

GOD USES PREACHING LIKE HE USES NOTHING ELSE

PART 1

INTRODUCTION

Commenting on Romans 4:13, Jonathan Edwards wrote:

God has appointed Christ to be the heir of the world in his kingdom of grace, and to possess and reign over all nations, through the propagation of his gospel, and the power of his Spirit communicating the blessings of it. God hath appointed him to this universal dominion by a most solemn oath; "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear." (Isaiah 45:23) (Compared with Philippians 2:10&11.) Though the solemn oath of God the Father is to be understood in so comprehensive a sense, as to extend to what shall be accomplished at the day of judgment, yet it is evident by the foregoing and following verses, that the thing most directly intended, is what shall be fulfilled by spreading the gospel of his salvation, and the power of the Spirit of grace, bringing "all the ends of the earth to look to him that they may be saved," and come to him for "righteousness and strength, that in him they might be justified, and might glory."¹

If ever we wanted a summary of what Acts is about, Jonathan Edwards provides it for us in these comments.

The exaltation of the risen, victorious Son – that is, the vindication of Jesus as the Christ – which we see in his return to the Father in Acts 1:9 and his ascension to the right hand of the Father as co-habitant of the throne and co-regent with the Father and the Spirit, is the basis for all that we read in the rest of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. The Lord Jesus Christ, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given, before whom every knee will bow, to whom the inheritance of the nations belongs, under whose feet all things are places, who has been installed as King in Zion over all the chain-breaking pride of the Kings of the earth, *this* Jesus sends the Spirit.

As far as the narrative of Acts is concerned, the sending of the Spirit has at least three major and closely inter-related significances.

- First, the quote from Joel in 2:17ff makes clear that the pouring out of the Spirit inaugurates the new covenant days; days when the law of God will be written on men's hearts; when, picking up on the promises in Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34, we shall be ruled by the new, good shepherd who is God himself; and when, as God promised through Ezekiel 36:27, "I will put my Spirit within you". These days bring in God's fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham's seed – through Christ.
- Second, the activity of the Spirit points to the great, coming day of the Lord, when every eye will see him as he comes with justice and salvation. Luke's quote from Joel emphasises that the Spirit's work has a focus on preparing all people for the glorious day of the Lord, when salvation will come to all who

¹ Jonathan Edwards. *A Humble Attempt to Promote the Agreement and Union of God's People Throughout the World In Extraordinary Prayer For a Revival Of Religion And The Advancement Of God's Kingdom On Earth According To Scriptural Promises And Prophecies Of The Last Time.* (1789) You can find the full text at http://lords-day.org/resources_dl/edwards_humble.html

call upon the Lord – which is what the proclamation of the gospel will urge people to do. Thus ...

- Third, the Spirit is sent to empower the church with the authority and presence of Christ in its proclamation of the gospel, fulfilling Jesus words in Luke 12:11-12; 24:46-49 and Acts 1:8.

It's worth pausing at this introductory stage, brothers and sisters, just to bring to the surface of our minds that everything that we do takes place in this context. All our preaching and pastoring, our study and our relationships, our shopping, our sport, our marriages and the raising of our children, the lives of our fellowships, our bereavements, this course – everything, takes place and serves the purposes of these new covenant, eschatological, gospel days in which the King is *de jure* established, temporally imminent and boldly proclaimed.

For these reasons, the book of Acts is both a record of what God did and a paradigm for understanding what God is still doing and will yet do in the days of his patience. In the days when the gospel of Jesus the Christ is proclaimed in the power of the Spirit all things lead toward the great climactic finale that is also a new beginning. Christ's reign over all the earth – or to put it in the terms that God gave through Habakkuk, when “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14) – drowns all other ‘reigns’ and eclipses all other glories.

In Acts, we are given the early days of a work of God that we are still part of now; we see men and women participating in the mission of God that still continues. As David Bosch puts it in *Transforming Mission*:

Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God ... There is church because there is mission, not vice versa.²

The life of the early church and the life of today's church are all part of the mission that lies at the heart of God who is a fountain of sending love. The lordship of the exalted Son, exercised on earth by the Spirit of truth and love, is now as it was then the hope of the church for growth. The Lord reigns and as the gospel of his grace is proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, his reign extends ‘where’er the sun doth his successive journeys run.’ The day will dawn when the kingdom of this world (in its badness and well as its big-ness) has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. (Rev. 11:15)

So how does this all pan out in the book of Acts? The two main activities are already indicated: the proclamation of the gospel of the exalted Christ and the activity of the sent Spirit. The two go hand in hand, but to aid our assimilation, we'll look at them in turn.

PART 2

THE WORD OF GOD AND THE EXPANSION OF THE CHURCH IN ACTS

How is Acts constructed? Richard Longenecker³ has helpfully highlighted the structure of the book and one has to say that it could have been written to encourage

² David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* Orbis Books (USA); (April 1991) p.390

preachers, teachers and evangelists to stay true to their calling; and, conversely, to remind congregations of what they most from the guys at the front.

Longenecker highlights the fact that the book is structured in six ‘panels’ of material. The six panels follow an introductory section concerning Pentecost and are arranged in two parallel groups of three: the first group of three concerns the mission to the Jewish world, the second concerns mission to the gentile world. Each of the six panels ends with a summary statement that tells us about the growth of the church; these become markers for the structure of the whole book. (They are rather like fence-posts, driven into the text, on which the whole book hangs and by which its quite differing parts are connected.) It is in the repeated content of these summary statements that we see the principle by which the church is growing. For example, the first ‘fence-post’ (my term, not Richard Longenecker’s) comes at the end of the section from 2:42-6:7 which concerns ‘The Earliest Days of the Church at Jerusalem’ the Summary Statement says, "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (6:7). This, together with the other five summary statements, compels us to draw the conclusion that it is by the spreading of the word of God through the preaching of the gospel that the church of God grows. The whole set is appended at the end of this paper so that you can colour it in!

So what sort of expansion does the Lord create through his word in Acts. And, given the paradigm that Acts represents, what kind of growth are we lead to expect?

We should expect to see four kinds of growth – three very evident in Acts, the fourth being highlighted by Paul in his epistles.

1. Numbers

First, the church grows numerically. Peter preaches on the day of Pentecost and about three thousand are added to the number of disciples (2:41). As the apostles taught and the teaching bore fruit in the lives of the people, the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (2:27). The growth continues even when the preachers are imprisoned; when Peter and John are in jail for ‘proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead’ the number of men who believed kept rising – it ‘grew to about five thousand’(4:4). By chapter 6 verse 7 we reach the first ‘fence-post’, as quoted above.

2. Spread

The numerical growth then becomes inseparable from the second kind of growth – geographical. The church spreads according to the pattern that Christ revealed in Acts 1:8. From Jerusalem it spreads to Judea and Samaria and thence to the uttermost arts of the world’. Of course it’s not simply a matter of distances and geographical extent. It’s also a matter of ‘peoples’: the *ethné*. But notice what’s involved here. Preaching the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah gets you into trouble: the geographical spread of the church happens because of persecution and scattering; and because those scattered preach. Thus after Stephen’s martyrdom, in chapter 7 and the outbreak of the great persecution in Jerusalem, all except the apostles are scattered. But they don’t go away and lick their wounds in either self-pity or self-protection: those who were persecuted preached. The Kingdom community, note, not just the professionals back in

³ Richard N. Longenecker: Acts (Expositor's Bible Commentary). Zondervan (USA); New Ed. Pbk. (1996)

Jerusalem, is used by the Spirit in proclamation. They don't simply go to new places, ignore new people and say nothing about Christ in new situations. Neither do they become reticent out of bitterness towards Christ for messing up their lives. Nor are they silenced by fear of what people might do to them. We say, 'Once bitten, twice shy.' These people were the opposite: bitten by the wild beast of affliction, they stick their heads back right in the beast's mouth: 'Go on, have another go; I'm still going to speak!' Rather than pulling back having suffered persecution, they were spurred on all the more. Luke has already recorded Peter's reaction when forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus: it is a pattern for witnesses everywhere: 'We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard' (4:20). The persecution in Jerusalem invigorates rather than weakens the witness-bearing. The believers are not put off preaching: they are motivated for it! When they got somewhere, anywhere, they preached. Some of them might have settled; others, like Philip, might have led a wandering life, becoming itinerant evangelists. But wherever they went, they voiced the faith by preaching the word. Luke doesn't describe a kind of preaching that focussed on persecution, and they don't appear to spend their time carping about the Sanhedrin: they declare the gospel message. So 8:4, 'Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.'

Relocated by God, they became fellow-builders with him as he enlarges his kingdom. Already that statement of intent that God had declared through Habakkuk, that 'the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea', appears over the eschatological horizon and enters our historical field of view.

3. Strength

There is a third dimension to the expansion of the church. It grows in what Luke calls 'strength'. Which means what?

Well, it certainly doesn't mean virtuoso giftedness. The kind of strength here is not the sort of showing off your gift thing that does the church equivalent of tearing telephone directories in half – all very impressive but worse than useless.

The strengthening of the church is referred to six times in Acts. It is always associated with the preaching and teaching of the word of God, and it is never a reference to 'strength of numbers'. Sometimes numbers increased as well as strength, but not necessarily. The occurrences are at the end of the paper for you to follow up in their fuller context, but for now it will suffice to say that the three Greek terms that Luke uses indicate that strength is primarily strength of faith, and particularly faith resisting hostility. Believers are built up to withstand animosity; or they are made more courageous and steadfast in their belief and proclamation; or the life of the church in a city is consolidated by a second visit of the Paul and his companions so that it might stand firmly for Christ. It's strength that shows in perseverance against the odds.

4. Godliness

This fourth aspect of the expansion of the church focuses our minds once again on the qualitative growth of the church. I appreciate that the terms 'Kingdom' and 'Church' are not synonyms, neither are the actual Kingdom and the actual Church co-extensive; but in that the Kingdom on earth can be taken to be the sphere in which the kingship of King Jesus is acknowledged – in which knees are bowed now and tongues confess now that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father – then as we see the church expand we do see the Kingdom expand. There are ways in which we cannot properly speak of the Kingdom growing because Christ is totally Lord over all things whether people

like it or not. Yet there are also ways in which we can properly speak of his Kingdom growing and increasing: in fact we are obliged to do so by the parables of growth (e.g. the mustard seed) and by the statement by God through Isaiah of what will happen ('Of the *increase* of his government and peace there shall be no end.' Is.9:7 – my italics.) This fourth aspect of the Kingdom's growth certainly has to do with the acknowledgement in practical living of the Lordship of Christ. It's not actually referred to directly by Luke but it does belong to the church that was planted during Paul's missionary endeavours as recorded in Acts.

Writing to Titus, in a letter which is brimful of teaching about the role of preaching and teaching, so that the church on Crete might be strengthened, Paul gives the clue to the calling that he had received when God assaulted him in on the road to Damascus. In fact he gives us one of the classic descriptions of his identity. He writes 'Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness ...' (Tit. 1:1)

The spontaneous expansion of the church that we see taking place through the preaching of the word of God is only adequately seen – and, dear friends, expected – when we recognize and yearn for a growth in godliness. As the inner kingdoms of the human soul, so ravaged and corrupted by sin and Satan, become the inner kingdoms of our God and of his Christ, so the Kingdom grows. Let that be expected by us which speaks of the converting of habits, of attitudes and values, of the will, of ambitions of our relational reflexes, of our idolatries. Godliness, as well as conversions, was the harvest of anointed preaching of the truth that Paul considered himself appointed to gather. Same truth; same 'Giver of Knowledge'; same kingdom growing in the same days. Same calling.

PART 3

THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT AND THE EXPANSION OF THE CHURCH IN ACTS

How was all this done? Whence came this life-changing, world-inverting power and authority? Are these *really* the Acts of the Apostles?

Having told the apostles the purposes of the mission of God, Jesus warned the disciples not to rush off and try to accomplish it. We might think of doing it a different way – the worldly mind seeks to give motivational speeches, to pump people up and set 'em going. Work people up to a frenzy of emotion and let them loose upon an unsuspecting world. Or else lecture them to near-death, load up a ministry 'toolbox' with reference-based techniques, programme them with gospel mantras and place them among people who are dead in their transgressions and sins. And then expect them to find a path between pride and despair.

⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (Lk. 24:46-49)

Again, at the beginning of Acts itself, Luke records the words of Jesus concerning what would happen before the proclamation, the witnessing, could begin:

⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will

be baptised with the Holy Spirit.”⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (1:4-8)

Patently, volume 2 of Luke’s work is about the acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles (and through many others as well).

In what ways do we see the Spirit being the sovereign agent of the kingdom’s growth? Of course, every conversion involves the regenerating work of the Spirit, but there is more to the scriptural record than even that miracle of mercy.

There are two works of the Spirit that lie behind the proclamation that we have been looking at thus far in Luke’s account of the spreading out of God’s Kingdom.

1. The Sovereign Spirit Enables the Preaching

The Holy Spirit enables once fearful and frankly, fairly thick disciples who demonstrated an amazing ability to miss the point to become bold, coherent and authoritative preachers of the gospel.

It is the Spirit who enables the preaching on the day of Pentecost (2:16ff). The power shows in several ways: the bold preaching of the Christ by all those on whom the Spirit had descended, trained orators or not; the ability to speak in other languages; the effectiveness of speaking that relies on the hearers actually hearing and taking the message to heart – the Spirit is sovereign at both ends of the communication process and people are saved. Their own power would have been laughably insufficient; the power that clothes them from on high is gloriously sufficient for the work of the Kingdom.

It is the Spirit who fills Peter when he and John are hauled before the rulers, elders and teachers of the law for healing the cripple by the gate called Beautiful and for proclaiming that the resurrection is in Jesus. Faced with almost exactly the same squad that he had hidden from in the courtyard as Jesus was tried, when he was terrified that he might face the same fate as Jesus, Peter the unschooled fisherman boldly runs rings round the hard-hearted experts. (4:8ff)

That same boldness is given to the ‘all’ who have gathered in prayer (4:23ff) as they are inspired to speak the word of God.

Stephen, a man known to be full of the Holy Spirit (6:3-5) speaks to his opponents from the Synagogue of the Freedmen and floors them with his wisdom and ‘the Spirit by whom he spoke’ (6:8-10).

As those who preach the same message as part of the same mission, we are given every reason to look to the same Spirit to give us the same boldness to break through our natural fears, the same intelligence to acquire true content, the same instruction to know the word that, as the suffering servant puts it in the third servant song, ‘sustains the weary’ (Is. 50:40) and the same inward motivation that longs to see God honoured in the declaration of his glory.

2. The Sovereign Spirit Guides the Preachers

The question of sovereignty keeps cropping up for us throughout our service. We have a terrible tendency to think that once we’ve been doing it for a few years, made a

few mistakes and observed the more numerous mistakes of others, developed a web of involvements and responsibilities and worked out a pretty neat theology of this and that, then we can and ought to define our sphere of work. In the name of maturity we inadvertently sidle our way onto the throne. Moment-by-moment reliance on the Spirit as the Lord who guides begins to seem like recklessness. In the process of acquiring the 'man-strength' of what's often called 'leadership', our ability to listen and discern with sensitivity the subtle nudges and promptings of the dove, the gentle breeze, the still, small voice, quietly withers.

Yet the plot of the longest bit of narrative in the New Testament is frequently driven along by the gentle and unpredictable wind of the all-powerful creator-Spirit.

Note, therefore, the way in which the gospel reaches Ethiopia. Philip, ministering successfully in Samaria, seeing the Acts 1:8 promise coming to fruition, experiencing the continuation of that which was begun by Jesus by the well near Sychar, watching God break down centuries of hostility from Samaritans and inundated with the need for small-group follow-up work and Bible Study handouts and a host of other exciting and vital work, is gently but firmly levered out of the situation. Against all the apparent necessities of responsive and responsible service, an angel of the Lord tells Philip to go and stand in the middle of nowhere for no apparent reason, and when a chariot comes along the Spirit tells this responsible, dependable, mature man to go and run alongside it. There is no hint as to the significance of the moment; Philip has no data by which to assess the pros and cons of the move. He's simply told by the Spirit 'Go to that chariot and stay near it'. (8:29)

And note the way in which Paul's route on the second of his missionary journeys is navigated according to the Spirit's preventions. God closed doors so that Paul and his companions ended up in Troas, where he received the vision of the man of Macedonia calling them. The gospel's entry into Europe, the playing out of the plot revealed in Luke 24:27 and Acts 1:8, was planned not by the strategic genius of Paul, but by the Spirit. Thus:

⁶ Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.' (16:6-8)

Nor did it stop there for Paul. His testimony to the Ephesian Elders at their deeply moving final meeting at Miletus, was that the third journey would terminate in Jerusalem, and would lead to suffering. The impetus to go there and suffer the consequences came, again, from that steady trade-wind of the sovereign Spirit.

²²“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.” (20:22-23)

3. The Sovereign Spirit Makes it Work

There remains one other crucial aspect of the Spirit's work in the expansion of the Kingdom in Acts. The preaching of the gospel in the places that were fore-ordained by God would have been to no avail were it not for the work of the Spirit that accompanied the preaching. This sovereign work of the Spirit is not attested to so much in Luke's narrative as in the theological reflection that we encounter in Paul's

letters to the churches that were planted in Acts. The work— note this — is done in both hearers and preachers.

Thus in Acts 17 we read of the Kingdom coming to the capital of Macedonia, Thessalonica. Luke's telling gives us the events, the characters and their deeds; but what was going on under the surface, so to speak? Taking off the story-teller's specs and looking through theological lenses, what do we see? Well, Paul tells the Thessalonians at the start of his first letter to them

'⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.' (1 Thess. 1:4-6)

First, the electing grace of God was at work. Second, this is obvious to Paul because of two groups of phenomena: one in the preaching and one in the hearing. He knew that God was about his fore-ordained work because in the preaching were the true words, powerful presentation, the Spirit's enabling, deep conviction in the preachers (what a difference that always makes to our preaching!) and the supporting evidence of the preacher's lives. But that was matched by what was going on in the hearers — warm reception of the message with joy, in spite of persecution. And where did that joy come from? The Holy Spirit. There was no joy to be found in the circumstances, but Christian joy is not joy in our circumstances nor does it come about because we feel good about ourselves — these are the world's joys. Distinctively Christian joy is feeling good about God, not feeling good about yourself. Who but the Spirit can persuade carnal pagans that God's character and his grace in Christ, his mercy and his great *telos* for believers are so good that they produce joy that rises above the circumstances?

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians from Corinth. His first letter back to the believers there contains an even clearer statement of the double work of the sovereign Spirit in making preaching effective.

Paul reached Corinth bruised and wearied. The splendid bow-wave of the gospel's progress through Macedonia had a wake of violent assault. The man was knackered and hurt and afraid. His weakness was right on the surface, visible to all and very apparent to himself. At least, that's what he seems to be saying when he writes to them.

'When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.' (1 Cor. 2:1-5)

The only power that was going to make the whole thing work was the Spirit's power.

That power was demonstrated not only in enabling Paul to persevere, but in giving the Corinthians ears to hear and eyes to see. In a manner which corresponds to the work of the Spirit in the preachers and the hearers in Thessalonica, Paul describes what happens everywhere and at all times when the gospel brings life.

'The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. ¹⁴ The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.' (1 Corinthians 2:10-14)

We speak the truth and people understand and accept it because of the work of the Spirit, who regally 'applies' the victory of the risen Christ over sin and death to bring dead sinners to life for evermore as the word of God is preached. Edwards was spot on:

God has appointed Christ to be the heir of the world in his kingdom of grace, and to possess and reign over all nations, through the propagation of his gospel, and the power of his Spirit communicating the blessings of it.

It simultaneously sobers us and spurs us on. We are both humbled and hopeful; cast back upon God in repentance and in expectation, to exalt him and exult in him alone.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE: THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS (after Richard N. Longenecker, *op cit.*)

INTRODUCTION: THE CONSTITUTIVE EVENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND ITS MISSION (1:1-2:41)

PART I: THE CHRISTIAN MISSION TO THE JEWISH WORLD (2:42-12:24)

Panel 1--The Earliest Days of the Church at Jerusalem (2:42-6:7)

Summary Statement: "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (6:7).

Panel 2--Critical Events in the Lives of Three Pivotal Figures (6:8-9:31)

Summary Statement: "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord" (9:31).

Panel 3--Advances of the Gospel in Palestine-Syria (9:32-12:24)

Summary Statement: "But the word of God continued to increase and spread" (12:24).

PART II: THE CHRISTIAN MISSION TO THE GENTILE WORLD (12:25-28:31)

Panel 4--The First Missionary Journey and the Jerusalem Council (12:25-16:5)

Summary Statement: "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers" (16:5).

Panel 5--Wide Outreach Through Two Missionary Journeys (16:6-19:20)

Summary Statement: "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" (19:20).

Panel 6--To Jerusalem and Thence to Rome (19:21-28:31)

Summary Statement: "Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (28:31).

APPENDIX TWO: REFERENCES TO THE CHURCH BEING STRENGTHENED

Acts 9:31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

Acts 14:21-22 ²¹They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²²strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

Acts 15:32 Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers.

Acts 15:40-41 ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Acts 16:5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Acts 18:23 ²³ After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and travelled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.