

Brethren, we have been going through a series about the events in history down through time. We've been taking a look at the image in Daniel and what Daniel saw and what was revealed to Nebuchadnezzar and that he was the head of gold, and that it pictured the kingdoms that would come and go down through time. We've looked at the beast and the image in Revelation 13 and we've looked at Babylon and the beast in Revelation 17. We've looked at the seven heads and the ten horns and we have a view of how everything progressed through time.

In the time of Daniel the government that was upon this earth, that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had to deal with, we saw a glimpse of that. We can see how they dealt with the government, the kingdom, the people that were in authority in their day. As we've been going through this series we've looked at the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, the Persian Empire, Greece and Alexander the Great, and we've looked at the Roman Empire and we've touched on the Vandals, the Heruli, the Ostrogoths, and the Roman Catholic church and what took place down through time. We saw the image that it produces of the Roman Empire and the type of government that it was upon this earth - he gave us a view. And when we look back at what Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had to face and the problems that the governments of their day caused them we can see that it has been the history of God's Church.

God's Church has not always dealt well with the governments of this earth; we've not always fit well with these governments regardless of the time that God's people lived in.

When we go back to the Exodus we find that they were living in slavery, which has been touched on in recent sermons...and they were under a harsh government because they were actual literal slaves in their time. So there have been God's people down through time that have suffered mightily because of the governments upon this earth, and this will be the title today; *Governments*.

The governments have not been friendly to the people of God down through time. There have been many martyred and persecuted. There has been much bloodshed for God's people, and that's what we want to look at today, because we have had an overview of the governments of this world down through time and there have been several sermons recently given upon this.

What we will start in the sermon today, we will start looking at some of the lives and how the governments affected them in their personal lives, because we do not always focus upon this. We don't always focus upon how Satan uses the governments of this earth to come at God's people. And you and I are not strangers, the people of God are not strangers to persecution. God tells us that down through time much of the persecutions were caused by the governments of this earth. We know what God says, that Satan is the god of this world, and we know that the whole world is under the sway of the wicked one; it's what God calls the wicked one. And even at the best of governments they are not fashioned after God's Government. There is a new Government coming upon this earth that is mightily needed.

For the last several months, those of us who are living in America, that is all we have heard about, the type of government that we need. The democrats claim that they have the best solutions to the problems with their style of government. We have the republicans saying that they have the answers and that their style of government is needed. But we know that there is not a just government upon this earth; not at this time. But you and I know and understand the type of government that is needed

upon this earth and it is not man's government. It is the Government of God that is needed and it is the Kingdom of God that needs to be established upon this earth to bring about a just government. We've not always focused on, even though we know it, we've not really got down and focused on how the governments of this earth have persecuted God's people. We know it and we have always looked at an overview.

Today we will start with the apostle Paul and we will go through his life and his trials and tribulations and we will look at how the governments of this earth, just in his time, what he had to deal with and how he was treated by the governments whether it be the Roman government or the Sanhedrin; it makes no difference, it was the governments in his day and those are the ones that he had to deal with on a daily basis.

When we go back in time and look at Jeremiah and what they did to him, they put him in a well so they would not have to listen to him; and you and I understand why, because they did not like the message. It was about the message so they persecuted the messenger, and it's the same today. So we understand the governments of this earth have been powerful and have persecuted and even martyred God's people down through time. We don't even have to mention Jesus Christ and what He went through and the trial that He went through; it's a prime example of man's government upon this earth and what they do to God's people. He is the ultimate example. But like I said, there are many down through time that have suffered mightily, like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And I cannot comprehend going through what those young men went through. They were teenagers when they were taken captive.

You and I cannot imagine the type of government that they had in their day, because they were slaves, and if you made a misstep in their day you lost your head. We have progressed down through time and mankind cannot swiftly do that, in this country anyway, even though they may want to. We have a penal system in this country that has been set up that is a little more humane but the oppression is still there, brethren, and the motive is still there toward God's people, even to this day. God's people and man's government do not always mix well.

So we will go back today and we will spend most of the time in the book of Acts and we will start with Paul and see some of the opposition and some of the obstacles that were presented to him by man's government of his day. You can be turning to Acts 22 and I will go back and do a little history on the apostle Paul and his life. Paul was born to a wealthy family about the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year AD in the town of Tarsus, which was in the province of Cilicia, which is the southern portion of Turkey. Saul's father had obtained citizenship and was a Roman citizen, so Paul, his name, was Saul in the beginning until God changed it. So Saul was a Roman citizen by birth, and you may hear me refer to him either way, Saul or Paul.

**Acts 22:26 - When the centurion heard that he went and told the commander saying, 'Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman;' then the commander came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman?' and he said, 'Yes;' And the commander answered, 'With a large sum, I obtained this citizenship;' and let's notice what Paul said...but Paul said, 'I was born a citizen.' Then immediately, those who were about to examine him withdrew from him, and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, because he had bound him.** And in that day Roman citizens had certain rights, just like you and I have today in America...and actually the reason they were afraid was because they had bound him and as a Roman citizen Paul had certain rights; and so that's why they were so [alarmed] alerted of what they had done.

In verse 3 we see that Paul was actually born a Roman citizen in his time upon this earth, and when Paul was a teenager he was sent to Jerusalem to study the law with Moses, and Saul, like his father, was a Pharisee. That was the largest sect at that time. Paul studied under Gamaliel, a well known and respected leader, teacher of the law.

Let's look [back up] in **verse 3** at this account. **And Paul said, 'I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.** So we can see that Paul/Saul at this time was highly educated and he was very knowledgeable in the law of God. And to give you the time frame, Paul was born in 2-3 AD. And so we come up to the year 31 AD and we find that this is where a mock trial had been held by the Roman government and the Sanhedrin and their influences upon this trial, we know about that. And we know about the false accusations against Jesus Christ that were brought against Him. Jesus was found guilty even though He was innocent of crimes; it was trumped up crimes is what they said, crimes worth of death is what they said...and it was the Roman government that carried out the sentence, death by crucifixion, and they hung him on a pole.

Be turning over to Acts 8...and when we come up on the Day of Pentecost we know that 3,000 converts were added. That was on the Day of Pentecost and that was in 31 AD and they began to call those at that time Nazarenes. So we're breaking into the story and seeing what was taking place. They were under the leadership of a fisherman named Peter and they were causing a lot of commotion - I guess that's what you could call it - among the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. They had crucified Christ, and Saul at that time thought that the followers of Jesus Christ...he thought they were heretics.

Let's look at **Acts 8:3** and we see Paul coming on the scene and we see where he was persecuting the Church, and it says - **As for Saul, he made havoc of the Church, entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.** Now, you and I don't have to quite live under those circumstances but we can see that Paul was with the government of his day and that he was causing the people of God persecutions. I'm sure that Saul thought in his mind in that day that he was doing God a favor, to stamp out what he thought was a fanatical and false religion that was trying to discredit the Great God of this universe. And I'm sure he thought that all that belonged to this sect deserved to be imprisoned or stoned to death, because of some of his actions.

Let's go back to **Acts 7:54** and we find that it's talking about Stephen; we break into the story after Stephen had told them.... let's just see what it says, **verse 54** - 'Stephen the Martyr' - **When they heard these things that Stephen said, the message...they attacked the messenger as we'll see... they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.** So they were pretty upset and they did not like the message that they had heard from Stephen.

**But he, talking about Stephen, being full of the holy spirit, saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and you and I understand that that's a true statement, that's where He's at... And he said, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, it was more than they could bear; the message was more than they could bear; and they ran at him with one accord and cast him out of the city and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling upon God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice and said, Lord, do not charge them with this sin. And when he had said this, he fell asleep/he died.**

Let's notice **Acts 8:1 - Saul was consenting to his death.** In other words, he was in agreement at this time. We can see that Saul was a part of the system, the government of that day, and we find **at that time a great persecution rose against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his funeral/to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the Church entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.** So we can see that the government of this day was very hostile to the Church of God. We find that Saul was a part of this system at this time.

Let's see where God intervened in Saul's life and let's see how it was done. **Acts 9:1 - and let's notice... Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, he went to the highest authority, and asked letter of him to the synagogue of Damascus so that if he found any who were of the way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven: so we see God intervening. Then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, Who are You, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting: it is hard for you to kick against the goads. So he trembling and astonished said...** now from what we know about Paul and what we just read, he was not a man that would be very fearful very quick, but this says he was trembling...so God was getting his attention and he was astonished because of what was taking place. So here is a man of Paul's stature, who is just about fearless and we find that he is trembling and he is astonished.

**And he said, Lord, what do you want me to do?** So God had his attention! **Then the Lord said to him, Arise, and go into the city and you will be told what you must do. And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no one.** So he was the only one that saw it. **Then Saul arose from the ground and when his eyes were opened he saw no one:** so we can see that Saul was blinded and he was the only one that saw what took place - the rest just heard a noise. **So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was there three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank...for three days.**

**Now, there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, Ananias. And he said, here I am, Lord. And the Lord said to him, Arise, and go to the street called Straight and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus:** and we can see God moving His plan forward for what will take place... **for behold, he is praying, and in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand upon him so that he might receive his sight.** Now, you and I know these stories but I don't know that we've ever focused very deeply on what actually took place and to actually put ourselves in that time zone of where Paul lived and what actually took place and how violent it really was.

Let's notice Ananias' response... **Then Ananias answered and said, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem:** They knew him! His reputation preceded him. **And here he has authority from the chief priests,** so the chief priests had given Paul authority, **to bind all who call on Your name.** So Ananias recognized Saul as a dangerous man and that he was part of the government of that day...and Ananias knew it, he knew it very well. **But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:** So we can see how God would use Saul. **For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.** And you and I are taking a look at what Paul would have to suffer and what he would have to face after God got his attention and chose him for His work.

**Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands upon him said, brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the holy spirit.** So we can see that it was Jesus Christ dealing directly with Paul/Saul at this time.

**And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales and he received his sight at once, and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.**

We have to now go to Galatians 1, and you can be turning there, and we can see that God was bringing Paul out of the government of his day to bring him into use to be a part of the government of God in God's Church. We can see God starting to use Paul. Let's pick up the story in **Galatians 1:15** - and we find... **But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by His grace to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him among the Gentiles;** so we can see Paul understanding what he would have to do, and he said, let's notice... **I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went to Arabia and returned again unto Damascus.**

And in **verse 18** we find the timeframe; **Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles, except James the Lord's brother.** So we can see that Paul went to Arabia and spent three years there during which time he was taught by Jesus Christ. Paul knew the scriptures well, he was a zealous student as we know by the scriptures, and he had knowledge of the Old testament scriptures but we know that he did not know or understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. But he was an astute student and he was a Pharisee. He had not known that Jesus Christ was the prophesied Messiah until now and it took God's direct intervention into Paul's life and it took Jesus Christ speaking directly to Paul to reveal Himself to him. And what Paul needed was a true understanding of the scriptures for what he was about to be used for. God had called him out of the government of his day and brought him into His Church and into the government of His Church, God's Church.

Let's go back to **2 Corinthians 12:1** - We find Paul speaking and we find that he was speaking about himself and he's telling about how he learned the truth and how God had dealt with him. It's Paul speaking about how Jesus Christ dealt with him so let's read about what Paul is saying about himself... **It is necessary, not profitable, for me to boast; I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago, it's Paul talking about himself and he said... (whether in the body, I do not know, or whether out of the body, I do not know...)** in other words he does not know how to fully explain what took place, he just knows what happened. And he said **(...only God knows how it was done.)** Paul says... **such a one was caught up into the third heaven.** It's the way Paul was explaining it, and let's notice; **I know such a man,** and he does because he's talking about himself; **(whether in the body, or out of the body, I do not know: God knows)** and the protestant world has so misused these and twisted these scriptures, but you and I understand the truth of the matter. We know that it was Paul speaking about himself.

And they use these scriptures to say that Paul went to heaven, and they use this next verse... **How he was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter...**so they use these to twist, but it is actually Paul telling about what happened to him.

**Verse 5 - Of such a one I will boast, yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. For though I might desire to boast I will not be a fool for I will say the truth. But I will refrain lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be, or hears from me, and lest I should be exalted;** let's notice what is being said...**Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations,** he recognized that it came from the Great God of this universe and His Son Jesus Christ, and he says...**a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me lest I be exalted above measure.** So we can see that he was taught God's truth directly from Jesus Christ during the three years that he spent in Arabia. He already knew the scriptures because he was an astute student, and now Jesus Christ was filling him in on His mission and the truth of the matter.

Let's go back to the book of Acts...**Acts 9:26** and we'll find where Saul came back to Jerusalem. **And when Saul had come to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples,** let's notice this account and what took place, **but they were all afraid of him.** Very understandable, because he was a part of the system, the government of that day that had persecuted so many of them...so many of their fellow brethren. **And they did not believe that he was a disciple;** so can you imagine having to deal with a man like Paul, and it says that they were afraid of him...and it's very understandable.

But let's notice **verse 27 - But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road;** it's what we just read, Paul explaining what he saw on the road, **and that he had spoken to Him,** talking about Jesus Christ, **had spoken to Him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out, and he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists; but they attempted to kill him. So when the brethren found out they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus. 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.** Here we see the Church beginning to grow, and we can see how God was beginning to use Saul, which his name later became Paul; and as we remember, Paul was a Pharisee, and we can see how the governments of the past persecuted the true Church. So what happened to Paul...Paul became like a man without a country because of how God was using him. He had persecuted the Church of God so severely that it was very difficult for many to accept him because they were so afraid of him, and many did not believe that he was now a member of the Church of God even though he was now preaching Jesus Christ in the synagogues.

The Jews totally turned against him and rejected him since he had turned from being a Pharisee and had embraced what they thought to be a blasphemous religion, the same that you and I have.

Turn over to **Acts 22:12** and let's pick up the story where Paul was telling what happened. He's telling about where he had a vision and God told Paul to leave Jerusalem quickly. So we can see how God was dealing with Paul. **Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me and stood and said to me, brother Saul, receive your sight. And at that same hour I looked up at him.** Here Paul is explaining. **Then he said, The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know His will and see the Just One and hear the voice of His mouth.** So we can see it explained how Jesus Christ dealt with Paul. **For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.** And it's why it was done and it's why it was done in the way that it was done.

**Verse 16 - Now, why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins calling upon the name of the Lord.**

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**Verse 17 - Now it happened when I returned to Jerusalem, so we're back to Jerusalem, and was praying in the temple, and he's telling what took place, that I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me, Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me. So I said, Lord, they know that in every synagogue, let's listen to what Paul was telling...Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You.** Can you imagine the position that Paul was in? Many of the believers did not believe or trust him and neither did the Jews. **When the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, let's notice, I also was standing by consenting to his death and guarding the clothing of those who were killing him.** So Paul had to live with this the rest of his life, brethren, the things that he had done, and those that he had persecuted so severely.

**Verse 21 - Then He, talking about Christ, said to me, Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.** So we can see that Jesus Christ was giving Paul his mission and how he was to be used in the government of God. He was putting it together. We can see that God was getting ready to use Paul to go to the Gentiles and in Acts 10 we can see how God revealed to Peter and the way that it was done.

Peter was to prepare the way for Paul because up until this time just about every member of the Church of God was Jewish by birth. There were a few that had been previously converted but it was just a few, mostly it was all by birth at this time. God was getting ready to use Paul so He used Peter in Acts 10 and we can find this is where Cornelius sends a delegation.

**Acts 10:1 - There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian *regiment*, a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he observed him he was afraid and said, What is it, Lord? So he said to him, Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa and send for Simon, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea, and he will tell you what you must do. And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. When he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.**

**Verse 9 - The next day as they went on their journey and drew near unto the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: Then he became very hungry, and wanted to eat, but while they made ready he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to earth.** Brethren, these scriptures have been so distorted by the protestant world and they don't have a clue what was taking place. **In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts and creeping things and birds of the air. And a voice came to him and said, Rise Peter, kill and eat. And Peter said, Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, What God has cleansed, you must not call common. This was done three times: and the object was taken into heaven again.** It's like I said, these scriptures have been so distorted by the other religions of this world, and it's the protestants mostly and the catholics. It's been so misused to show that we can eat unclean foods but we will find the truth of the matter as we move on through these scriptures.

**Verse 17 - Now while Peter wondered within himself what his vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who were sent from Cornelius made inquiry for Simon's house and stood before the gate and they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. While Peter thought about the vision, the spirit said to him, Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise**  
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therefore, go down and go with them doubting nothing, for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius; and said, Yes, I am he whom you seek: for what reason have you come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear words from you. Then he invited them in and lodged *them*. And on the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

**As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*. But Peter lifted him up, saying, Stand up; I myself am also a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many who had come together.** The protestant world has so misused and distorted the vision that God gave Peter to prepare the way for Paul. They use these scriptures to say that all food is clean to eat, but as we will see it is not about the food. The vision that God gave Peter is not about the food and he realized that God was showing him in the vision it was about calling any man 'common' or 'unclean'. So we can see God moving His plan forward.

**Verse 28 - Then he said to them,** let's notice.... You have to understand the times that Paul lived in. In the Jewish nation at that time it was unlawful to even associate with people outside if they were not a Jew - the Gentiles - and he said... **You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with/or go to one of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.** We find the truth of the matter. Brethren, here we find God making a major change. This was huge in the eyes of the Jews! God was now revealing a change, new truth at this time to prepare the way for His plan to move forward.

Let's notice Peter's reaction...**Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for: I ask then, for what reason have you sent for me? So Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter; he is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner by the sea: when he comes, he will speak to you. So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come, now therefore we are all present before God,** let's notice, **to hear all the things commanded you by God.** This was *huge* in that day! We find Peter preaching to Cornelius' household.

**Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said, Of truth I perceive,** let's notice what's being said, **that God shows no partiality.** New truth, brethren, for their time.

**Verse 39 -** let's notice what else is being said - **And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they killed by hanging on a tree: Him God raised up the third day and showed Him openly...**

And notice what is being said in **verse 41 - Not to all the people,** let's notice what's being said, **Not to all the people... Sometimes we just read through what is being said. Not to all the people but to the witnesses chosen before by God,** the same as you and I at the end of an age, witnesses chosen by God... it's why you're here. And it says... **even to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.** So we can see it was witnesses chosen by God, who even witnessed Him after He had died - they were chosen. It's talking about witnessing Jesus Christ after His resurrection. **And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and Governments**



**the dead.** And Jesus Christ will be here in just a little while as that Judge to fulfill these verses and judge this world and set up God's Government upon this earth, a just government.

**Verse 44** we find the holy spirit given to the Gentiles... **And while Peter was still speaking these words, the holy spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.** And let's notice... **And those of the circumcision who believed...** let's notice, because this was a *huge change* in what they believed, but God was moving His plan forward. **And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because of the gift of the holy spirit had been poured out on the gentiles also.** And this was huge!

**Verse 48** we find...**And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.** Paul was converted around 35 AD, spent three years in Arabia, which brings us up to about 38 AD. He was in Damascus for a short time and then he went down to Jerusalem and back to his home in Tarsus about 40-41 AD and he was probably preaching in Tarsus after his conversion. But now it was time for Paul to begin his ministry, and by this time the Church of God was growing pretty rapidly.

So it was getting time for Paul to be used. The leading minister at this time from Jerusalem was Barnabas and we can be turning over to **Acts 11:25** and we find - **Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul:** in other words, that was his mission, to seek Paul out. **And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the Church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.** So we find that this is the first time that they were called Christians.

**And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and showed by the spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world: which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.** So we see the timeframe. **Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea: This they did also and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.** So we find them sending food to the brethren as there was a famine in the land. And you know, brethren, you and I cannot comprehend a time of violence such as they lived with. The Church of God suffered mightily by the governments upon the earth in this time, the time that they lived in.

We can find an example in **Acts 12:1** of the violence and the persecution. And it says in bold: **'Herod's Violence to the Church'** and we find another example of how God's people were dealt with. **Now about that time Herod the king,** so we see another instance of the government, those in authority at that time, and we find that **Herod the king stretched out his hands to harass some of the Church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.** And you and I cannot comprehend living in such a time, the power that was given to some people in the governments of their day.

Let's notice **verse 3** - **Because he,** talking about Herod, **saw that it pleased the Jews, Herod proceeded further to seize Peter.** So now we find him going after Peter and we see the timeframe. **(It was during the Days of Unleavened Bread.) So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him; intending to keep him before the people after Passover. Peter was therefore kept in prison: but constant prayer was offered for him by the Church. And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping and he was bound with two chains between two soldiers: and the guards before the door were keeping the prison.** And we know the story but let's just go through it and bring it back to memory. **Now, therefore, the angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the prison, and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up saying, Arise quickly, Governments**

**and his chains fell off his hands.** So we can see Peter being delivered from bondage, but we can also see what God allowed. We can see where some were allowed to be martyred and some were allowed to be killed, and none of this can take place, brethren, unless by what God allows, and this is the example we are reading. God did not allow Peter to stay in those chains.

**Verse 8 - And the angel said to him, Gird yourself and tie on your sandals. And so he did. And he said to him, put on your garments and follow me. So he went out and followed him and did not know what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.** So we see Peter kind of explaining what he really couldn't explain, and it was kind of surreal to him, what was taking place, and he was explaining it the best he could in his words...and he says, **When they were past the first and the second guard post they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord, and they went out, and went down one street and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself,** and you and I should be able to understand that one, because of what he had just seen...and now he says, **Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people.** So we can see God intervening at this time to move His plan forward; it's why it was done. And when God needs to make a move we can see it at work, we can see it here and how it was done.

This has been the story down through time - the Exodus and what took place...Pharaoh and how he was dealt with by God. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Jeremiah, Isaiah, John on the Isle of Patmos, and we can go on and on. We are no strangers to the governments of this earth. So we can see that dealing with the governments has not always been a pleasant task for the people of God. God's people don't always fit well with these governments, but there is a just Government coming that you and I will fit well, brethren. We will fit in that government very well.

**Acts 13:1** - we find this is where Paul and Barnabas are being sent to the Gentiles. **Now, in the Church that was in Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And they ministered to the Lord and fasted and the holy spirit said,** let's notice what is taking place - God is moving His plan forward once again and He said: **Now separate to Me, Barnabas and Saul, for the work which I have called them.** So we can see their commission. **And having then fasted and prayed and laid hands upon them they sent them away. So being sent out by the holy spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they arrived at Salamis they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews:** And as we read earlier, God had prepared the way for Paul to go forward to the Gentiles through Peter by showing him it was about man, it was not about the food, and that no man was unclean. So the way for Paul to go to the Gentiles had been opened with Peter's vision and it was now time for the work that Jesus Christ had called Paul to do, to really get started, to move His plan forward. Paul was now going forth and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

God was calling many and establishing Churches at that time. So we see God's plan moving forward in the early stages. It was the message of the Kingdom of God that was being preached, the good news. So Paul began his journey in the city of Seleucia, as we just read, which is on the Mediterranean Sea, which is in Syria, just to give you an idea. Paul and Barnabas had boarded a ship to set sail to Cyprus, as we read, and there they preached the Kingdom of God.

In chapter 13 we will see that it was about Paul's sermon that he gave, and down in **Acts 13:44** we see that the whole city was turning out after Paul's sermon, especially among the Gentiles. So we can see **Governments**

God moving His plan forward and in **verse 48** we find - **Now when the Gentiles heard this they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.** In other words, brethren, those that God was calling, the ones that He was opening their mind to the truth, just the way He did you. **And the word of the Lord was spread throughout all the region.**

And let's notice what took place, **verse 50** - **But the Jews stirred up devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, and raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, surprise, surprise... and expelled them from their region.** They did not like the message so they attacked the messenger, just the same as they do today. It's about the message, it's about God, and it's about God's plan.

Let's notice **verse 51** - **But they shook off the dust of their feet against them and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the holy spirit.** It's talking about those that God was calling; it's what it's saying. So we can see how they endured persecutions as God was calling and establishing His Church through Paul and Barnabas. Paul's whole ministry was plagued with persecutions. Paul and Barnabas stayed some time in Iconium and preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and as we already know, we're not going back to read all of it but God performed many miracles through them to establish His word and to establish who they were at that time. It's how God was working in their day.

**Acts 14:5** - **And when a violent attempt,** it doesn't say 'attempt', it says a 'violent attempt'. Some of these that have gone before us, you and I cannot comprehend what they endured, and we can see that it was a *violent* attempt made by both **the Gentiles and the Jews**; so we can see that they were catching it on both sides **with their rulers**, those in authority, **to abuse and stone them. They became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region:** So we can see that they were having to run. **And they were preaching the gospel there,** talking about the good news, the Kingdom of God, the same one that you and I hear every Sabbath, and it's about the good news of the Kingdom of God and the Government that God is bringing to this earth in just a short while, brethren. We can see that they were persecuted constantly.

**Acts 14:19** we find that the **Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there, and having persuaded the multitudes,** they stirred them up, and let's notice what took place, **they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city supposing him to be dead.** It's pretty graphic, brethren, when someone is throwing stones at you until you look like you're dead, if you can picture that in your mind. And it's a pretty graphic beating. Let's notice...**However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.** I think he had some help from God. I'm quite sure he was smarting a lot from the beating that he had just taken and it probably took him days if not weeks to overcome it. Most of the time we just read through these scriptures without grasping the pain and the suffering that some have had to endure because of what they believe, the truth, and here Paul was beaten severely for preaching the truth.

**And when they had preached the gospel,** the good news of the Kingdom of God, **to that city and made many disciples, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, straightening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith,** and saying...they had come to realize **that we must through many tribulations enter into the Kingdom of God.** You've heard many times about how we have to fight for this way of life. It's not easy! We can see that it's not easy for those that went before us and we're just getting a glimpse of what some had to face. We've not always really focused on this but it makes some of our trials look pretty small, brethren.

Let's notice **verse 23 - When they had appointed elders in every Church**, the same as we are doing now in the Church of God - PKG. God is moving His plan forward just as He was then and we can look back at the persecutions and the trials that God's people have faced down through time. When we look at these examples, you think your load is heavy? Our load is light compared to what some have faced down through time, those that God has called to this way of life. What we are looking at today is just how some persecutions took place, and most of it was by the governments and the authorities that were in charge.

I still cannot imagine what Moses had to face talking to Pharaoh. Can you imagine having to go before a king like Pharaoh and to stand there and tell him what Moses had to tell Pharaoh? I don't think we focus much on what some have had to do, the messengers, Daniel... I keep referring back to Daniel because Daniel had to face a king that he knew that could cut his head off at his whim; he didn't have to ask anybody, he didn't have to go to court, he could just have it done. It was the same for Moses in Pharaoh's days; it's the kind of authority that they had. And as we remember, Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. Can you imagine just what some of these have faced? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into a furnace of fire. We can look back and see what was written about these young men, because they were teenagers when they were taken captive, they were young men. And we remember what they told the king, that they were going to obey God above him.... didn't set well, and that is basically why they were marched into a furnace of fire. But we saw that God delivered them because of His plan.

And our minds cannot comprehend such a thing, such violence that has been against God's people by those in authority, the government of their day. Some of us, if we turn off the air conditioner it's a trial, here in Georgia, but there are many of God's people that have suffered severely through time because Satan is the god of this earth, the god of this age, and he has tried to thwart God's plan down through time. Now is no different! Brethren, the trials that we face come from this being trying to do away with God's Church at this time; it's where it's coming from. But the good news now is that his time is short, he does not have much time left. He's caused a lot of heartache in God's Church down through time but there will be a new government upon this earth in just a little while - the good news that they talked about down through time, the good news that Paul spread, the good news that the Kingdom is coming that Daniel talked about, where God will set up His Kingdom upon this earth with a just Government, where mankind will not be persecuted anymore because of the truth, because of the message. They will not be able to attack the messenger anymore at that time. They will not be able to persecute anymore.

There is a new government needed upon this earth. There is not a just government upon this earth; not one! There is absolutely none at this time!

**Verse 25 - Now when they had preached the word in Perga they went down into Attalia: from there they sailed to Antioch where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. Now, when they had come and gathered the Church together they reported all that God had done with them and that he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.**

**Acts 15:1** - we see God at work again and God moving His plan forward once again...and it was the conflict of a circumcision, and we find...**Certain men came down from Judea and had taught the brethren**, and there was a great controversy, which we will not go into now, we will just see how it was resolved because that's the important part, we won't go into all the others.

**Verse 7 - And when there had been much dispute**, we see here, **Peter rose up and said to them**, let's notice what is taking place and who is saying what: **Men *and* brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us**, let's notice, **God chose among us that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe**. So let's notice that it's Peter taking charge and showing how God was working.

**Verse 8 - So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the holy spirit just as *He did* to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you test God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, in the same manner as they. Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. And after they had become silent, James answered saying, Men and brethren, listen to me: Simeon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And with the words of the prophet's agree, just as it is written...**

And let's notice **verse 16** - it's prophetic in nature but this is what he quoted... **After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David**, let's notice what he's quoting... **which has fallen down; I will reveal it's ruins, I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things.**

**Verse 18 - Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath. Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole Church**, let's notice... **Then it pleased the apostles, elders, with the whole Church to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely Judas who was also named Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. And they wrote this letter by them: The apostles and elders and the brethren, To the brethren**, let's notice who it's to, **who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:...and Greetings...** you can read the letter on your own.

So we can see God using His government in the Church of God - it's what took place - and how God used it to set it in order, and that is what the focus should be upon.

Back up in Acts 15:7 we find that it was Peter, it was Peter that had been chosen by Jesus Christ, to be the chosen apostle, and it was through Peter that Jesus Christ chose all the apostles to take the message to the Gentiles, and we can now find that it was Peter who made the binding decision that Gentiles need not be circumcised as a requirement for salvation. You can find that in verses 8-11. Brethren, this was *huge*! This was not a small matter in their days! This was earth-shaking, earth-shattering at this time, but God was moving His plan forward once again. God was making another change - new truth - and it was a *major change* for them, brethren.

We find James, the pastor of the Church at Jerusalem, who was acting as the chairman of the meeting, confirmed Peter's decision therefore making it an official teaching of the Church of God. God was now making a change in His Church and He was establishing the order in the Church of God, God's government, and we can see it at work. God revealed that it was no longer necessary to be physically circumcised as a sign of being one of God's people. We now know that circumcision is of the heart and

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being begotten of God's spirit is now the sign of God's people. God revealed new truth to His Church at this time. God continues to reveal new truth to His Church today as we now have 57 Truths that God has revealed at this time.

God is still moving His plan forward and nothing happens without His approval - nothing! God's Church is moving forward and God will continue to lead His Church through His end-time apostle, as He always has - nothing will change. The order is the same. God set in order the way His Church is to be organized and no man is to change what God has set in order - no one!

Turn over to Ephesians 4 and let's see where God gives the order of His government. And it says, **Ephesians 4:1 - I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord**, it's Paul talking and he calls himself a prisoner because where can you go for the truth, brethren, except to the Church of God, the Church that God is working in. And he said, **I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling wherewith you were called.** And I hope you understand what you have been called to, brethren, I hope you understand.

**Verse 2 - With all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, forbearing with one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one Body, one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;** There is only one way, brethren. There is **One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.**

And let's drop down to **verse 11 - And He, Himself;** let's notice who said it... **gave some to be apostles;** it's where it came from, **some, prophets; some, evangelists; some, pastors and teachers; For the equipping/perfecting (better said) of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ: Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we should no longer be children tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men and the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.**

**Verse 15 - But speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things Him who is the head,** let's notice, **Jesus Christ; From whom the whole Body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies according to the effective working of which every part does its share, causes growth of the Body to the edifying of itself in love.** So brethren, we can see that Jesus Christ, the same Jesus Christ that trained Paul, the same Jesus Christ that works in the Church today, the same Jesus Christ that establishes His government in the Church of God today, just the same as it was established in the days of Paul. God is still at work and God is setting it in order for what's ahead, and it's the same Jesus Christ today that's doing it and that is why we have the name 'Church of God - PKG' - tells us what we're to do. 'Church of God - Preparing for the Kingdom of God' that is coming to this earth to establish the Government of God on this earth, a just Government.

Mankind cannot rule itself, just look at the news, it's a powder keg and you can see the results of man's rule. It's coming to a head! And when you take all the governments of the whole earth there is not one government that can solve man's problems - not one - yet man in his vanity and in his pride thinks that he can solve man's problems, even to this day. All you have to do is look at the news and they'll tell you how. The republicans think they have the answer, the democrats think they have the answer, the Germans think they have the answer, the Chinese think they have the answer, and on and on it goes...but there is only one Government that can solve our problems and that is the one that comes from the Great God of this universe and His Son Jesus Christ. It's the only way.

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You and I are to be preparing for the Kingdom that is coming to this earth and we can see that God is still ordaining elders, we can see God at work, we can see God setting it in order for what's ahead for the Church of God - PKG. He is setting in order His government as we move forward through His plan. We only have a short while now before Satan will be remove from this earth and his inspired governments will be replaced by God's Government. It will happen!

God told us that the axe has been laid to the tree and we know that it will come to pass. God will replace the governments with a just Government and you and I look forward to the day when all this will be done. God says it will be done and He says it's like 'looking through a dark glass' but He does give us a view of what is taking place. We can see the outline and we can actually see His plan being moved forward little by little.

**John 17:6** - let's look at where Jesus prayed for His disciples and what was said... **I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given me out of the world: They were Yours, You gave them to Me; and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me and they have received them and have known surely that I came forth from You, and they have believed that You sent Me.** And we do today, we believe that God sent Jesus Christ and He set the Church in order, as we just read. We just read the scriptures where it was done, the beginning. And we can see how He used these men down through time to set His plan in order.

**Verse 9 - I pray for them:** let's notice, **I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours and Yours are Mine; and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world I kept them in Your name:** talking about those in His days; **those whom You gave Me I have kept and none of them is lost except the son of perdition that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now come I to You, and these things I speak in the world that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word;** and let's notice... **and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one.** The god of this world, brethren, Satan, who has inspired all the governments of this world.

**They are not of the world just as I am not of the world. Sanctify, in other words, set them aside by Your truth:** and that's how it's done, **Your word is truth. As You have sent Me into the world, I have also sent them into the world. Satan's world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by/through the truth.**

**Verse 20** - We find Jesus Christ praying for all the believers all down through time and let's notice what He said - **I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;** Kind of fits you and I doesn't it, brethren, those at the end of an age.

**That they all may be one, as you, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in us:** we saw God bring His Church together. We saw how He brought it together into one, into unity and how He set His government in the Church and we saw how that they became unified in the truth. God brought the Gentiles into His Church, which was *huge* in that day and time. We saw how God brought them in and that it was not a small task to do this, but He says **that they also may be one in us that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them; that they may be Governments**

**one, just as we are one, I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one;** let's notice what's being said; **and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them, as you have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You gave Me, may be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory which You have given Me: for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.** And we understand that God had a plan in place before this world ever was.

**O righteous Father, the world has not known You:** and we understand this, because you have to be called by the Great God of this universe and have it revealed to you, and the world has not known the God of this universe, not at this time. But it says, **I have known You, and these have known that You sent Me.** And we do! **And I have declared it to them by Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.**

And let's look at **John 16:11** and we find that it's talking about judgment, and this was said on the last night that Jesus Christ was upon this earth. That's when it was said. Because the ruler of this world is judged, and it's good news for you and I to know this and to understand this. You and I know what Satan's judgment is, we know the end, we know his fate. And Jesus Christ was saying here that the ruler of this world is judged and that was back when He was walking the face of this earth, and He said **I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now.** And we probably couldn't bear it today, brethren, to know fully what is really ahead.

**Verse 16** - Jesus said our sorrow will turn to joy. It will take place and He said - **A little while,** and it's when He was talking to them and He said, **you will not see Me: and again a little while and you will see Me, because I go to the Father. Then some of His disciples said among themselves, What is this that He says to us, A little while and you will not see Me, and again a little while and you will see Me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that He says, A little while? We do not know what He is saying.**

**Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, Are you inquiring among yourselves of what I said, A little while and you will not see Me, and again a little while and you will see Me? Most assuredly I say to you, that you will weep and lament but the world will rejoice: and you will be sorrowful but your sorrow will be turned into joy.**

And He gave an example and He said, **A woman, when she is in labour, has sorrow because her hour has come:** very much like you and I are feeling at this time, and it's a good example that Jesus Christ gave. Let's notice what He said... **but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the pain/the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow,** and we do, **but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice,** and it will. We look so forward to the day when Jesus Christ will return to this earth and bring about a just Government. And He says, **and your joy no one will take from you.** Never again, brethren, none of us will ever again be persecuted for the truth of God once Jesus Christ is upon this earth to set up His Kingdom.

**John 16:33** - Jesus left us some comforting words and He said; **These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you might have peace.** And let's notice what He said; **In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.**

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