



The Prayer Life of the Early Church

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Christ for the Nations

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

- 1) **Prayer that prepares for Pentecost (Lk.24:49; Acts 1:8, 14)**
- 2) **Prayer that perpetuates Pentecost (Acts 4:23-31)**
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- 4) **Prayer that prepares for Mission (Acts 13:1-4)**

This pamphlet is a follow on from a previous study entitled, “The Prayer Life of Jesus from Luke’s Gospel.” Two basic facts emerge about Jesus’ praying: (1) each time prayer is mentioned in the Gospel we find that Jesus is alone; (2) there is always an important reason why Jesus prayed. Alongside those times when prayer is focused on a particular object or caused by a particular circumstance there is also the continual praying that appropriates grace and helps maintain our relationship with God – to this kind of prayer we apply the exhortation of Paul to “pray without ceasing” (1Thes.5:17) and fits well into Paul’s comment about his own prayer life when he says to the Corinthians, “*I pray with tongues more than you all*” (1Cor.14:14-15, 18). Such constant prayer in the Spirit edifies the soul and helps us stay close to the Lord.

Many of the Psalms are employed by Christians for personal prayer, whereas many churches in Scotland employ them for corporate singing instead of singing hymns or worship songs. Often we go alone to make vocal our inner heart (Ps 5:1-3 etc.). But one of the fundamental characteristics of all prayer is that we articulate with our voice the prayers that gush or groan from our heart. It is inconceivable that people can attend prayer meetings and not pray aloud!

We have one example of this personal praying in the life of Jesus in which we have no explanation as to why He devoted time alone with Father (Mk.1:35 cf. Lk.5:16 see also Mat.6:7). In both of these references we note that Jesus *withdrew* into a *solitary* place and the *wilderness*. Obviously on these occasions Jesus needed to be alone, yet in Gethsemane He longed for His chosen disciples to participate with Him in prayer and to share His burden (Mat.26:40). We may call this withdrawal praying to meet alone with Father in an uninhibited release of the heart, responding to the inner movings of the Holy Spirit which may be expressed in painful unutterable groans (Rom.8:26); in joyful shouting as described by David (Ps.47:1; cf. Isa.12:6; Zeph.3:14); or in tranquility of spirit as we engage in worship and meditation (Ps.23:2). Alongside this study you may choose to fuel your own prayer life by engaging with men and women who modeled prayer in their lives.¹

¹ The prayer life of: David Brainerd, Fraser of Lisuland, “Praying Hyde,” George Muller, Hudson Taylor etc.

PRAYER THAT PREPARES FOR PENTECOST (LK.24:49; ACTS 1:8, 14)

The disciples gathered together and engaged in 24/7 prayer, with the assuring words of Jesus in their hearts that they would shortly receive power following the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus reminds them of His words concerning the promise of the Father: *“but wait for the promise of the Father, which says He, ye have heard of me”* (Acts 1:4; Lk.24:49); and in the following verse, *“but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence”* (v5).

And so they depart from the mount of Ascension and ascend now to the upper room. Ten days later they spill out from this room to descend to the crowds of pilgrims assembled in the temple precinct, who had been irresistibly drawn to that location by the sound of the wind of God from heaven. It was the same mighty wind that had parted the Red Sea for the Israelites as they fled from Pharaoh’s army.

The disciples did not know how long they needed *“to tarry”* (Lk.24:49) until they were *“endued with power from on high”* (Lk.24:49). However, the day had been fixed in God’s calendar. This is emphasised by the reference in Acts 2:1; *“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come”* God *suddenly* came to the assembled disciples. God had been working according to His time plan from the first day in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned, thus destroying their relationship with their creator. However, the time schedule of events from the day of the resurrection to the day of the outpouring is shown to us exactly as God planned it to be (Lev.23:15-16). When Divine sovereignty meets with the importunate prayers of God’s people God will move in mighty power on their behalf - at the same time accomplishing His own purposes through their prayers.

When we studied the prayer life of Jesus we were struck by the strategic place of prayer at crucial moments in his life. In the book of Acts this is also true with accompanying results. The results of 10 days of importunate prayer, linked with the sovereign purposes of Almighty God results in Pentecost, the birth of the church by the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon 120 praying disciples. The immediate results are described by Luke. We need to recognize them, because whenever the Holy Spirit is poured out the church instinctively goes back to this occasion as the authentic proof of a work of God. Acts Ch.2 is viewed as a model for future outpourings, or as Peter said, *“This is that”* (Acts 11:17; 15:8-9).

The background of the outpouring of the Spirit is the departure of Jesus from among them and His final words before His ascension. Luke uses this occasion to link the conclusion of Jesus’ ministry and the beginning of the churches ministry; to link the ascent of Jesus with the descent of the Spirit. Read the end of Luke (24:49-53) in conjunction with Acts (1:2-14). Both passages refer to the final instructions of Jesus and His ascension; they form a strong linkage, providing a bridge for us to transit from the gospel of Jesus to the gospel of the church, from the powerful presence and ministry of Jesus to the powerful presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit in Christ’s apostles. These two passages form a strong linkage, like the coupling between a locomotive and the carriages of a train.

There are several points from these two passages that give clues as to how we must also pray, reminding us that prayer prepares the disciples for Pentecost. Jesus instructs them to *“tarry”* until they are endued with power from on high (Lk.24:49). The church has always interpreted this word in relationship to prayer and *“waiting on God.”* However, please note that Jesus links tarrying with a clear purpose – *until* you are empowered by the Spirit. In those instructions there is a definite PROMISE. This promise is spoken again in Acts (1:4-5, 8) and there Jesus says specifically that they will be baptized in the Holy Spirit as a fulfilment of John Baptist’s prophecy. The baptism of the Spirit is also linked in both passages with the promise of the Father (Lk.24:49; Acts 1:4) and Peter makes the fulfilment of that promise to Jesus the pivotal event of Jesus’ exaltation, resulting in the coming of the Holy Spirit who is the *“promised”* One. Having received the promised gift Jesus mediated the Spirit through His own Person. Jesus is the baptizer in the Spirit as John prophesied of Him: *“He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”* (Lk.3:16). This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus’ exaltation. The PROMISE of the soon coming of the Spirit was the basis for believing and persevering prayer. So we recognise the simple process that had such world shaking results! – The **promise**, translated into united **prayer** intercession, resulting in the

outpouring of the Holy Spirit. What is manifested in the initial outbreak of revival becomes the continuing daily experience of the church. Before the outpouring the disciples engaged in 10 days of united and believing prayer.

These are the features that must be considered with regard to the coming of the Holy Spirit:

- The preceding occasions in Luke where Jesus models prayer. The final teaching, instructions, and specific promise of Jesus regarding the coming of the Spirit. Ten days of united and believing prayer.
- God's 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 through Him. The exaltation of Jesus is in direct consequence of His victory on the cross. The result of Jesus accomplishing salvation is crowned by the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- God's sovereign manifestations of the Spirit's presence and His baptizing the disciples in the Holy Spirit.

These are the features that accompany the coming of the Holy Spirit:

- The Divine signs – the mighty wind blowing and the flaming fire dividing up into individual flames resting/remaining on each of their heads.
- 120 disciples “filled” with the Spirit and speaking in tongues – 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.

These are the features that characterize the early church:

- The church: the apostles' doctrine, fellowship and unity, breaking of bread, prayer.
- Signs and wonders are done by the apostles.
- Community of goods.
- Continuing links with the temple.
- Daily growth by the addition of new believers, increasing to 5,000 (4:4).

These features which 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 forthright preaching by the apostles. The immediate result of the first miracle and the bold preaching of Peter and John results in their first taste of persecution and the second outpouring of the Spirit.

In 2:42 we read a summary of the key features (core values) of the early church. I want to link two of them together – prayer and fellowship. The following quote by **Charles Finney Lectures on Revival** brings these two elements together, “Nothing tends more to cement the hearts of Christians than praying together. Never do they love one another so well as when they witness the outpouring of each other's hearts in prayer. Their spirituality begets a feeling of union and confidence, highly important to the prosperity of the Church. ...It can be doubtful whether Christians can ever be otherwise than united, if they are in the habit of really praying together. And where they have had hard feelings and differences among themselves, these are all done away by uniting in prayer.”

PRAYER THAT PERPETUATES PENTECOST (ACTS 4:23-31)

This is the second outpouring of the Holy Spirit and is directly associated with specific prayer for (1) boldness in the face of persecution, and a second prayer request which is the outcome of the first, which is (2) for God to continue to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Jesus - as in the case of the lame man (3:6-7). They do not pray for protection, but for continued boldness to proclaim Jesus' Name (3:16).

Peter and John on their release from prison instinctively hurry to "their own company" to tell them of recent events, and their first taste of real persecution. In their concern and alarm they instinctively turn to *urgent* prayer, not as an end in itself but as a weapon of warfare. The conflict is with the Jewish authorities, who have been charged again by the apostles with the death of Jesus (3:13; 2:23). When the church heard Peter's story the whole company *instinctively* turned to prayer. The first outpouring had been preceded by unity – "they were all with one accord in one place" (2:1) and following the first outpouring the believers discovered a deeper unity, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common" (2:44). Some commentators believe that the whole church prayed this prayer in unison together.

We need to carefully look how they prayed and what they prayed. The concluding request is most significant, to which I referred earlier. The outcomes are equally significant. Luke links the outcomes as linked directly with prayer, "When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were gathered together" (4:31). This is not a diversion, but an accompanying manifestation of the Holy Spirit, as we found in Ch.2 when the *rushing mighty wind* accompanied the first outpouring and individual *tongues of fire* sat on each of their heads. I include an extract from my Notes on revival which were prepared for the "New Life Conference" in 2008 at the end of my study (NOTE ONE).

There is a Divine purpose in supernatural manifestations that accompany the coming of the Holy Spirit (May I remind you that God chooses how He will manifest Himself). I wrote in the last essay on the Prayer Life of Jesus about the invisibility of the Holy Spirit and the need for visible tokens of His presence and sometimes His actions. Such manifestations are never an end in themselves but they are an integral part of God's revelation. Look at the *immediate outcomes* in the life of the church and the *ongoing activity* of the apostles. There are very real results in the life of the church that follow from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We did this exercise following the first outpouring and we do the same here (4:31-35).

Outcomes:

- The *place was shaken* under the power of God where they are gathered together (I include further examples from George Fox (1653) and Duncan Campbell in the Hebrides (1949) – see NOTES TWO and THREE at the end of my Study).
- They were *all* filled with the Spirit (again!). Some for the first time. The result of outpouring is ingathering of new believers, filled with the Holy Spirit. There don't seem to be any who are excluded.
- They spoke the word of God with boldness and power (specific answer to prayer)
- Healings (5:12, 15-16) - (specific answer to prayer)
- Unity of the multitude of new believers – community of goods (as in Ch.2). Part of deepening commitment results in selling houses and land to meet the needs of the multitude of new believers.

Further outcomes require one to carefully examine the progress of the church as it unfolds in subsequent chapters. Alongside the *manifestations* of the Holy Spirit we also note the *works* of the Holy Spirit. The preaching of the apostles is the primary work of the Holy Spirit following their baptism in the Spirit. You must study the preaching of the apostles

and the impact of the Word related to the growth of the church throughout the book of Acts. Note also those occasions when a newly gathered church was taught “the apostles’ doctrine” (2:42; Eph.4:4-6 see also Acts 11:26; 18:11; 19:9-10). Note every reference to healing by the apostles, beginning with 2:43. Philip’s preaching is accompanied by an outbreak of miracles of healing and exorcisms (8:5-8). Further outbreaks of miraculous power occur in Peter’s ministry (5:16), and later in Paul’s ministry (19:11-12). The Biblical phrase found in 5:12 – “signs and wonders” describes the operation of the Holy Spirit in miracles. These outbreaks of the Spirit in miraculous healings are similar to the manifestations of the Spirit’s power that accompanied the ministry of Jesus following His baptism in the Jordan (Mat.4:23-25). We witness here the *continuation* of Jesus’ ministry in the context of the Spirit’s activity in the early church. Similarly, we have reference to “the multitudes” that were drawn irresistibly to Jesus on account of His healings (Mat.4:25; Mk.3:7, 8; Acts 5:14 etc.). The point about the *continuation* of Jesus’ ministry in that of the apostles is an important point because at the present time there is some debate about the gospel Jesus preached and also Paul.² The writer to the Hebrews clearly recognizes the continuation of Jesus’ ministry in the first era of the early church (Heb.2:3b-4). This was demonstrated in the preaching of salvation and the “signs and wonders” that *confirmed* the message. An obvious fact that affirms the continuation is the strong link between Luke and Acts. By making this strong link we may apply Luke’s Prologue (Lk.1:1-4) to both volumes of his work.

Throughout the Acts Luke observes specific occasions when the Spirit is manifest with the purpose of working a miracle or a healing, or a judgment (5:5, 10; 13:11). The first healing of the lame man (3:1-11) is followed by Peter’s explanation of the event (vv12-18) concluding with an application and call to repentance (19-26). There is no reference to the Holy Spirit but this instance is a clear parallel to other occasions when the Spirit moved in power to accomplish supernatural healings (4:33; 5:12, 15-16; 6:8; 8:6; 13:9; 14:9-10; 16:18; 19:6, 11). The authority of the Holy Spirit was manifested in the preaching of the apostles; Luke often refers to the power of the word of God (2:4; 4:31; 6:7; 8:14; 10:36, 37; 12:24; 19:20). Paul’s preaching, like that of Peter resulted in deep conviction of sin (24:25).

The evident growth of believers is also the work of the Holy Spirit and twice we read that “the Lord” *added* to the church new believers (2:47; 5:14). Luke is clearly interested in numerical additions to the church, or what we refer to as church growth. On the Day of Pentecost 120 disciples filled with the Holy Spirit spill out of the upper room and 3,000 Jews and proselytes from every part of the Roman Empire repent, believe, are baptized and receive the Spirit (v41), followed by the 5,000 (4:4). It is clear that Luke takes careful note of numerical additions to the church and speaks of believers being multiplied, although at times the numbers are so great he simply refers to “multitudes” (4:32; 5:5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 11:21; 17:4;18:9-10; etc.). Luke also records the growth of the word of the Lord; Luke is far more interested in spiritual growth than numerical growth, “*Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied*” (Acts 9:31).

There are also a series of occasions when the Holy Spirit takes initiative and gives strong direction (4:8; 5:19; 8:26; 10:19; 11:12; 12:7; 13:2; 16:6; 20:23 21:11). Possibly the greatest intervention of all is the occasion of Paul’s apprehension on the Damascus Road, when “the Lord” confronts him (not the Holy Spirit). Paul conversed with Him calling Him Jesus. Similarly, it is the Lord who speaks to Peter regarding Cornelius (10:4, 14) and it was Stephen “full of the **Holy Spirit**” who saw the **Lord** standing on the right hand of **God**” (7:55-56). This verse bears witness to the 3 Persons of the trinity present on the occasion of Stephen’s martyrdom. The Lord also spoke to Paul at Corinth when he faced persecution (18:9-10). It was during the ordeal of the storm that “the angel of the Lord” fulfilled the role of the Lord, reassuring him of the safety of all on board (27:23-24). It is **GOD** in all these situations who speaks, in the person of

² Emphasis is made on the difference between Jesus’ preaching of the Kingdom of God and Paul’s preaching of justification by faith. There is also a debate as to whether Paul’s central teaching was justification, or some other paradigm. The Holiness preachers of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century would have said that Paul’s central teaching was to do with Christian experience, summed up on the expression “in Christ.” More recently the Pentecostal scholar Gordon Fee has suggested that Paul’s central paradigm has to do with “God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul” (Hendrickson Publishers), this book is a must for all serious Bible students.

the **Holy Spirit**, or the person of the **Lord**, or the Lord's messenger, the angel of the Lord who guides and directs the words and deeds of the key characters. He intervenes in circumstances, He speaks, He gives clear direction, He brings growth, and He encourages and strengthens. Before Paul writes his epistles we discover that Christ in His exaltation not only dispenses the Holy Spirit but is also the head of the church.

In Acts Luke recorded three occasions when the Holy Spirit was poured out - on the believers at Jerusalem twice and once on the Gentiles who had met together in the house of Cornelius. We often speak of the Jewish Pentecost and the Gentile one. The first took place in the precincts of the temple and significantly the third in a house. For the next 200-300 years the church met in houses ("house churches"). It was only when the Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity and made it the state religion of the Roman Empire that the church took up its residence in the centre square and began to meet in churches modelled on the secular basilica. The church had recognition and prestige, a situation that no longer exists in Western society. The church in the West is now marginalized and stripped of its privileges making way for a "multi-faith" community where Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus have equal recognition alongside Christianity. To speak out against this multi-faith community will bring immediate persecution of Christians. However, if the church is depleted in the West its growth in the South is nothing short of phenomenal. In Latin America and Africa the church outstrips the growth of Islam.

New believers at Samaria who came to the Lord through Philip also received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the hands of the apostles Peter and John. On one occasion Paul also lays his hands on about 12 disciples of John Baptist who receive the Holy Spirit (19:6). The book of Acts is unique in its documentation of the first years of Christianity and its extension from Jerusalem throughout the Roman Empire. What we have to recognize is that it is by no means a comprehensive account. For example we have no reference to most of the apostles of the Lord Jesus. We have a record of how churches were founded but no history of their development; it would appear from Acts that Paul's visit to Athens was like a wet squib. Luke says that despite everything "*certain men clave unto him, and believed: among them was Dyonysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them*" (17:34). The subsequent history of the church at Athens is a wonderful story that we do not have from Scripture.

One further point before we move on. May we suggest that as the gospel was preached in new unreached locations (2Cor.10:16; Rom.15:20) that the kingdom of God advanced through further outpourings of the Holy Spirit and that signs and wonders accompanied the preaching of the apostles. We see the demonstrations of the Holy Spirit that accompanied the preaching of Philip at Samaria (8:6-7) and he was not an apostle; we also see similar phenomena under the preaching of Stephen (6:8). Paul reminds the Christians of Galatia how the gospel came to them at the beginning (Gal.3:5; see also Heb.2:3-4). Please note that for Paul the primary thing about the entrance of the gospel to the Galatians was that they had received a revelation, "Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth, crucified among you (3:1), but this revelation of Christ crucified was also accompanied by the "supply of the Spirit" and the "working of miracles" (3:5). Similarly, when Paul came to Corinth his determination was to preach "Christ crucified" (1Cor.2.2 cf. 1:18). Note also that when Philip went down to Samaria he "preached Christ unto them," but is also evident that the miracles that accompanied his preaching contributed to their universal response to the gospel (8:5-6). However, these new believers had not yet received the baptism in the Holy Spirit which was imparted to them through the laying on of the hands of the apostles Peter and John (Acts 8:15-17 cf. 19:6).

Acts Ch.6 records a satanic attempt to counterfeit genuine sacrificial giving prompted by the Holy Spirit. The swift judgment by the Spirit meted out on Ananias and Sapphira was severe and immediate and shows that in the presence of such a powerful movement of the Holy Spirit the demands of obedience are imperative. Evan Roberts in the Welsh revival of 1905 continually emphasised the need for instant obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and the danger of grieving Him.

The second occasion of persecution results in their imprisonment and the direct intervention of the angel of the Lord releasing them and urging them to return to the temple to continue witnessing to the people (19-20). The Holy Spirit is determining the pace of action and witness. God is in control and the boldness of the apostles' witness is irresistible in

its force (v29-32). Not only does the Holy Spirit initiate and direct change but it is also true that persecution also drives events precipitating missional preaching resulting in growth and the spread of the gospel.

The murmuring of the Gentile widows and the appointment of the 7 young men to oversee food distribution demonstrates a further result of the church's growth. After a period of 7 years a second generation of men have emerged who are able to manage practical responsibilities in the church. The spiritual development of 2 of them – Stephen and Philip show that they became men of powerful ministry (see Ch.7 and Ch.8). Please note that the appointment of the 7 was to relieve the apostles of practical responsibilities, not for leisure activities, but rather that they should not be diverted from their focus on prayer and the word of God (v2).

PRAYER THAT RELEASES PETER FROM PRISON (ACTS 12:5-19)

James was the first apostle to be martyred and Luke's account brings us to the day before Peter's planned execution. The first martyr of the church was Stephen. The situation appears dire. It looks as if the martyrdom of James had caught the church off guard. There is no record of anything about it. It is simply mentioned with no details. It appears as a prelude to introducing the urgent situation for the church of a second apostle about to be killed.

The church again instinctively turned to prayer as their *only* means of dealing with the situation. We are faced with an impossible crisis which is answered by **persevering** and **prevailing** prayer. Following my account of the "East Africa Revival" in Kenya I referred to 3 lectures on Prayer in Charles Finney's "Lectures on Revival" which in my view is the best material on this topic of prevailing and persevering prayer. I also refer you to Dr. Wesley Duewel "Mighty Prevailing Prayer" (Zondervan). All his books on prayer and revival are outstanding. A simple definition of prevailing prayer is prayer which obtains its objective. Examples of people who prevailed in prayer are Abraham (Gen.20:17-18), Moses (Ex.8:12 etc. Num.12:13), Jacob (Gen.32:24-32), Hannah (1Sam.1:27), and Elijah (James 5:14-18) who provide wonderful examples from Scripture of prevailing prayer. We also have the statement of James:

*"The **effectual**, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16).*

To prevail in prayer means that it is effectual – it obtains its objective. The prayers of the church were effectual in the release of Peter from prison. The prayers of the saints at Damascus preserved their lives from Paul's intention to persecute them and resulted in his conversion!

Jesus' prayers were effectual. In Gethsemane the struggle for Jesus was the issue of Father's will. We must seek the mind of Christ in order to pray effectively. Moses interceded for Sodom, but did he break off too soon? Not one prayer of Jesus failed, or was ineffective or ineffectual. Read Heb.5:7.³ The KJV gives the impression that Jesus sought Father to deliver Him *from* death. If that was the prayer of Jesus it is quite clear that God did not answer His prayer. But look a little closer and you will see that Jesus prayed to be delivered *out of* death. God took Him into death and delivered Him out of death by raising Him from the dead.

Paul was familiar with prayer and later I intend to study the prayers and the prayer-life of the apostle. At Philippi he and Silas engaged in earnest prayer following their awful treatment by the authorities. The amazing result was that the prison was shaken to its foundations by an earthquake. I have already given you examples of the power of God shaking buildings; I did not include Mount Sinai (Ex.19:18 cf. Isa.64:1-3; 6:4). Here is another example due to prayer. Paul survived his awful sufferings as a result of miraculous interventions resulting from prevailing prayer. There is only one occasion when his ability to prevail in prayer failed him. He records in 2Cor.12:8 that he specifically sought God three times to remove the thorn from his flesh and each time he specifically sought God to remove it he failed to prevail. God's answer was to say no. Finney says that not to seek God to intervene in our trying circumstances is to tempt God. How many times have we failed simply because we gave up before we had an answer? Many Christians do not know about this kind of praying and they have no experience of prevailing in prayer. Hannah is a wonderful example of such praying, she said: "*For **this** child I prayed*" (1Sam.1:27). Finney says most Christians come to learn how to pray effectual prayers through a protracted process of prayer. In other words, it comes gradually by experience. Prayer has to be worked at, and we have to see it as our first priority. Let me give you 3 verses from Paul:

"Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with unutterable groanings" (Rom.8:26).

³ See Appendix One: Exposition of Hebrews 5:7; p7

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph.6:18).

“Pray without ceasing” (1Thes.5:17).

Jamiesen, Fausset and Brown in their Commentary on Acts 12:18, 19 say that Peter’s deliverance from prison must have been during the fourth watch (3.00-6.00 a.m.); else he must have been missed by the keepers at the change of the watch. The lesson I see here is the importance of continuing in prayer – what would have happened if they had stopped praying earlier? Despite the fact that they did not yet have assurance that God had answered their prayers they continued to pray resulting in the intervention of “the angel of the Lord” (12:7; 5:19). Many commentators (including R. A. Torrey) believe that this angel in the O.T. is a pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus Christ. The event is amazing (read the details of his release) and shows that united prayers release the power of God. They *unite* in prayer because they are united in heart and purpose. Each example of prayer which we have discussed has this primary characteristic (1:14; 2:1, 46; 4:24). These people are not praying their own prayers; they are uniting together in one prayer. They have seen clearly the will of God, unite together in prayer and persist until they prevail. This is what I understand as corporate prayer that brings answers.

PRAYER THAT PREPARES FOR MISSION (ACTS 13:1-4)

A new chapter in the history of the book of Acts is initiated here, and yet it is a continuing of the momentum that follows directly from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. One can recognize key events that show to us the development of the work of the Lord as the church expands and grows. One example of this is the crisis that arose over the problem of the widows in Ch.6. and the appointment of the 7 young men to “serve tables.” This was not a permanent appointment but it resulted in Stephen and Philip coming to the fore and developing ministries that far transcended their original remit. We find Philip at Samaria where his evangelistic preaching is accompanied by miracles – formerly the domain of the apostles. I believe that Stephen would also have developed apostolic gifts had not his ministry been cut short by martyrdom.

A further example of this follows Paul’s relentless persecution of the church at Jerusalem resulting in the scattering of believers who preached the word of God as they fled from the city (8:4). Little did they realize the result (11:19)! But this marked a further development in the work of the Lord in that ordinary believers were used by the Lord to evangelize, and not only that – but Greeks embraced the good news of salvation. Thus, the first Gentile church was born in Antioch by ordinary believers sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Paul had been drawn back into the situation at Antioch by Barnabas. Together they taught the gathered assembly of new believers for 2 years. As a result of a word of prophecy from Agabus predicting widespread famine (11:28), the church collected relief for the brothers in Judaea and sent their relief supplies with Barnabas and Saul. This was important because it brought Saul to the notice of the apostles, no doubt gaining their approval because of his labours among the poor of Judaea. The close of this chapter leads directly into Ch.12 and the prevailing prayer of the church on behalf of Peter in prison.

The first matter to address is the heading I have chosen for this section on prayer. What do we mean by mission in the context of Acts? We could also ask ourselves the question as to what we mean by mission in the context of Jesus’ ministry and I do not think it would be too difficult to answer in that He clearly declared His mission mandate when He visited the synagogue in Nazareth following His baptism and subsequent temptations in the wilderness. He declared His mission in the words of Isa.61:1, 2 (Lk.4:18). Jesus also sent out His 12 apostles on mission and we have the mandate that Jesus gave to them before he sent them out two by two (Mat.Ch.10). In the context of the Acts our definition of mission embraces the thrust of the Holy Spirit in declaring the resurrection of Jesus Christ following the death of Christ on the cross. Such a definition is far too brief and one needs to study the content of the apostles preaching and also the works of the Spirit that accompanied their preaching. There is a momentum of the Holy Spirit and we can trace His agenda as He precipitates actions that result in further spread of the work of the Lord. For example consider the outcomes of the healing of Ch.3 or the martyrdom of Stephen. There was never a static moment in the life of the early church. Inertia is an ailment that did not plague the early church. This purpose driven agenda of the Holy Spirit brings us to the end of ch.12. Our last sight of Peter is where he shows himself to the praying believers in the house of John Mark’s mother and quickly departs, “he departed and went into another place” (12:17). We hear no more of him until the Jerusalem Council in Ch.15.

The next chapter in the history of the church begins in the church at Antioch where they are praying and ministering to the Lord and fasting (13:1-3). Campbell Morgan calls this first paragraph “the watershed” of the book. The apostle Paul becomes the central figure from this point onwards and the Holy Spirit now works through him. Paul brings a new dimension to the advance of the gospel. Sometimes the Spirit has to intervene when he gets his directions wrong but mission now becomes strategic rather than spontaneous. Paul targets important centres of commerce or culture for mission and from these centres Paul’s co-workers spread out into the neighbouring areas as they seek to plant the gospel in new territory. One of the outcomes of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the initiation of mission. Jesus had anticipated this when He commissioned the disciples,

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mat.28:19).

*“But you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and **unto the uttermost part of the earth**” (Acts 1:8).*

We see in hindsight that the Holy Spirit through the first apostles and believers followed exactly that first agenda outlined by Jesus at the beginning of the Acts.

Among the company of believers gathered together at Antioch were prophets and teachers which also included Barnabas and Saul. It was through one of these prophets that the Holy Spirit speaks:

“Separate unto Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (13:2).

Please note also that the church had been praying and fasting - I believe on the crucial matters of extending the work of God to the regions beyond. Praying and fasting is never an end in itself, although without doubt it will reap spiritual benefits in your life and impart to you power for ministry. I believe when Jesus said to the powerless disciples that *“this kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting” (Mat.17:21)* that He had been fasting. Put this into the context of Caesarea Philippi and the Mount of Transfiguration 6 days later and I have come to the conclusion that Jesus had been fasting throughout that time, which gives greater significance to His word here on the matter of fasting. Fitting it into the context of the events we believe that Jesus has linked prayer and fasting together at this crucial point in His ministry (for a fuller treatment of these crises in the life of the Christ see my studies on “The Prayer Life of Jesus”).

One has to stand back and recognize the awesome strategies and plans of God for mission initiated in this local church through prayer and fasting unto the Lord and the power of the prophetic word to act as a catalyst to action. These men have *already* been called! God prepares His servants for mission before He sends them out, as in the case of Paul (Acts Ch.9). I personally believe that it was the urgency of the believers at Damascus knowing Paul was advancing on them to take them to prison that drove them to prayer which God answered by saving Paul. The work of God really began for the apostle the day he witnessed the martyrdom of Stephen, so we see how prayer weaves in with the purposes of God and His dealing with men. Mission cannot be initiated or advanced or accomplished apart from prayer in conjunction with the will of God. As a result of this first missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul the church at Antioch is called the first missionary church. This sending church was also the church to which Paul always returned (14:26-28).

CONCLUSION

My original intention to focus on the prayer life of the early church has expanded beyond my original remit to include a wider perspective on the early church which embraces the powerful and intrusive presence and actions of the Holy Spirit. His intrusion was welcomed and his authoritative headship recognized and his instructions obeyed. There is no reference to worship in the church, but the supreme act of worship is to lay down your life and to die triumphantly like Jesus. To preach and to share the good news of the gospel is to worship Christ for His great salvation. The only reference to praise is in the context of extreme suffering and linked with prayer and followed by an earthquake! (16:25). It seems to me that what the church is lacking to-day is genuine *context*. This is why there is no urgency in prayer. Put the church back again into the world of men, into the world of persecution, and into the *real* moving of the Holy Spirit then things will happen.

We have seen how prayer paves the way for the outpouring of the Spirit and the uprising of the Holy Spirit in great gushing of living water (Jn.7:37). The coming of the Spirit is not selective, but rather, is poured “upon *all* flesh”. The fullness of the outpoured Spirit carries all in its flow and makes the election of God to embrace 3,000 people, followed by 5,000! In the upper room *all* 120 disciples were filled with the Spirit. In the second outpouring of the Holy Spirit all those present in the house were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit. In the house of Cornelius the Holy Spirit falls upon *all* those present. When Paul prayed for the new believers at Ephesus they *all* spoke in tongues and prophesied. In our churches there are many people who are looking in from the outside and have not yet come into the blessings of the Holy Spirit, who require a baptism of the Spirit whereby they are simultaneously baptized in the Holy Spirit and into the body of Christ (1Cor.12:13).

We have given no space to the place of tongues with regard to prayer, simply because it is not an issue in Acts, but it is there, and we must keep in mind that these believers experienced the flow and liberty of the Holy Spirit in prayer (16:25; cf. 1Cor.14:14-15, 18; 1Thess.5:17).

To make a way for the Holy Spirit in our day we must give full credit and recognition to Him in our teaching of Scripture. Acts is a suitable book for this purpose. Only as we give Him the honour that is His in the context of the trinity will faith arise and prejudice be dispelled from the church and from the ministry. We come to a correct understanding of the Holy Spirit by beholding Him in the context of Scripture, not from the perspective of men, nor from the abuses of a carnal church. What is evident in Scripture must have its counterpart in the church. Like Peter we would love to say, “This is that” (11:17). To deny the gifts of the Holy Spirit or to hinder their manifestation in the body of Christ is dangerous practice. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is to be taught from Scripture and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are to encourage in our churches. These are the only truly Bible based churches that come nearest to the model of Acts.

NOTE ONE

In the revival in India associated with **Pandita Ramabai** we read of the manifestation of tongues of fire as at Pentecost. It is rather a long extract but well worth reading.

In 1903 Pandita heard of revival blessings in Australia through the Torrey-Alexander Crusade, so she sent her daughter there to enlist prayer for India among the hundreds of newly formed prayer cells. In December Pandita heard of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Wales, and her hunger deepened for a similar outpouring in India. She started prayer cells of 10 girls each, urging them to pray for nominal Christians in India and for a world- wide revival. They had a list of unconverted girls they were to pray for. Within 6 months there were 550 girls praying.

God was simultaneously working in the Khasi Hills of Assam. Pandita heard of this outpouring and the evangelism that followed, with the result that she asked her senior girls to forego their lessons and give themselves to evangelism in the villages. This was accompanied by urgent prayer for God's outpouring. After days of prayer and evangelism the Holy Spirit came upon them with weeping, confession of sin, and prayers for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. One of the girls that had chosen to go out into the villages was so set aflame that the other girls saw a vision of fire engulfing and surrounding her. It was the fire that had sat on the heads of the disciples on the day of Pentecost when they were first baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The next day as Pandita was teaching on John Ch.8 the Spirit came in power. All the women and girls began to weep, confess their sins, and conviction of sin spread throughout the Industrial school, among students and workers. Two young girls were so gripped by the Holy Spirit that they gave themselves to constant prayer, until their faces shone with heavenly light. Following repentance and a sense of forgiveness prayer continued for holiness (sanctification) and baptism in the Spirit. Many of the girls had a vision of "the body of sin" within themselves. They said that the Holy Spirit came into them with holy burning; they experienced a baptism of fire that was almost unbearable. After this experience of the cross, their hearts were flooded with peace and joy, their faces radiating God's glory. "One little girl of 12 is constantly laughing - her face, plain, even ugly, is beautiful and radiant. She does not know it. She is occupied with Jesus. You think you have looked on an angel face. Some claim to have seen the Lord - one, a blind girl. All speak of His coming again. One sang hymns, composing them as she sang - lovely hymns to Indian tunes."

About 700 of their number felt the call to go out witnessing, and so they gave themselves to many hours in prayer and Bible study. Missionaries came to see what God was doing from all over India. A well known Brethren missionary who had been 16 years in the country spent 17 days among them and said: "There was hunger, real pain of hunger.... shame, at the ignorance, after long years of Christian life, of what this travailing in prayer, being lost in prayer meant, as it was seen here in many mere children."

"Little girls were lost for hours in the transport of loving Jesus and praising Him; young Christians were counting it a rare privilege to spend many successive hours of intercessory prayer for strangers never seen or known... In one meeting we had 17 hours together; the following day more than 15 hours passed before the meeting broke up with great joy; and such songs of praise as hoarse and broken voices could utter. The work goes on. It is now 11 months since the blessing began ... we daily saw souls seeking and finding, coming out into blessing so full and definite as often to be almost more than could be borne, filling the mouth with laughter and the life with gladness."

Comment: This is one of the most powerful accounts of revival I have read. There are important parallels with the Moravian Revival. (1) We find strong and spiritual leadership in both cases and we discover that in both situations there is: (2) a strong Christian community with structures and accountability, providing a base for the Holy Spirit to move. (3) In both situations they were engaged in evangelism. (4) In both situations they had prepared themselves by Bible study and constant prayer; and the Moravians had purposely sought to remove all differences between brethren. Prayer was

their number one priority; prayer prepared their hearts for the outpouring. Perhaps one reason why the Welsh revival appears to have come to an end so quickly was that some of these elements were absent. When we speak of community we are really speaking about the church living together in fellowship; accountable to one another in love, submission, caring and nurture. The church devoted to the mission of God and the salvation of souls and the church giving itself to prayer for God to graciously and continually pour out the Holy Spirit.

NOTE TWO

*An extract from the **Journal of George Fox** in which he describes an occasion when the church shook under the power of God. "I (George Fox) went into the steeplehouse (at Carlisle), and after the priest had done I spoke the truth to them and declared the word of life amongst the people. The magistrates desired me to go my ways and desired me not to speak; and the priest got away, but I still declared; and told them I came to speak the word of life and salvation from the Lord amongst them. A dreadful power of the Lord there was amongst them in the steeplehouse that the people trembled and shook: and they thought the very steeplehouse shook and thought it would have fallen down. The magistrates' wives were in a rage and tore and rent to have been at me, but the soldiers and friendly people stood thick about me. At last the rude people of the city rose and came with staves into the steeplehouse and cried, 'Down with these round-headed rogues', and threw stones, but the governor sent a file or two of musketeers into the steeplehouse and commanded the other soldiers all out, that were with me, which had been convinced, and which kept the rude people off me.*

Then when the soldiers came to call away the other soldiers, they plucked me down and would not let me stay amongst the rude multitude, and took me by the hand very friendly and said they would have me amongst with them then; and so when we were in the street all the town was of an uproar, and stones flew about and cudgels, in the steeplehouse and about it, and without in the streets, and swords were drawn. And the governor came down to appease the people and, for standing by and for me against the townspeople, some of the soldiers were cast into prison. And there came the same lieutenant, the pastor of the Baptists, that came before with his rapier in his hand, and took me out of the crowd into his own house, where there was a Baptists' meeting. And so in the afternoon he offered up his meeting to declare the Truth among them, and there Friends came also and we had a very quiet meeting ..."

AGES (108:7), N/J (158:5)

NOTE THREE

*An extract from the biography of **Duncan Campbell** describes how on one occasion in **the Hebrides revival** the house where they were praying was shaken by the power of God. "An evening was given to waiting upon God in the home of an elder. Around midnight Duncan turned to the local blacksmith: 'John, I feel the time has come for you to pray.'¹ With his cap in his hand John rose to pray, and in the middle of his prayer he paused, raised his right hand to heaven, and said 'O God, You made a promise to pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground, and, Lord, it's not happening.'¹ He paused again and then continued: "Lord, I don't know how the others here stand in Your presence; I don't know how the ministers stand, but, Lord, if I know anything about my own heart I stand before Thee as an empty vessel, thirsting for Thee and for a manifestation of Thy power. ' He halted again and after a moment of tense silence cried: 'O God, Your honour is at stake, and I now challenge You to fulfil your covenant engagement and do what You have promised to do.'*

Many who were present witnessed that at that moment the house shook. Dishes rattled in the sideboard, as wave after wave of Divine power swept through the building. A minister standing beside Duncan turned and said: 'Mr. Campbell, an earth tremor! but Duncan's mind, however, was in the fourth chapter of Acts: "When they had prayed the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.' He pronounced the benediction immediately and walked out to find the community alive with an awareness of God. A stream of blessing was released which brought salvation to many homes during the succeeding nights (p132-133).

Among those converted the following night was a fifteen-year-old boy, Donald, who became an outstanding helper in the revival. This lad became a 'front-line' prayer-warrior. Duncan called at his home one day and found him on his knees in the barn with the Bible open before him. When interrupted he quietly said: 'Excuse me a little, Mr. Campbell, I'm having an audience with the King' (p134).

Comment: It is important to note that following the manifestation of God's power in shaking the house the men went out into the night and out of the darkness they heard the groans of men and women bowed down to the ground under the heavy conviction of sin. This was one of the marks of the Hebrides Revival. Surely this convicting power of the Holy Spirit was the most significant thing that resulted from prevailing prayer, rather than the awesome power of God that was so powerful that the house shook! Nevertheless, I trust that this study has made very clear that the works of the Holy Spirit are accompanied by the Spirit's manifestations and are an essential part of the Divine revelation. This prayer meeting demonstrates the importance of prevailing prayer and also the importance of uniting together in prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We see how *one* man in company with others of like heart can bring down the power of God. The power of God was such that it extended beyond the prayer meeting into the community. True revival cannot be contained in the church; one is reminded of the preaching on the Day of Pentecost, quoting from Joel, Peter declares God's promise,

*"I will pour out of My Spirit on **all** flesh" (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17).*

Derrick Harrison Mineotta, Minnesota (USA). December 2010.

These Notes are the outcome of sharing on the subject of prayer at four Prayer meetings at Mineotta Christian Fellowship during a visit to Steve, Manjit and family.

These verses describe the agony of Jesus as he prayed in Gethsemane. There seems to be an apparent contradiction between the prayer of Jesus to be spared from death and what actually happened, in that He had to suffer death. How then were His prayers answered? My explanation is that He had to go *into* death, to be delivered *out of* (ek) death. God answered His prayer by raising Him from the dead. Some believe there was an immediate answer to prayer as He was strengthened to face the ordeal of the cross.

At the end of the verse we read that, *“He was heard in that He feared.”*

If this was the normal word for fear we would make a direct link with Gen.22.12,

“Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

The content and typological significance of Genesis Ch.22 links the two passages together, quite apart from the reference to fear. Abraham submits to God (Father) and Jesus submits also to Father. However, it is Jesus who dies not Abraham. Isaac is the one who “in a figure” dies. But the typology is so rich in meaning adding significance to the real act of Jesus dying. Hebrews employs this historical event to demonstrate Abraham’s faith in resurrection (Heb.11:17).

The word in Hebrews (5:7) is not *φοβος* (fear) but *εὐλάβεια* which may be translated as: “He was heard on account of His pious resignation” (Dean Alford: “Geek Testament” Vol.4; p96). The English Standard Version puts it nicely: “He was heard because of His reverence.” If we remove the word “piety” and insert the words “reverent submission” or “godly fear” we arrive at a similar position to the ESV. We sense a finely tuned intimacy between Jesus and Father as He chooses unconditional resignation to Father’s will whatever the costly consequences. Jesus, like Abraham is aware that so much hangs on His momentous choice. Abraham faced what no other human father has had to confront; the killing of his own son at God’s command- hence the fear. God was looking intently at him, hoping and believing in this “strong man of faith” (Rom.4:20; Heb.11:17-19).

The salvation of the whole world was at stake here. Father was dependant on Jesus alone to accomplish His eternal plan of salvation. In Christ alone is there hope for the world. There is salvation in no other Person. God’s plans for humankind at this moment relied entirely on Jesus Christ. Should not Jesus tremble before God in the light of such momentous responsibility? God had no other contingency plan- there was no other way to bring salvation to the world.

Could Jesus have failed? Could He have chosen not to reverently submit Himself to His Father’s will? To disobey He would have undone His relationship with Father who was His head (1Cor.11:3) and denied His own understanding of His relationship with Him. Disobedience is not only unthinkable but impossible when we speak of Jesus the Son of God. However, to speak of Jesus according to His own description as Son of Man we immediately move outside of Deity and have to view things in the context of His humanity. As a man it was not impossible for Him to fail. But He did not fail! True to Messianic affirmation and expectation:

*“He will not fail nor be discouraged,
Till He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands shall wait for His law.” (Isa.42:4).*

The momentous challenge of the cross necessitated indescribable suffering. It required fortitude sustained by faith under severe temptation, resolve that was challenged through pain and endurance that enable Him to endure the long hours of crucifixion: “He endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb.11:27). He endured to the end that we might be saved (Mat.10:22), “not accepting deliverance;” that He “might obtain a better resurrection” (Heb.11:35).