

# Gods Beginnings

By Derrick Harrison

*This pamphlet is the outcome of 4 messages preached at Christ Church in Exmouth on Sept. 25<sup>th</sup> and Oct. 9<sup>th</sup>*

rrcc

October 2011

TAKING CHRIST'S LOVE TO THE WORLD

## GOD'S BEGINNINGS

Several Scriptures alert us to new beginnings initiated by God. We have identified three: (1) God beginning with creation, (2) The beginning of the humanity of the Lord Jesus and (3) the beginning of the church.

1). *"In the **beginning** God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen.1:1).* This verse states the fact that God created the world and man and woman. God was there before the world's beginning.

2). *"In the **beginning** was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn.1:1).* This is the first verse of John's Prologue. He refers to Jesus as "the Word" and makes important statements about his relationship to Father and the fact that He was the creator of the universe. A further important statement concerns His Incarnation: *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn.1:14).* This second beginning refers to the fact of Christ's humanity which was something new to God – the incarnate God/man. This was not only a new beginning initiated by God but the incarnation initiated a fundamental and permanent change in the second Person of the Trinity. This change did not alter or detract from His deity but showed the perfection of God's initial creation of man in the image of God. Adam mirrored God but Jesus was God. There was absolute compatibility between the two natures united in One Person; more than compatibility there was union of them. The incarnation in no way affected the divine union of Father and Son as clarified and declared by Jesus, *"I and my Father are One" (Jn.10:30).*

The taking up of the human nature and the sanctifying of it in the Person of the Lord Jesus anticipates the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in transforming sinful human nature and our taking up into the fellowship of the triune God as envisaged in Jesus' High-Priestly prayer of Jn.Ch.17. The entire sanctification of our humanity was envisaged by God as the cause of our election according to Paul, *"just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph.1:4).* Ultimate and complete perfection will be affirmed to us at the Parousia, *"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the*

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Thes.5:23). Expressed differently but stating the same glorious truth John says, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1Jn.3:2).

The second Scripture which refers to the life and ministry of Jesus as a beginning is found in John’s writings and is clearly linked. The eternal Word and creator whose beginning is stated by John in terms of incarnation (Jn.1:14) in his gospel is now introduced in his first letter as, “That which was from **the beginning**, which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have **handled**, concerning the Word of life—“(1Jn.1:1). John must always begin here because his new life began when he met Jesus (Jn.1:37) who became his intimate friend (13:23).

These words refer to the human life of Jesus in the flesh. Although He is not named immediately it soon becomes apparent that John is writing about Jesus. He makes the human life of Jesus immanent by describing his relation to Jesus in hearing his voice, by tactile touch, and physical sight. The human senses now interact with the physicality of Christ. All our senses are activated and employed in our heart engagement with the living Christ (see how the senses are essential to loving interaction in the Song of Songs – for a further development of this theme see my teaching on “The Biblical Doctrine of the Heart” under the heading “Desire”). This is available on the website.

The revolutionary and epochal event of Christ’s coming is stated by the writer to the Hebrews in words that are pure theology,

*“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb.1:1-3).*

There is no Scripture that better expresses the full truth of Christ's incarnate Person. The whole chapter continues on the same sublime level of revelation concerning the Person of Jesus Christ. Note also how the book begins with "**God.**" This is similar to the first verse of the first book in the Bible, but Hebrews takes us a stage further back into God. The first statement about God must not be what He does (**Gen.1:1**) but who He is. This we read in Hebrews, "*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that **He is**, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*". (**Heb.11:6**). Logically, we must consider firstly the God who *exists*, and He who exists eternally. Only then can we consider a God who acts consistently according to His character. God's actions reveal His divine attributes which show to us the inner nature of God. He who exists eternally speaks by declaring His own Name, "*And God said to Moses, '**I AM WHO I AM.**' And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, '**I AM** has sent me to you''*" (**Ex.3:14**). Jesus' "I am" statements in John's gospel are affirmations of His own deity.

3). A further beginning took place when the Holy Spirit came and was poured out on the disciples on the Day of Pentecost "**(Acts Ch.2)**. In the first place we noted the beginning of creation. Then we advanced to the second beginning regarding God which was the coming of Jesus into human flesh known as the incarnation and thirdly we have arrived at the new beginning which is the birth of the church, the family of God. The first concerns Father, the second concerns the Son and the third final new beginning concerns the Holy Spirit. Each of these beginnings profoundly affects one of the Persons in the Trinity.

Of course there are other crucial beginnings along the way. In Genesis (the book of beginnings) God began again when He raised a new earth out of the devastation of the universal flood and began to repopulate the earth from the children of one righteous man called Noah. God made another crucial beginning with Abram in **Gen.Ch.12**. The nation that ensued from the 12 sons of the patriarch Jacob became the "children of Israel" and their history is the focus of the OT from Gen.Ch.12 to the last chapter of Malachi and into the NT. The children of Israel traced their biological roots and ethnic origin to their father Abraham. The origin of the nation's religion went back to Moses and the restoration of their religion following the Exile to Ezra.

The return of the Jews from Babylon marked a new spiritual beginning in a nation that had been stripped of their idolatry in Babylon where they had repented for their apostasy and rebellion against God. But they were waiting for the coming of the Messiah who would initiate God's end time purposes for Israel and for all humanity. The coming of Jesus marked the coming of the Kingdom of God – the rule of God in the lives of his disciples and demonstrated in the miraculous ministry of Jesus. The death of Jesus marked the finish of sin and the beginning of the new man in Christ. The resurrection of Jesus followed by the ascension and the exaltation of Jesus to Father's right hand also marked a new beginning in Christ's mediatorial reign and intercession.

There are new beginnings in the future, where we read that there will be a new heaven and a new earth and a millennium reign of Christ for a thousand years followed by the final end of Satan. The reign of Jesus and the eternity of our life in God will know no end and we shall reign with Christ forever.

I want to now consider the third new beginning which is the church. From eternity to eternity we can see the Son is the focus of Father's eye. Jesus is the "Beloved," so we look at the incarnation in that light and sense the immense significance of that event. When we turn to the church and the coming of the Holy Spirit into human experience we sense a like significance. Reminding ourselves of the harrowing history of man's sinning as we read of it in the Bible we begin to appreciate the importance of Christ's salvation that administers the death blow to human sin. Something big in terms of God and man has taken place. Similarly, something of great significance will take place following Jesus' departure from His disciples into heaven. Jesus carefully prepared them for the time of His ascension which will be followed by the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus puts the Holy Spirit alongside Himself in terms of deity in His teaching about the Spirit (Jn.Ch.14-16). The Holy Spirit is His *exact* and necessary replacement, "*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you **another** (αλλος) Helper, that He may abide with you forever" (Jn. 14:16).* The Greek word means, "another of the same kind." Jesus thus attributes deity to the Spirit alongside His own. The Holy Spirit is Father's replacement for Jesus. Jesus goes even further by saying that His

own departure is *necessary* so that the Holy Spirit can come. What can be more important to them than the physical presence of Jesus and his supernatural ministry among them? One of those miracle days of the Son of man! Both Mary and Martha sum up the feelings and longing we feel often in our hearts, *“Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died” (Jn.11:32).* Jesus addresses this concern in His teaching about the Holy Spirit in this section of Scripture before us,

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (Jn.14:12-14).*

The effective works of Jesus would continue to be done in His personal *absence* by those who ask in the name of Jesus. Who is it that will honour the name of Jesus by continuing works of power? The Holy Spirit honours the name of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is omnipotent power effective in the ministry of Jesus Who will also be effective in doing the works of God through the children of God who ask in the name of Jesus. Peter witnessed the fulfilment of this promise when the lame man was healed in *“the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” (Acts 3:6 cf. Isa.52:6).* It is clear that Peter understood this fact when he said to the people, *“And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all” (v16).*

Jesus recognized that the next beginning in the eternal purposes of God required His departure from them in order that the Holy Spirit may take His place. I do not think we have really adjusted our thinking to these words of Jesus. He is preparing them for the outpouring of God’s fullness which is the coming of the Person of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity (Jesus continually refers to “He”). The coming of the Holy Spirit completes the Biblical revelation of God. At Pentecost the transcendent Holy Spirit becomes immanent in the experience of the disciples imparting the life of God to them as the promise of Jesus is fulfilled in them,

*“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” ” (Jn.7:37-38).*

It was on the great day of the Feast of Pentecost that the promise was fulfilled and the gushing of the Holy Spirit rose up from their heart in ecstatic utterances of tongues and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:4**).

I think it is true to say that we have failed to honour the Spirit as we honour the Son. His self-emptying has been effective and complete as to hide His own Person so that we might focus our whole attention on Christ. But the Holy Spirit must be honoured for such self-effacement which reminds us of a similar effacement of the Son before the Father shown by a humble submission to Him in all things. A primary attribute of the divine nature is humility (see **Phil. Ch.2**). If humility adorns God’s character how much is humility appropriate to us who are human. The fact that we are human demands from God our submission and our need calls for total dependence on Him. For the Christian our submission follows our recognition of who He is and our deep sense of need demands our dependence on Father who is strong and caring. The glorious fact is that God is willing to share His fulness with us. His generous heart swallows up our need by freely showering upon us His abundant grace and generous Spirit. Our God is good to those who in their need cast themselves upon His generosity.

If Christ came for the express purpose of manifesting God to us, surely the Holy Spirit has come to express the fullness of God through us to the world. He has also given to us the Holy Spirit so that God can express Himself in us. When we come together in the church there we experience the fullness of God. There is a deep reality that we enjoy with God alone which is personal communion with our dear Saviour and Lord and there is the further dimension of our public gathering together unto Him which is the assembly of the righteous, which we call the church. Here we experience a further manifestation of the fullness of God as described by Paul in 1Cor.Ch.12 and Ch.14. We have an original picture of the life of the church in

its beginning in Acts Ch.2. and Ch.4. We also have many insights into the life of the church scattered throughout the New Testament letters.

Luke uniquely links the gospel narrative with the continuing activity of God in the Acts. He does this very powerfully in a number of ways. The gospels refer to the “ascension” of Jesus, which views His ascent from the perspective of the disciples. However, Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost takes the ascension further and speaks of “the exaltation” by the right hand of the Father,

*“Therefore being **exalted** to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).*

Peter now describes this event from Father’s perspective. This verse is the key to His sermon and explains theologically the procedure by which the promised Holy Spirit was given to Jesus and mediated through His own Person to the gathered disciples and then poured out on the crowd of three thousand. This marked a new beginning in the history of mankind as recorded in the Bible and there was nothing in the OT to compare with it. Jews of the Diaspora and proselytes from every region of the Roman Empire were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost and on this momentous day were swept by the Holy Spirit into God. This had not happened before and was a token of what was to take place henceforth in the great outpourings of the Holy Spirit. Peter points to the cause of this effusion of the mighty power and fullness of God.

He speaks of *“Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (Acts 2:22-24).*

I think it is crucially important to appreciate the central issues that were addressed by Peter in his inaugural sermon. This verse is a comprehensive statement that (1) describes the miraculous ministry of Jesus – as “a Man” He was anointed by the Holy Spirit and honoured by God. His miracles were a proof to His deity; (2) charges

the Jews with His death at the same time attributing it to the sovereign will of God; and (3) attributes the resurrection to God. The further statement to which I have referred in v33 takes the narrative beyond the resurrection to the exaltation which results in Jesus receiving from Father's hand the promised Holy Spirit which He poured out on the 120 disciples followed by 3,000 and then 5,000.

What happened on this wonderful day must be carefully analysed as recorded in Acts Ch.2 but what followed in subsequent days is equally important if we are to grasp the immense importance of this new beginning with regard to the Holy Spirit. The Day of Pentecost ushered in the age of the Holy Spirit as the baptism of Jesus ushered in the age of Jesus Christ. Both are of equal significance. The age of Jesus was brief, from His baptism to His death, the age of the Spirit spans the life of the church which began in Acts Ch.2 and will not come to an end until the Return of Jesus Christ, which represents a much longer period. This is the day of the outpoured Spirit upon all flesh (**Acts 2:17 cf. Joel 2:28-32**). It is the day of the Holy Spirit's fullness. Before the multitudes were convicted of their sin (v32) the 120 must be filled with the Holy Spirit. What is the fullness of the Holy Spirit? It is the FULNESS of God. Paul speaks of "fullness" (*pleroma*) and expounds the meaning of the word in Ephesians and Colossians (**Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:13; Col.1:19; 2:9, 10**).

There are 2 areas that I want to focus on, (1) the centrality of the Spirit's action in Acts Ch.2 and (2) the momentum and direction in the course of events as they unfold in the history of the church in Acts which demonstrate the sovereignty of the Spirit as He dictates the pace of things and initiates events as they unfold. If we delight in declaring the sovereignty of God this must include equally the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ alongside the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit.

(1) These are the features that characterized the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts Ch.2:

- The preceding events (which form part of the whole). The final teaching, instructions (**Lk.24:49; Acts 1:4-8**) and the specific promise of Jesus regarding the coming of the Spirit (**Jn.Ch.14-16**). Ten days of united and believing prayer.

- God's sovereign plan and purpose focused on the ascent and exaltation of Jesus and God's gift of the promised Holy Spirit to Him and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. God's sovereign manifestations of the Spirit's presence and His baptizing the disciples in the Holy Spirit.
- The Divine signs that accompany the coming of the Spirit – the mighty wind and the individual flame of fire on each of their heads.
- 120 disciples "filled" with the Spirit and speaking in tongues – several languages that were understood by pilgrims from across the Roman Empire.
- Peter's preaching.
- Conviction of sin – "What *must* we do to be saved?"
- A great ingathering of 3,000 souls.
- Repentance, baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This first chapter in the life of the church identifies (Acts Ch.2) the following features:

- The church: the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer.
- Signs and wonders are done by the apostles.
- Unity of heart and community of goods.
- Continuing meeting within the temple.
- Daily growth by the addition of new believers.

These features that characterized the first days of the outpouring are but the beginning of a continued and ongoing momentum of the Spirit's presence and works which is marked by miracles and aggressive preaching by the apostles. The

immediate result of the first miracle and the bold confrontational preaching of Peter and John results in their first taste of persecution and the second outpouring of the Spirit.

(2) The outcome of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the birth of the church and the unity of heart that characterizes the family of God. However, the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit must also be recognized as we observe the advance of the gospel and the purposes of God. The success in mission resulted from the abundant supply and overflow of the Holy Spirit. It has been suggested the book of Acts could equally have been called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is orchestrating events and He is advancing mission. A striking example of this is the preaching of Philip at Samaria which was accompanied by signs and wonders **(8:5-8; cf. 2:43; 4:30, 33; 6:8)**. Mission was accompanied by the miracle power of the Holy Spirit in healing and deliverance. Paul bears this out as he engaged in preaching the gospel **(Acts 19:11; Rom.15:19; Gal.3:5; cf. Peter Acts 5:15)**.

The unfolding events that demonstrate the initiative and action of the Holy Spirit:

- (We will not refer again to the events of Ch.2). The healing of the lame man followed by preaching and the repercussions in terms of confrontation with the authorities. The healing is a powerful demonstration of the Spirit's action; similarly we read that Peter was "filled with the Holy Spirit" when he is confronted by the priestly hierarchy. This again points to the action of the Holy Spirit coming upon Him at this precise moment of need (4:8). Such occasions are numerous.
- The second outpouring of the Holy Spirit following united prayer for boldness and miracles in the face of hostility and persecution. Accompanying manifestations: the house where they were assembled together was shaken by the power of God and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (again!). They preach the word of God with boldness and their unity together is further described, *"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"*

**(Acts 4:32).** Further outpourings of the Holy Spirit sustain and advance the work of God. The consolidation of their rich unity and fellowship led them as in Ch.2 to live together sharing their material goods among one another, a practise that does not appear in any other NT church.

- The swift judgment of Ananias and Sapphira is not an initiative of the Spirit that we would normally dwell on but demonstrates His swift intervention in co-ordination with Peter's words of judgment (Ch.5). It belongs to that period when men were deeply exercised about their material possessions – Barnabas sold his land holdings on the island of Cyprus and thus entered into what God was doing in the church at that time. Also the apostles experienced a season of unprecedented miracle power (5:12 cf. 2:43; 4:33; 6:8). The apostle Peter witnessed the healing of the sick and the possessed by virtue of his shadow passing over them as they lay helpless on the ground, "so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed" **(Acts 5:15-16)**. To this must be added the occasion at Ephesus when Paul experienced a special season of miracle power (19:11-12). To those Christians who believe that the miracle power of the Holy Spirit has ceased have confined themselves to a pseudo Christianity devoid of power. How the Spirit is grieved by our unbelief.
- A further demonstration of the Spirit's initiative follows the miracle shadow of Peter. The religious leaders are incensed by the success and advance of the gospel and imprison the apostles. At this point the Holy Spirit takes total control of the situation and the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and commanded them to proclaim in the temple the words of this life! (5:17-20). This is the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit impelling the apostles to proclaim the word of God in the face of hostile powers.
- Could you continue this theme throughout the book of Acts? Consider Stephen and the words of authority and irresistible power that led

inevitably to his martyrdom. See Philip the evangelist at Samaria and the supernatural power of the Spirit that accompanied his labours. Surely the Spirit longs to be generous in His miracles that answer the desperate needs of men and women who have never heard the Name of Jesus. Please note that miracles did not meet the need of the heart for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. It was not until the apostles Peter and John came down to Samaria and prayed for the disciples that they received the Holy Spirit. We must never become occupied by the periphery things, or the gifts of the Spirit for that matter. The character of the church that came about through the life of the Spirit was primarily a heart of unity and fellowship and attendance to the key ministries of the church – Scripture (the apostles doctrine), fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer (Acts 2:42). The unity of love provides the foundation for the manifestation of spiritual gifts in the church.

- One of the most dramatic interventions of the Spirit occurred with the overhauling of Saul on his way to destroy the work of God at Damascus. Prayer on the part of believers there halted Saul in his evil campaign of destruction. No one at that time had knowledge of what was in the mind of God in apprehending this zealous and angry son of Abraham. This action of the Spirit is not characterized by moderated restraint but by a sudden blinding light and a violence that caused Saul to fall to the ground (22:7) and the authoritative voice of Jesus rebuked him for his treatment of the church which Jesus took as a persecution of His own person – *“why are you persecuting Me?”* (9:4). God moves in complete unison. All His actions are acts of the triune God. There is no disparity here when we talk of the initiative of the Holy Spirit as the initiative of Christ. The fact is that God is sovereign in His church because the true church consists of those who have bowed their knee and submitted their hearts to the Lord and His rule and government. All today do not own His rule and that is the cause of the disparity between the sovereign rule of God and the mess that we see around us in the world. Man in his rebellion has rejected the rule of God. Saul meets the risen and glorified Christ and bows in humble submission. Men and women whose hearts have been subdued by meeting the risen

Christ advance the kingdom of God. It is apostles who are called to suffer for Jesus (9:16), who encounter great physical weakness and infirmity on whom rests the power of God (2Cor.11:30; 12:9).

- The first outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles. This follows the procedure outlined by Jesus, *“Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria and the uttermost parts”* (1:8); a pattern executed and accomplished by the Spirit. This outpouring is called the Gentile Pentecost because it marked a new departure and raised serious questions for the church at Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit suddenly *“fell on all those which heard the word”* (10:44). The descriptive phrases employed to describe the Spirit’s actions are consistent and point back to the baptism of Jesus, where we read that the Holy Spirit descended *“upon Him”* (The Greek also points to the fact that it remained upon Him – which points to His consist godliness of character and life). In Acts we read that the flames of fire sat upon each of them. What follows is not the outward descent of the Spirit but the *inward* uprising of the Spirit, *“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2:4). The two perspectives are describing one event, the personal baptism of the Spirit.

This description of the inward uprising of the Spirit exactly corresponds to Jesus’ own description of the Spirit demonstrating His fulness like a river in spate. I can remember as a child the awesome river flood of the Eden in Cumbria at a time of continual torrential winter rain, standing on the wide bank of the river as a small boy watching the swollen river as it coursed its way forward with such momentum and power. It is significant that one of the symbols often employed to describe this movement of the Spirit is a river. We certainly need new and continuing fillings of the Holy Spirit (Eph.5:8). Please also note that this first Gentile Pentecost took place in a house, a point which has great significance. Also note that the concerns of the Jerusalem apostles were allayed by the fact that the coming of the Holy Spirit had been accompanied by the gift of tongues (10:45-46; 11:15-17).

- The next event picks up the thread of persecution that followed the persecutions initiated by Paul which had decimated the church at Jerusalem and resulted in a mass exodus of believers to the region of Judaea. Scattered believers preached the gospel wherever they went

(10:19-20). Some had reached Greeks in Antioch resulting in a large number of them believing. This was the first known church founded by ordinary believers. I am sure that many churches like that in Rome had been founded by Jewish pilgrims who had been present at Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost and found themselves swept into the life of the Spirit (Acts 2:9-10), returned home to spread the good news of the gospel and founded churches throughout the Roman Empire.

- Acts Ch.12 marks Peter's farewell from the scene but it also a dramatic intervention of the Spirit as angels lead him forth out of prison. I think we have also to note a strange absence. The apostle James is suddenly killed – no account is given about how it happened and it is quickly passed over due to the impending death of the apostle Peter. The church is catalysed into action and their only recourse is to continual prayer for Peter's release. We learn from this crisis that 24/7 prayer accomplishes its objective and that prayer is a prompting for the Spirit's decisive action. Another intervention took place when the believers engaged in prayer at the news of Saul's soon arrival in Damascus. These are profound lessons in such a day as this when our only recourse is to pray – but with what results!
- I have chosen Acts Ch.13 as my final demonstration of the ongoing direction and sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in the life of the early church. I referred to Antioch as the first church founded by persecuted believers expelled from Jerusalem by Saul's persecutions. Barnabas was sent by the Jerusalem church to see what was going on at Antioch. His gracious response demonstrates the heart of him. His next act also demonstrates his wisdom and humility in seeking out Saul to teach the new believers in the church. Chapter 13 begins with the whole church assembled together with certain prophets and teachers ministering to the Lord. During this period of waiting on the Lord a prophetic word is spoken by the Holy Spirit, *"As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the **Holy Spirit** said, "Now separate to **Me** Barnabas and Saul for the work to which **I** have called them" (Acts 13:2).*

Now this is amazing and sums up all I have been showing you from Scripture. Luke attributes this specific prophecy to the Holy Spirit. You are familiar with the OT formula, "Thus says the Lord." Reading this verse we can say "Thus says the Spirit." This is further emphasised and clarified by the Holy Spirit saying to the gathered company, "*Separate unto ME Barnabas and Saul.*" The Holy Spirit is declaring Himself as the author of the prophetic word but also declaring Himself as sovereign in the affairs of the church. He is also the Lord of mission. He initiates mission here and sends forth Barnabas and Saul as His first missionaries. This also is affirmed by Scripture by recording the fact that they were "*sent forth by the Holy Spirit*" (v4). The secret of their success lies in the fact that they are sent forth at the initiative of the Holy Spirit, under His command and endued with His power and added to this the reality of the church where their call had originated – they had all been witness to it and thus were implicated in terms of responsibility towards them.

God has not ceased to maintain and sustain His creation by His power and providential care, nor has Christ ceased His intercessions for the church, nor has the Holy Spirit ceased to outpour Himself on all flesh. But we with Him await the conclusion to this age of the church and the Spirit; we anticipate the return of Jesus Christ, the Father's beloved Son. The Spirit maintains our watchfulness and stirs our hearts in eager anticipation. The Spirit also is ceaseless in His energy for the evangelization of the world. We know Jesus' blood is sufficient to ensure salvation for all but we all know that all will not be saved, but the Spirit will not rest in this generation until the whole world has heard the good news of Jesus Christ. Pentecost speaks hope to us and faith that through subsequent outpourings of the Holy Spirit the unreached multitudes will be reached and won for Christ. Jesus mapped out the course of mission when He prophesied the coming of the Holy Spirit in power,

*"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"* (Acts 1:8).