearts became hardened and completely insensitive to God and His Word. So, God "gave them a spirit of deep sleep, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, until this very day" (Rom. 11:7-8).

6. Although as a nation the Jews have rejected God's calling to Christ and His salvation, the door is still open to whoever would turn his heart to the Lord and believe on Him (2 Cor. 3:15-16).

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Twenty-Three

THE TESTIMONY OF GOD'S CALLED ONES: FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

Burden to Impart:

The love of Christ constrains His disciples to live unto Him for His testimony at any cost, even if it requires their lives.

Memory Verse: "...Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Facts to Teach:

1. Jesus' last charge to His disciples was a charge: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all the creation" (Mark 16:15).

2. Now, after almost 2,000 years, the name of Jesus is known over all the earth, and the story of Jesus, the four Gospels, are the most translated books on the earth; in over 1,000 languages.

3. At times those who believed in Jesus and the Bible were very much hated and persecuted. Satan opposed them and raised up fanatical resistance against them because they preached about the true God and the way of salvation through Christ. If the Lord's disciples were fearful of Satan's opposition and man's persecution, there would be no Christians on the earth today, because no one would know about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's witnesses needed to be faithful and firm to stand for Him at any cost, even their lives.

4. The Bible tells us what happened to some of the Lord's disciples, and history tells us what happened to others. John the Baptist was hated because of his honest testimony and was beheaded by the wicked King Herod (Mark 6:14-29). Stephen was a strong witness for the Lord. Because the Jewish leaders rejected his testimony they stoned him (Acts 6:8-12; 7:54-60). The Apostle James, the brother of John, was the first of the Apostles to die. Since he was a strong witness for the Lord, the Jews were happy when Herod had him killed by the sword (Acts 12:1-2). He died as a young man. His brother, John, lived to an old age through much persecution. As an old man he was sent away in exile to an island called Patmos (Rev. 1:9). The Apostle Peter was imprisoned and forewarned by the Lord that he would be killed (1 Pet. 1:14). According to history he was crucified upside down, refusing to be crucified in the same position as his Lord. The Apostle Paul was imprisoned and was killed for his testimony (2 Tim. 4:6-7).

5. Many of the Lord's called ones laid down their lives for their testimony. They were usually given a choice: to renounce their testimony as a Christian or to die. Some were left in prison until death (as happened to Watchman Nee). It was not hard for them to make their decision, for they had made it long before. If one had died for all, then they would no longer live to themselves, but to Him (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Their decision was this: whether we live, we live to the Lord, or if we die, we die to the Lord...Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:8-9).