

PAUL LIVED IN ROME

👉 read Acts 28:17–31

Paul was given a house to live in. Three days later, he called the Jewish leaders. He told them why he was a prisoner. The Roman authorities would have let him go free, he said, but the Jews in Jerusalem would not hear of it. “So I was compelled to appeal to Caesar,” he explained (28:16–19).

On a certain day, from morning till evening, Paul explained the Kingdom of God to these Jews. He tried to convince them about Jesus. He did this from their own Scriptures, the Law and the Prophets (28:23).

While a few believed the gospel, most did not. As they began to leave, Paul spoke again the great words of Isaiah (Is 6:9–10). Jesus also used these words when He spoke to the Pharisees and the people (Mark 4:12; John 12:40). Isaiah’s words spoke doom to those who rejected the Messiah.

The Jews in Asia had cursed him, beaten and stoned him, yet Paul said he had no charge to bring against them.

“For two whole years he stayed in a rented house in Rome. After that, history is silent. Whatever happened to Paul’s worn-out body, we know from God’s word that his spirit received “a rich welcome into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:11).

TALK ABOUT 1. What happened to Paul in Rome? 2. What was the great hope that Paul preached to the Jews in Rome? 3. Did he preach the same hope of eternal life to the Gentiles? 4. Do you have this hope?

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ACTS of the Apostles



A series of Studies
by
Fred Morris
written in everyday English

TO THE READER...

Read your Bible first, then study this book. In this study all Bible verses are from the New International Version of the Bible. Verses quoted from the Bible are shown as (Acts 7:6), chapter 7 and verse 6.

There are many versions of the Bible in English. When verses are taken from other versions they are shown as: KJV – King James Version; NASB – New American Standard Bible; TLB – The Living Bible; NLT – New Living Translation. Words for special study are

News (8:4).

The key idea in Acts is “Be ready.” God had made everything ready for the gospel to go to all the nations: a) The Romans had brought law and order. b) They had built roads to travel on. c) The Greek language was widely used. d) A little band of disciples was filled with God’s Spirit (2:2).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus told the disciples, “Preach the Kingdom of God” (Mark 1:15). Luke said they preached the gospel (Matt 10:7; Luke 9:6), so the Kingdom and the gospel of Jesus Christ are one and the same.

The disciples went first to “the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt 10:6). Later Paul

OUTLINE OF ACTS

1. Birth of the N.T. Church (1:1–5:42).
2. Persecution on the believers (6:1– 9:31).
3. Peter and the Gentile Christians (9:32–12:24).
4. Antioch and missions (12:25–16:5).
5. The gospel goes to Asia (16:6–19:41).
6. Paul’s journey to Rome (20:1– 28:31).

Dr Luke wrote Acts.

He began to write about what Jesus did and said in the “Gospel of Luke” and continued in the book of Acts. In his Gospel, Luke wrote “all that Jesus began to do and teach” (1:1). Luke told how Jesus chose disciples and how He went about preaching “the Gospel of the Kingdom.”

In Acts he told what happened to the disciples after Jesus went back to Heaven (1:9). Paul, Peter, James and other apostles wrote letters or epistles to the many churches to help the Christians stand firm in their faith. The Book of Acts is like a bridge. It spans from the gospels to the epistles. Before Jesus went back to Heaven He told the disciples to “stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (1:4; Luke 24:49). Jesus spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit. God is three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19).

Acts tells us how God sent His Spirit to live in the new Christians, what they believed, and how they worshipped. They were persecuted and scattered. And they went everywhere preaching the Good

THE SHIP WAS WRECKED IN A STORM

👉 read Acts 27:27–44

In the storm, the crew threw everything into the sea to make the ship lighter. The men went without food and the captain “gave up all hope of being saved” (27:20). Paul urged them to keep up their courage. He told them, “not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed” (27:22).

That night an angel told Paul, “Don’t be afraid...You must stand trial before Caesar...God has...given you the lives of all who sail with you.”

Next day Paul said to the men, “I have faith that it will happen just as the angel told me...but we must run aground on some island” (27:26).

Paul urged the men to eat for they had eaten very little in 14 days.

Soon the water got shallow. Some of the men let down a lifeboat. Then Paul spoke to Julius, the centurion, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved...” (27:31).

As daylight came, they saw a sandy beach and decided to run the ship aground, but it stuck on a sandbar. The ship started to break up. The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners, but the centurion wanted to spare Paul (27:42–43).

ON THE ISLAND OF MALTA

👉 read Acts 28:1–16

Some of the men swam to shore. Others floated on pieces of the ship and everyone reached land safely (27:44). When they got to the beach, they found they were on the island of Malta. The people they met were kind to them and lit a fire to warm and dry them.

Paul helped them gather wood for the fire. As he did this, a poisonous snake came out of the fire and bit his hand (28:3). “He must be a murderer,” they said. “He was not drowned at sea, so he is going to get justice now.” But God took care of Paul and he was not harmed by the snake bite.

The chief man on the island took the men to his estate and treated them kindly. His father was sick in bed, so Paul went to see him. After prayer, Paul placed his hands on the man and God healed him. When this happened, other sick people came to Paul and God healed them (28:8–9). Because God healed them, they listened to Paul preaching the gospel.

Early in AD 60 Paul was put on a ship that took him to Rome. Long before he reached the city, Christians came out to meet him. “The brothers traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns (about 40 miles) to meet us. At sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged” (28:15).

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE AGRIPPA

👉 read Acts 25:23 – 26:32

The next day Festus brought Paul before King Agrippa. Festus told the King, "I have found he (Paul) has done nothing that deserves death" (25:25). The governor's words remind us of Pilate's words, "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23:4 KJV).

Then Festus said to Agrippa, "I will send him to Rome. But I have nothing definite to write to the Emperor about him" (25:25–26).

King Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself" (26:1). This was the third time God recorded Paul's testimony (9:1–19).

Paul told the King, "The Jews all know the way I have lived since I was a child." Paul's life was open for all to see. Then Paul said, "I am on trial because of the hope God promised to our fathers" (26:6). That hope was Jesus. The Jews should have had the same hope that Paul had.

TALK ABOUT 1. Paul said "nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said": a) That Christ would suffer (Isa 53). b) That Jesus Christ would be the first to rise from the dead with a new body (1 Cor 15:20,23). c) That Jesus came to save all men (Luke 1:68). d) That Christ's light would go to the Gentile nations (Isa 42:6). 2. What did King Agrippa say about Paul (26:32)?

PAUL GOES TO ROME

👉 read Acts 27:1–26

Julius, a soldier in the Imperial Regiment, guarded Paul and the other prisoners (27:1). Paul's friend Ar-is-tar'-chus was with him. Paul called him "a fellow prisoner" (Col 4:10). Was Aristarchus taken prisoner at Ephesus (Acts 19:29)? Or did he offer himself to serve Paul? No one can say for sure.

Luke was with Paul. He wrote a very clear account of the ship and the storm. This showed how Paul acted in time of danger and how he led others.

Julius must have admired Paul. At Sidon he let Paul go off the ship without anyone to guard him (27:3). Paul visited the believers at Sidon.

Sailing was dangerous after September 14th and ships stayed in port for the winter. Winter began about November 11th. Now it was "after the Fast..." (27:9). This was the Day of Atonement (October 5th, AD 59) and the seas were already rough. Paul knew this and told the captain and the officer, "I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss..."

The owner did not listen to Paul. "The majority decided we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there" (27:12).

group of people meeting together to worship the living God (5:11; 11:26). 'The Church' can also mean all people everywhere who belong to Jesus Christ by faith. They are "Christians," born again by God's Spirit (John 3:8). They are God's family and they come from every nation and tongue and people group (Rev 5:9).

Jesus said, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17; Isaiah 56:7)

THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST'S NAME

Jesus gave His disciples the power and authority of His own name and God's Spirit worked through them. Many demons were cast out and the sick were healed by the power and authority of Jesus' name (4:10).

Not long after that, one of the Twelve, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Jesus. Peter

The letters to churches tell about the Holy Spirit:

1. Living in our hearts (Rom 8:9).
2. Bringing Christ's life and power to us.
3. Working Christ's holiness in our lives (John 16:8).
4. Making us bold to witness for Christ (Eph 6:20).

said he did not know Jesus and all the other disciples ran away! They needed God's Spirit, living in them, to give them courage. We, too, need to be "filled with the Spirit" if we are to serve God (Luke 11:13; Eph 5:18).

Under the New Covenant, the Father promised to send His Spirit on all believers (Joel 2:28). The Holy Spirit comes to everyone who receives Jesus Christ as their Saviour. They are "born again" by the Spirit of God (John 3:8).

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak – not laugh or fall down, but speak! (2:4). From that time, the Holy Spirit lived in them. They spoke God's word with boldness.

The disciples felt a strong urge to witness for Christ. They wanted to write all that Jesus had said and all that God's Spirit taught them. The Holy Spirit "opened their minds" and gave them the words to write (2 Tim 3:16). This did not happen until the Holy Spirit came upon them.

TALK ABOUT 1. What did Jesus tell the disciples to preach about (Matt 10:7)? 2. What changed the disciples from being afraid to being brave (2:4)? 3. How could these ignorant fishermen become writers of books in the New Testament? 4. Who wrote the Book of Acts? 5. What authority did Jesus give His disciples (Luke 9:1)? 6. Does God give Christians the same authority today?

The Holy Spirit in O.T.

- In creation (Gen 1:2).
- On God's servants (Gen 5:24).
- and workers (Ex 31:3).
- At special times (Judg 6:34).
- On God's prophets (Micah 3:8).
- On kings (2 Chron 15:1).

LUKE'S RECORD

read Acts 1:1–11 (Luke 1:1–4)

In the first chapter of Acts, Dr Luke tells what he wrote: “I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day He was taken up to Heaven” (1:1–2). This was the whole time Jesus was ministering on this earth.

After Jesus rose again from the dead, He showed Himself openly (John 20:14–28). a) To Mary. b) To Thomas. c) To His disciples. d) To five hundred. And He taught them about the coming of the Holy Spirit (1:4–5; Luke 24:49).

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

Israel was ruled by a Roman military government. The Jews and the disciples had hoped that Jesus would free them from Roman rule. So they asked Jesus, “Are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (1:6). Jesus answered, “It is not for you to know the times, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses...” (1:8). He turned their eyes away from earthly things to a spiritual Kingdom and the part they were going to play in it (1:3; John 18:36).

The Bible describes the Kingdom of God as: a) The eternal Kingdom of God (2 Peter 1:11). b) The Kingdom in the person of the King (Mark 1:15). c) A spiritual community where the King rules in the hearts of His people (Rom 14:17). d) A Kingdom not of this world but in Heaven (John 18:36). e) A Kingdom that will go on forever.

They would be Christ's witnesses to the whole world, beginning “in Jerusalem...” (1:8). But they would need more than their natural ability to do this. They would need the power and boldness that the Holy Spirit would give them when He came to live in them (John 14:17; Luke 24:49).

TALK ABOUT 1. What is the Kingdom of God? 2. What did the disciples want restored (1:6)? 3. What did Jesus answer (1:6–8)? 4. Why did Jesus tell them to stay in the city of Jerusalem (1:4, Luke 24:49)? 5. Who is the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–18)? 6. Why did the disciples need the Holy Spirit (John 16:13–14)?

JESUS WAS TAKEN UP TO HEAVEN

After Jesus talked with His disciples, He was taken up to Heaven before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from view (1:9). The disciples were surprised. They never expected this to happen. They stood with their mouths open, looking up into the sky.

Suddenly, two men dressed in white stood beside them (1:10). “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into Heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into Heaven” (1:11).

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE FELIX

read Acts 24:1–27

An-a-ni'-as the High Priest, went down to Caesarea with the elders (24:1). They charged Paul with: a) Stirring up riots all over the world. b) Being a leader of the Nazarene sect. c) Trying to desecrate the Temple by bringing Gentiles into it (24:5–6). Paul answered each charge brought against him.

Governor Felix told Paul, “When Lysias the commander comes I will decide your case.” He ordered the centurion to give Paul some freedom and let his friends visit him (24:22–27). Paul was in Caesarea for two years.

From time to time Felix and his wife Drusilla called for Paul. They wanted to hear more of “the Way.” Paul spoke to them of: a) Righteousness, the Christian and the living God. b) Self-control. c) Judgment to come.

He spoke God's word with power, until Felix trembled. But he did not yield to God's Spirit. “That is enough...,” he said to Paul, “you may leave.”

When two years passed, Felix went back to Rome and Porcius Festus became governor. He wanted to please the Jews, so he left Paul in prison.

Three days later, Festus went up to Jerusalem. There the Jewish leaders came and made their charges against Paul. They asked the governor to have Paul brought before the Sanhedrin. They wanted to kill Paul.

PAUL WENT BEFORE FESTUS

read Acts 25:1–22

Festus did not grant their request. He held court in Caesarea, so the Jews came from Jerusalem to Caesarea to make their charges against Paul. They brought many charges, but they could not prove any of them.

Paul stood innocent before them. He was not a law-breaker. And he always kept the Jewish laws when among the Jews.

At last Paul said, “I appeal to Caesar.” Festus spoke to his council about Paul's appeal. Then Festus said to Paul, “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!” (25:12).

A few days later, King A-grip'-pa (Herod Agrippa I) and Bernice arrived in Caesarea. Festus talked with Agrippa about Paul: “There is a man here,” he told him, “whose case was left for me by Felix. When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and other Jewish leaders gave me their side of the story and asked me to have him killed. I pointed out to them that Roman law does not convict a man before he is tried” (25:14–16 TLB). After hearing this, Agrippa said to Festus, “I would like to hear this man myself” (25:22).

to scourge prisoners would have killed Paul, or crippled him for life.

Paul asked one of the soldiers, "Is it legal for you to whip a Roman citizen who hasn't even been tried" (22:25 TLB)? The centurion (an officer in charge of 100 men) heard Paul say this and reported it to the commander.

"What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen." Under Roman law, all citizens were given a fair trial before they were punished. The commander said to his men, "I had to pay a big price to become a citizen" (22:28). Instead of flogging Paul, the commander sent him to the Sanhedrin to be tried (22:30).

BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

👉 read Acts 22:30 – 23:11

Paul told the court. "I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead" (23:6). Sadducees said there was no resurrection and no angels or spirits. Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body and in spirit beings, so his words caused an uproar. The Sadducees wanted to kill Paul, but the Pharisees argued, "We find nothing wrong with this man." The commander was afraid Paul would be torn limb from limb, so he told the soldiers to take him back to the barracks. Then the Lord said to Paul in a vision, "Take courage!" He said. "As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (23:11).

THE PLOT TO KILL PAUL

👉 read Acts 23:12–35

Forty Jews said they would not eat food until they had killed Paul (23:14). Then they asked their leaders to have Paul brought before them. They planned to ambush him along the way and kill him.

The son of Paul's sister heard of this plot and told Paul about it. Paul said to one of the centurions, "Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him" (23:17).

For safety, Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander, moved Paul to Caesarea. There he would stand trial before governor Felix (23:31).

In Caesarea governor Felix told Paul, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here" (23:35). After that Paul was kept under guard in Herod's palace. In the next days and months he witnessed before governors, kings and high officials. This was God's plan for him (9:15).

Agrippa was only a youth when his father died in AD 44, so Claudius did not make him king of Judea. However, after some years, emperor Claudius gave him the land ruled by Philip (Luke 3:1). Under emperor Nero this area was enlarged. The Dominion of Antipas was added to it and, later, Judea and Samaria.

MATTHIAS CHOSEN TO BE AN APOSTLE

👉 read Acts 1:12–26

The disciples went back to the city as Jesus had told them (Luke 24:48–49). They went to an "upper room" and waited. Jesus had told them "wait for the gift My Father promised" and they obeyed.

Peter wanted to make the number of apostles up to twelve again. Judas Iscariot had hanged himself. That left their number at eleven. Luke is very careful about the details: a) Judas was numbered with the apostles (1:12). b) He "obtained part of this ministry." c) He "was guide to those who arrested Jesus." d) He went out and hanged himself.

GOD'S GREAT PLAN...

1. Jesus went up to Heaven
2. The Holy Spirit came down
3. The believers went out into all the world with the gospel
4. Jesus will come again

Peter called them "Brothers" (2:14). He said, "The Scripture...had to be fulfilled." All that was written about Jesus (and Judas) had come to pass. Peter told of two prophecies from David's Psalms. The Holy Spirit had spoken about Judas 700 years before. He said: 1. "May his place be deserted..." (Ps 69:25). 2. "May another take his place" (Ps 109:8).

Two of the brothers, Joseph, called Bar'-sab-bas, also known as Justus, and Mat-thi'-as stood before them. They prayed, "Lord show us which of these two You have chosen...And the lot fell to Matthias" (1:26). This is the last time we read in the Bible of "lots" being used. Someone has said, "They did not need to use lots again for they had the Holy Spirit to show them."

TALK ABOUT 1. The apostles prayed about the decision they were making. What was their prayer (1:24)? 2. How do you wait on God in prayer? 3. Why were the disciples so concerned about the one they would choose?

THE DISCIPLES PRAY AND WAIT IN THE UPPER ROOM

👉 read Acts 2:1–13 (Luke 24:49)

Each day, the disciples and followers of Jesus, men and women, prayed and waited on the Lord. Mary, Jesus' mother was one of the women. They were "all together in one place" and they were of one mind. The apostles did not think of themselves as above or better than the others.

They waited and prayed for ten days. No one was in a hurry. On the 50th day after Jesus rose from the dead – on the Pentecost – the Holy Spirit came to them. The gathered disciples heard a sound like a mighty wind. They saw what "seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them" (2:3).

Men and women together, “were filled with the Holy Spirit” (2:4). They saw the glow of the Spirit rest on each one, but His ‘filling’ or control came to their hearts. His was a gentle flame that brought light and joy to their lives.

What had appeared to be “tongues of fire” soon passed from their sight, but the blessing of the Holy Spirit stayed. God’s Spirit filled them with love for Jesus and for each other.

Now God commands each of us to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). As we believe and trust Christ, His Spirit come to us. The Presence of Jesus comes to us by His Spirit. All Christ’s grace and strength can be ours because He sent His Spirit to the Christian Church at Pentecost (Phil 4:13). When we are filled with the Spirit, He controls our lives. We will love with God’s love. We will be bold for Christ and want to tell others (4:31). All those who received the Holy Spirit that day went out speaking “the wonderful works of God!” (2:11).

GOD:

- set their eyes on missions
- “you shall be My witnesses” (1:8).
- gave them power to witness
- they preached in the power of the Holy Spirit (2:33).
- gave them a world view (2:21).
- chose who would be sent (13:2).
- told them where to go (16:6).

PASSOVER OR FEAST OF WEEKS

At Passover, the number of people in the city doubled. People came from every country and packed into every inch of space. All these strangers (foreigners or Jews from other lands) heard the apostles praising God. Each visitor to Jerusalem heard in his own language. This was a miracle!

At first these Jews scoffed at this miracle of language. These men have had too much wine, they said (2:13). Then the Holy Spirit took control of Peter’s tongue and he spoke with power. His Galilean speech would have been hard to understand, but the Spirit made Peter’s words clear.

TALK ABOUT 1. What is God’s command to the Christian Church (Matt 28:18–19)? 2. Who did God send to help us do this (1:4–5)? 3. What miracle did God use to tell the Good News to all those in the city of Jerusalem (2:6)? 4. Why were so many people from other lands in the city at this time (2:5)? 5. Peter preached the first sermon after Pentecost __ True __ False?

PETER SPOKE TO THE CROWD

 **read Acts 2:14–47**

Peter spoke to Jewish men and women. They already knew the Scriptures because they read the Law and the Prophets at their synagogues every Sabbath and taught them to their children (Deut 6:6–9). Peter used words spoken by Israel’s prophet Joel who lived 800 years before (2:16). He said: 1. “This (the coming of the Holy Spirit) is what was spoken by Joel the prophet (Joel 2:28–32). 2. Jesus was proved to be the Son of God by His miracles. 3. We are eye-

the things that have been told about him were not true.

Paul agreed to go to the Temple with the four Christian Jews and join with them in the same rites. He had been under a vow himself. Earlier, he had shaved his head at Cen-chre-a (18:18). Paul agreed to do as the elders had said.

PAUL ARRESTED IN JERUSALEM

 **read Acts 21:27–39**

Jews from the provinces wanted to kill Paul. They had seen him on the street with Troph’-i-mus, a Gentile from Eph’-e-sus, so they spread false stories about him and stirred up the people.

They shouted, “Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches... against our people and our law and this place...(the Temple)” People came running from all directions. They dragged Paul from the Temple area and were trying to kill him (21:31).

News of the uproar reached the Roman commander. He took some of his soldiers and ran into the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander, they stopped beating Paul. Then soldiers grabbed him and chained him.

The commander asked what Paul had done, but some shouted one thing and some another. So the commander took Paul to the barracks.

As Paul stood on the steps, he asked to speak to the crowd who had followed him. They shouted, “Away with him!” (21:33–36).

TALK ABOUT 1. Were the reports of Paul’s teaching Moses’ laws true? 2. What did Paul teach (1 Cor 15:3–5)? 3. What was the vow of a Nazirite? 4. What charge did they bring against Paul (21:28)?

PAUL SPOKE TO THE PEOPLE

 **read Acts 21:40 – 22:29**

Paul stood and spoke to the people in Aramaic, the language of the common people. He told them of his birth and training as a Pharisee. He told how he had persecuted Christians and how Jesus spoke to him on the road to Damascus. Then he told of God’s command to go to the Gentiles.

When the crowd heard this they shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!” (22:22).

The commander told his men to take Paul and flog him. The whip they used

The Nazarite vow

A vow taken by men and women setting them apart from others for the service of God. (Num 6:1–21)

- a) For a time he would not cut his hair.
- b) He would not shave his beard.
- c) He would not drink wine or beer.
- d) He would not go near a dead body.
- e) He would be set apart for a holy life, and he would serve the Lord.

said Philip's daughters became well known. One or more of them settled at Heirapolis. They were eye-witnesses of God's work in the Christian Church of that time.

AGABUS GAVE PAUL A SIGN

While Paul stayed with Philip, Ag'-a-bus, 'a prophet', came from Jerusalem (21:10-11). Agabus took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews...will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles'" They all wept!

Paul asked, "Why are you weeping...I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (21:13).

The Holy Spirit was leading Paul, but they were urging him not to go to Jerusalem. When he would not be held back, they said, "The Lord's will be done." God had made it very clear that He wanted Paul in Jerusalem.

Paul said good-bye to the saints and left Caesarea. Some of the disciples went with him. They knew the danger, but they wanted to see Paul safely to the house of Mnason, an old saint from Cyprus, who lived in Jerusalem.

After they arrived in Jerusalem, Paul and the others went to see James and the elders (21:17-18). James told Paul, 'Many thousands of Jews have believed in Jesus as their Messiah. And all of them are zealous for the law' (21:20).

These Jewish Christians: a) Believed Jesus was the Messiah. b) Kept God's Law. c) Found strength in obeying the many traditions.

James and the elders told Paul, "These Jewish believers have been told that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs. What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come" (21:21-22 NASB).

Paul's words, "I am ready..." should be the watchword of all disciples. Be ready to do whatever your Lord calls you to do.

This was Paul's last journey to Jerusalem as a free man. From this point on he was a prisoner. He suffered trials and flogging like his Master, Jesus Christ, and finally was put to death in Rome.

THE JERUSALEM ELDERS

The elders in Jerusalem loved Paul and called him "brother", but they knew Jewish believers would not be his friends. Also, they wanted to be sure that what they had heard about Paul's teaching was true.

Paul kept the Law of Moses as well as any man could. He said, "To the Jews I became a Jew in order to win Jews" (1 Cor 9:20). In his defense before the Roman governor Festus, Paul said, "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the Temple..." (25:8).

James and the elders said to Paul, "Do what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them (to the Temple) and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses."(21:23-24 NASB). If he did this, all will know that

God's promise: "In those days I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams...And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:28-32).

witnesses of the resurrected Messiah! (1 John 1:1-2). 4. Your own Scriptures prove that Jesus was Israel's Messiah. 5. Repent and believe in Jesus' death and resurrection.

"God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ," Peter said (2:36). His words cut these men to the heart and some asked the apostles, "What shall we do?"

Peter told them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the

gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children..." (2:38-39). Then he warned them: "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." They must leave their old way of life and join other Christians in living godly lives.

THREE THOUSAND PEOPLE REPENTED

That day about three thousand people repented and believed. These new believers were baptized into the Christian Church – the Body of Christ – by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 3:6). So began the Christian Church in the New Testament age.

The early Christian Church was made up of Jews and a few Gentiles. Believers kept close to each other for support. They had no church buildings so they worshipped in the Temple and in their homes. Every day they went from house to house to eat the Lord's supper, to pray and enjoy fellowship, so that their homes became private chapels (2:46-47).

"They praised God and enjoyed the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (2:47).

"With glad and sincere hearts..." means they were joyful and open with each other. So often we try to hide our true selves behind a mask.

They prayed until their prayers turned to praise. Their worship did not keep to any time. Meetings began when people gathered and went on until they went back to their own homes. Most of the believers were poor, but all were ready and willing to help others. They shared what they had and it was said, "they had everything in common" (2:44). Among them were widows, orphans and slaves, but this did not matter. They ate meat with "singleness of heart..." (2:46). They collected money for the poor and gave freely. "Freely you have received," Jesus said, "freely give."

Each person repented and confessed their sins. They claimed the blood of Jesus to take away their sins (1 John 1:9). The Holy Spirit bound them together. They had one purpose, to honour Christ in everything.

They began to live and work in harmony and to share everything. They

Fire of Pentecost

- purifies the conscience
- warms the heart
- lights up God's word
- spreads the Gospel
- brings joy to the Church

trusted the Holy Spirit to help them overcome sin and live holy lives and they did not fear persecution.

We all need to trust God's Spirit to help us: a) Honour Christ in our lives. b) Stand up for what is right. c) Witness to family and friends. d) Move against the evil in our towns. e) Have victory over our old sinful natures (Gal 5:17).

TALK ABOUT 1. What happened when Peter preached (2:41)? 2. Did these Christians have a lot of property? 3. Must we confess our sins to God before we can truly worship Him? 4. How did the Holy Spirit's power show in the believers' lives?

One accord

- a) In prayer (3:1).
- b) In doctrine (3:22).
- c) In worship (4:1–2).
- d) In heart (4:32).
- e) In service (4:34).

GOD ADDED SIGN AND WONDERS

☞ read Acts 3:1–10

Peter and John went to the Temple to pray. A lame man sat at the gate. He had always been lame. Every day, friends carried him to the gate to beg. The man held out his hands for money.

Peter set his eyes on the lame man and said, 'Look at us!' This man needed more than a few coins! Peter had little money, but he knew God was at work in this man's heart. "Silver or gold I do not have," he told the man, "but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

Then he took the beggar by the right hand and helped him to stand. The man jumped to his feet and began to walk, praising God with a loud voice (3:8). Peter offered 'faith in Jesus' to this man and God healed him.

People crowded around to see what had happened to the lame man. Peter said to them: "Men of Israel, why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong" (3:12).

Jesus was gone, but the power of His Spirit was with the disciples. Those who served "in His name" had His power in them. And "faith in the Name of Jesus" was making men and women whole again. The prophet Isaiah had said this would happen (Isa 35:5–8).

PETER SPOKE AGAIN

☞ read Acts 3:11–26

The Jewish people had blindly followed their wicked leaders. So Peter called all of them to "repent and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord..." (3:19).

Heaven had received Jesus, but He would come again and "restore all things" (3:21). This restoring all things is joined to: 1. Faith in Christ as Saviour from sin. 2. Listening carefully to God's words and obeying them.

PAUL SAID GOOD-BYE

☞ read Acts 20:13–38

We don't know why Paul walked a short but rough path to Assos to meet the ship when he was hurrying to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost. At Ephesus the elders came to the ship to meet with him (20:17).

He encouraged them to continue in the Lord's work. Then he said, "I am innocent of the blood of all men" (20:26; Ezek 3:17–21).

'Do as I have done.' He told these elders, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of God's flock, which He bought with His own blood" (20:28).

Many try to take care of 'the flock,' but do not keep watch over themselves. They fail in their own feeble struggles and the sheep are scattered. Or they are so busy watching themselves that they have no time to care for the flock. In this matter, we note: a) The great price paid for the flock – Jesus' own blood. b) The dangers – called "savage wolves." c) False prophets inside the churches – "even from your own number..." d) The great work Paul had done at Ephesus. e) The only thing that could keep them strong – "the word of His (God's) grace, which can build you up" (20:32).

Paul knelt down and prayed. They all wept and kissed him because they knew they would not see his face again (20:36–38).

TALK ABOUT 1. What causes men and women to give up their hope in Jesus? 2. What can build up a Christian's faith (20:32)? 3. What warning did Paul give the elders (20:29–31)? 4. How did Paul know where to go next?

PAUL WENT UP TO JERUSALEM

☞ read Acts 21:1–26

Paul and his friends landed at Tyre in Phoe-ni'-cia. The church in Tyre began when believers went there from Jerusalem (11:19). The Christians urged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit warned them of trouble ahead for Paul (21:4). Paul also sensed trouble, but he went on (20:23).

At Caes-a-re'-a he and the others left the ship. The saints welcomed Paul and he stayed seven days with Philip the evangelist (8:40). Philip was a deacon, "one of the seven" chosen to help in the distribution of food (6:5). Later, God gave this godly man the gift of preaching. His four daughters prophesied and told Paul what would happen to him in Jerusalem.

Eusebius, who wrote early Church history,

Languages

In Paul's day, people used four different languages: Greek was the business language; Latin was the language of the Romans; the common people spoke Aramaic. Hebrew was the language of the educated Jews, but from the time of the exile the people spoke Aramaic every day.

TALK ABOUT 1. Paul worked with his hands ___ True ___ False? 2. Were John's disciples Christians (19:2)? 3. Can anyone use the name 'Jesus' to cast out demons? 4. Why did the Christians in Jerusalem suffer hardship? 5. Who was Artemis (19:24)? 6. What caused the riot at Ephesus (19:23–41)?

MACEDONIA – GREECE

👉 **read Acts 20:1–12**

Paul left Ephesus and went into Macedonia, then to Greece (20:2). He met with the Christians in each place and encouraged them (Heb 3:6).

After three months in Greece, Paul wanted to take a ship to Syria. He would have gone on to Corinth, but the Jews made a plot against him (20:3). So he left Greece and went back through Macedonia.

Some of the believers from Macedonia travelled with Paul. one was So'-pa-ter from Berea (So-sip'-a-ter in the book of Romans, 16:21); Ar-is-tar'-chus from Thess-alonica – later he went with Paul to Asia and then to Rome (27:2); Gaius and Timothy from Derbe; Tych'-i-chus, Troph'-i-mus from Asia. These men came from different ethnic groups. b) The missionary spirit of these early churches. Each church gave up some of its leaders to go with Paul. c) Their missionary zeal to share what God had given them.

Paul wanted to eat the Lord's Supper with the believers on "the first day of the week." This was done in all the churches (20:7; John 20:19,26; Rev 1:10). The first day of the week was called "the Lord's day" because Jesus rose from the dead that day. On the Lord's Day believers preached and taught God's word and 'broke bread' to remember Christ's death. They 'feasted on Christ' (John 6:55–56).

In the third-floor room, Paul went on talking until midnight (20:7). The room was hot and filled with smoke from the oil lamps. As Paul talked a young man, Eu'-ty-chus, fell from an open window three floors to the ground. When they picked him up, he was dead. Paul went down and threw his arms around the young man's body and he came back to life.

"The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted" (20:12). Paul went back upstairs to eat with the others oil lamp

Women prophets

While there were no great women prophets, God did give these women this gift:

- Miriam (Exodus 15:20)
- Deborah (Judges 4:4)
- Huldah (2 Kings 22:14)
- Noadiah (Nehemiah (6:14)
- Anna (Luke 2:36)
- Philip's daughters (Acts 21:8–9).

Samuel and every prophet since had spoken about what is happening here today, Peter told them. Isaiah's words had a double meaning – a message for the people who heard him speak and a spiritual message for the future. New Testament writers point us to the spiritual meaning of the prophets' words. The promise of God to Abraham (Gen 12:3), became "the covenant" and those listening to Peter were "heirs of the Covenant" (3:25).

Peter said:"God has glorified His servant Jesus... You handed Him over to be killed. You disowned Him before Pilate. You asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life. But God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this." (Acts 3:13–15; John 20:8)

God kept His Covenant promise to Abraham, to the Jewish nation and to us by sending Jesus Christ (Gen 13:15–17; Gal 3:16).

Peter told them, "When God raised up His servant (Jesus Christ), He sent Him first to you...to turn each of you from your wicked ways" (3:26). Christ was God's messenger to Israel first, then to all the world (Matt 28:18).

The chief priests and Temple officials were furious at being called wicked and it was easy for Satan to plant evil thoughts in their dark hearts.

TALK ABOUT 1. The Holy Spirit did signs and wonders through the apostles ___ True ___ False? 2. What was God's promise to Abraham (Gen 13:15–17)? 3. Can we claim God's promise for ourselves? 4. Can you say "Look at Jesus in me?" Is that your testimony? 5. Did Jesus come to be only Israel's Messiah?

PETER AND JOHN BEFORE THE COURT

👉 **read Acts 4:1–22**

Peter and John taught the new believers. The lame man who had been healed stood beside them. The Temple guards and Sad'-du-cees were "greatly troubled" by what Peter was saying: "claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead" (4:2 TLB). They tried to stop Peter speaking, but they could not, so they arrested Peter and John. Even so, many believed in Jesus (4:4).

Because it was evening, they put Peter and John in prison. The next day, the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met together in their highest court, called the Sanhedrin to question the apostles.

The High Priest, Cai'-a-phas, was president of the Sanhedrin. Annas, the old president was there, too. These two men had judged Jesus before they sent Him to Pilate (John 18:12–14). The other members of the Sanhedrin sat in a circle. Peter and John stood in the center.

The court demanded to know "By what power or

The Spirit of God:

1. Gave power to heal the lame man (4:14).
2. Gave disciples boldness to speak (4:8).
3. Taught them the truth (4:11, 25–26).
4. Gave them Scriptures to pray (4:25–26).
5. Spoke judgment on the rulers (4:10, 27)

what name did you do this?" They demanded to know who gave the apostles this authority (4:7)? Peter answered: "This miracle was done in the name and power of Jesus from Nazareth, the Messiah, the Man you crucified!" (4:10). He used the name "Jesus Christ," the One anointed by God to be the Saviour.

Then Peter said, "Jesus is the stone you builders rejected..." (4:11; Matt 21:42). God the Father sent His Son to be the cornerstone (or capstone) of the Christian Church, but they had rejected and killed Him.

God was, even then, building His Church (Matt 16:18). The Church is made up of born-again men and women. God calls His Church a 'Body' or 'temple' (1 Cor 3:16). He lives in this temple by His Spirit. The Church is built on Jesus Christ the stone these leaders (builders) had rejected! (Ps 118:22).

The court was silent. They could see Peter and John's courage. They were common men, who "had been with Jesus" (4:13). He had taught them. Now they were made wise and bold by His Spirit (Matt 10:19). They could find

no charge to bring against Peter and John, so they put them out of the room. "What are we going to do with these men?" the Pharisees asked each other. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle..." The man born lame had been living among them for 40 years!

After talking about this, the Sanhedrin called Peter and John and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus (4:18). To this they replied, "You decide whether God wants us to obey you instead of Him! We cannot stop telling about the wonderful things we saw Jesus do and heard Him say" (4:19–20 TLB).

TALK ABOUT 1. What could the Sanhedrin do to stop this Jesus-teaching? 2. What made Peter and the others so bold? 3. Who were the Pharisees? 4. What had they seen Jesus do? 5. Why did the Jewish leaders refuse to believe Jesus was the Messiah? 6. What is God building (Matt 16:18)? 7. What did the court tell Peter and John not to do (4:18)? 8. How did Peter and John answer the court?

THEY PRAYED FOR PETER

👉 **read Acts 4:23–37**

When they let Peter and John go, the disciples went to the believers and told them everything. Then all the Christians prayed. God heard their prayers. The place where they were meeting shook and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit again (4:31). Christians need to be filled with God's Spirit, and filled again. Then they must speak boldly the words the Spirit gives them to speak.

Men from every class came into the Christian Church – rich, poor, old, young, educated and not schooled. In Christ, they were all "of one heart and

No other name

Peter told the council at Jerusalem, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

sport's arena. Paul thought to go there and speak to the crowd, but his friends held him back.

The Jews pushed Alexander to the front to speak for them or show that Jews were not the same as Christians (19:32–33).

At last, the clerk of the city spoke to the crowd. He used clever words: a) All the world knew of the wonders of Ephesus and Diana. b) Paul's friends could not have done wrong. c) If the Ephesians had charges against these men, the courts were open and the proconsuls would hear their case (19:38). d) This riot was without reason and might get their city into trouble with the Roman governor.

The city clerk's words quieted the mob. Then he sent the people home (19:41). That day Paul and his friends escaped with their lives.

GODDESS WORSHIP IN EPHESUS

After the flood, men had found the great plains in the land of Shinar (Gen 11:2). Nimrod became a leader (Gen 10:8). He began to build the tower of Babel and gathered people into city states protected by walls. Nimrod was a ruthless, ungodly ruler. The Jewish Encyclopedia says, "Nimrod... made all the people rebellious against God."

Babylonian idolatry developed around the tradition of Nimrod, his wife Semiramis, and her child Tammuz. After Nimrod's death, Semiramis said that he was the SUN GOD. When her son Tammuz was born, she claimed that he was their 'god' reborn (or reincarnated). She said that her son was supernaturally conceived and that he was "the promised seed" (Gen 3:16).

Mother and child were worshipped in Mesopotamia from the earliest times. Monuments dug up in Babylon show the goddess Semiramis with her child. She was always pictured with a child in her arms and rays of light around her head!

The mystery religions of Babylon spread to all the surrounding nations. Mother and child were worshipped under different names in each nation. The Chinese had a 'holy mother' called Shingmoo. The ancient Germans had the virgin Hertha with a child in her arms. In India she was known as Indrani, also pictured with a child in her arms. To the Greeks the mother goddess was known as Aphrodite. Diana of the Ephesians was the same goddess. One writer says, "Regardless of the country, the name or the place, she is the wife of Baal; the virgin queen of Heaven, who bore fruit although she never conceived."

Woodrow writes in Babylon Mystery Religion, writes, "Babylonian paganism became well established in the Roman Empire. Compromises were made ...in an effort to bring everyone into the 'church.' Instead of the church being a separate, holy and pure called-out people, Rome made 'the church' a part of this world system" of goddess worship."

The prophet Jeremiah rebuked the nation of Judah for worshipping the Queen of Heaven (Jer 7:18). The 'Queen of Heaven' was a Babylonian title for the goddess Ishtar, worshipped in Babylon.

THE SONS OF SCEVA

Seven sons of Sceva, a 'high priest', were paid to cast out evil spirits (Matt 12:27; Luke 11:19). When these men saw Paul cast out evil spirits in the name of Jesus, they tried to do the same. They took Paul's words and used them. "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out," they shouted at a man with an evil spirit (19:13).

The evil spirit answered these men, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" The man with the evil spirit jumped on them and beat them up so that they ran out of the house 'naked and bleeding' (19:16).

Those who heard about this were seized with fear. "And the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour" (19:17). Some believers came to Paul and confessed to having evil things. Others had practiced witchcraft, so they burned their scrolls and fetishes in public. .

PAUL AND MACEDONIA

Paul planned 'in his spirit' (KJV) to go through Mac-e-do'-ni-a and Greece. He said, "After I have been there I must visit Rome, also." Later he wrote to the church in Rome and told them of his plan to come to Rome, then go on to Spain. Paul had his eyes on the Gentile nations to the west!

This was a time of famine and hardship, so the churches in Mac-e-do'-ni-a took up money for the poor saints in Judea (Jerusalem). Paul encouraged them in this and helped take their gift to Jerusalem (24:17).

PAUL CAUSED A RIOT

👉 read Acts 19:23–41

In Ephesus the men who made shrines were angry. Few were buying silver shrines of Artemis. (Diana to the Romans). De-me'-tri-us who made shrines for a living gathered other shrine makers and caused a riot.

Soon the whole city was in an uproar (19:29).

The mob grabbed the men who were with Paul and dragged them to the

ALEXANDRIA was a great city on the mouth of the Nile River in Egypt. It was established by Alexander the Great when he conquered Egypt in 331 BC.

Outside of Rome, it was the greatest city in the Roman Empire. Its lighthouse was one of the seven wonders of the world.

The city had many 'schools of learning' with a large museum and library. Many Jews lived there and Judaism was very strong. There seventy Jewish scholars worked to translate the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. Their translation is called the LXX or Septuagint (L= 50 and X = 10 in Roman counting).

Apollos came from one of these 'schools of learning.' Some think he wrote the Book of Hebrews because it is like some other writings we know that came from Alexandria.

mind." They were joined by one faith, like branches joined to a tree, and the life-giving Spirit filled them all (Rom 8:9).

Those who owned lands sold them and brought the money to the apostles who gave it to the poor (4:34–35). Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus sold his land and brought the money to the apostles. He was always helping and encouraging people, so the apostles gave him the name Barnabas which means "Son of Encouragement."

The Christian's prayer

"Lord, consider their threats.
Enable your servants to speak Your word with great boldness.
Stretch out Your hand to heal.
Perform signs and wonders through the name of Your Holy Servant Jesus." (Acts 4:29–30)

CHURCH MEMBERS JUDGED

👉 read Acts 5:1–11

An-a-ni'-as and his wife Sapph-i'-ra also sold a piece of property. An-a-na'-is brought part of the money to the apostles. Ananias told Peter it was the full price, but he and his wife kept back some of the money.

Peter knew Ananias was telling a lie. "Ananias," he said, "Satan has filled your heart. When you claimed this was the full price you were lying to the Holy Spirit. The property was yours to sell...And, after selling it, it was yours to decide how much to give. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us, but to God" (5:3–4 TLB). Lies are lies, whether they are big or small. God said, "Put off falsehood and speak truthfully..."

God struck down Ananias and he died. Three hours later his wife came in and told Peter the same story. "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord?" Peter asked her, and God struck her down also.

Because of this, "great fear seized the whole Church and all who heard about these events" (5:11).

TALK ABOUT 1. What is "the Church" of Jesus Christ? 2. Why did God judge the man and his wife for telling lies? 3. What did God say about telling lies (Eph 4:25)? 4. Who is the "father of lies" (John 8:34)? 5. What did God say about helping widows and orphans (James 1:27)?

GOD HEALED MANY

👉 read Acts 5:12–16

The apostles went to the Temple and taught the believers. They met in Solomon's Colonnade – a roofed area along one side of the court of the Gentiles and maybe the largest public shelter they could find (John 10:23). Here men changed money and merchants bought and sold goods.

THE APOSTLES PERSECUTED

👉 read Acts 5:17–42

More and more men and women believed in the Lord. They carried their sick into the streets, so that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed (5:15). Was this what Jesus meant when he told Peter? "Anyone believing in Me shall do the same miracles I have done, and even greater ones..." (John 14:12 TLB).

The Sanhedrin had no power to stop God healing and blessing the people. The High Priest and the Sadducees were "filled with jealousy" so they "arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail" (5:17–18). In the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. When the Temple guards went to get John and Peter, they found them gone. Can you imagine Satan going to his 'prison' and finding his slaves gone – set free by the power of the gospel (Rom 1:16)?

The angel told John and Peter: "Go, stand in the Temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life." The Christian faith is not a religion, it is "new life" in Jesus Christ. It is God's life given to us by His Spirit who comes to live in believers. "The Spirit gives life," Jesus said (John 6:63).

We do not have this kind of life until we come to Christ. (one word in Aramaic means both 'life' and 'salvation').

Daylight came as the sleepy apostles walked back up to the Temple. There the crowds were still waiting to hear the "message of this new life."

About the same time, the High Priest called the Sanhedrin together. They sent for the apostles, but the jailer could not find them! The officers said the jail doors were locked and the guards were on duty. The captain and the guards were puzzled. Then they were told: "The men

Healing the sick

"Is any one of you sick?" James asked.

The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well." (James 5:14–15)

Sick may mean sick in body or sick in spirit. Sin makes men sick. We are sick with worry, and with work, and sick with disease. Some are sick in their minds. God can heal all sickness.

The sick person must see their need of God's touch. They should "call the elders of the church" – the local body of believers. These are spiritual leaders in the Christian community.

They lead others because they are men of faith. They are bold to take God at His word. They have their authority from Christ. (Matt 28:18).

Those who are called to pray for the sick person will "anoint with oil in the name of the Lord." The oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. He is "the power of God" in the Church.

We ask God to heal the sick "in the name of the Lord." (John 14:12–14)

The Lord will raise him up from sickness or despair. He raises up whomever He wills to make well.

If not, He gives them more grace to bear up under their suffering.

The brothers wrote letters to the church leaders at Corinth asking them to receive Apollos. In Corinth, Apollos debated in public, proving that Jesus was the Messiah-Christ. "With force he came out ahead in his public discussions with the Jews, proving through the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah" (18:28, Berkeley Version of the Bible).

Apollos was a great help to those "who by grace had believed" and helped them know sound doctrine (1 Cor 3:6; 2 Tim 4:2). In the church at Corinth some said, "I am of Apollos" and named him their leader. This caused division in the church (1 Cor 1:12).

TALK ABOUT 1. Who was Apollos (18:24)? 2. What did his message lack? 3. Who helped him to see what was missing (18:26)? 4. What happened to Apollos afterwards? 5. Who controlled Paul's life? 6. Did circumstances help to show him where to go? 7. How can we have the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

PAUL AT EPHESUS

👉 read Acts 19:1–22

At Eph'e-sus Paul met twelve seekers, disciples of John the Baptist. He asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed" (19:2)? They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

Paul asked, "What baptism did you receive?" They answered, "John's baptism." Paul did not say, "that is not good enough." He agreed that John's baptism was for repentance. Men must repent of their sin to believe in Jesus Christ. Paul saw that these men were still waiting to believe in Jesus. When he explained the gospel to them, they believed and they were "baptized into the name of Jesus" (19:5). Then Paul "placed his hands on them." The Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in other languages (19:6).

These twelve were a very small group. They had been cut off from the main source of Christian teaching which was in Jerusalem. They did not know: a) The Spirit had been given at Pentecost (2:3–4). b) The Church's letter about law-keeping (15:6–21). c) Witnesses had gone out from Antioch.

For three months Paul spoke in the synagogue at Ephesus, "reasoning... about the Kingdom of God" (19:8 NASB). Some hardened their hearts and spoke evil against "The Way," so Paul left them. He went to the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Paul taught there every day for two years "so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (19:10).

After his day's work, Paul went from house to house to meet with the believers (20:20). He also wrote a letter to Corinth and visited that city (2 Cor 2:1). God added signs and wonders to Paul's ministry, so that even handkerchiefs (sweat-rags) and aprons that touched him were taken to the sick and their sicknesses were cured and the evil spirits left them (19:11–12; Heb 2:4).

PRISCILLA AND AQUINAS MEET APOLLOS

👉 read Acts 18:18–28

Before Paul left Corinth, he had his hair cut “because of a vow he had taken.” This may have been a Nazarite vow (Num 6:1–21). Perhaps he vowed to make an offering at the Feast of Tabernacles at the Temple in Jerusalem 30 days later. Heads had to be shaved 30 days before such offerings and sacrifices were made.

Paul took Aquila and Priscilla with him. They sailed to Syria and went to Eph’-e-sus. This was the capital city of Asia, famous for the worship of Diana, the Roman goddess of sex. The Ephesians called her by her Greek name, Artemis. The temple of Diana was one of the wonders of the world.

Aquila and Priscilla stayed at Ephesus, but Paul went on. The Jews who worshipped at the synagogue asked him to spend more time with them, so he promised, “I will come back if it is God’s will” (18:21).

It had been two years since Paul left Antioch. Now he went back to report to the believers there. He went also to fulfill a vow he had made (18:18; 21:17–24). This was the end of his second missionary journey.

When Paul landed at Cae-sa-re’-a, he went up and greeted the church in Jerusalem (18:22). Luke said Paul went ‘up’ to Jerusalem because the city was 2,500 feet above sea level. From Jerusalem, Paul went ‘down’ to Antioch.

PAUL’S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

After reporting to the church at Antioch, Paul began his third journey. He went west, across Galatia “strengthening the disciples” as he went.

Meanwhile a man named Apollos came to Ephesus. Apollos was a Jew born in Alexandria, a great center of learning in Egypt. He had studied the Scriptures from a boy and people liked to hear him speak. Indeed, he preached like John the Baptist, or like Elijah, the prophet of old (18:28).

Aquila and Priscilla liked this learned man.

Apollos preached what he knew: a) What the old prophets said. b) The work of John the Baptist. c) How these pointed to the Christ, the Messiah. But Apollos did not know that Jesus had died and had risen again.

What Apollos said was not wrong, but it was not complete. He preached about God, but he did not tell people how to be saved. Priscilla and Aquila knew Apollos did not preach the full gospel message (1 Cor 15:1–4).

One Sabbath, Priscilla and Aquila invited Apollos to their home and explained the gospel to him. We may suppose they told him of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the coming of the Holy Spirit (2:1–4).

Apollos may have visited Aquila and Priscilla many times. When he understood the gospel clearly, he wanted to go and preach in Corinth. (Achaia was the Roman province, with Corinth as its capital).

you put in jail are in the Temple courts teaching the people” (5:25).

Next day the apostles again stood quietly before the Sanhedrin. The High Priest did not ask what they had been doing, he told them: “You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching...And you are trying to make us guilty of this man’s blood” (5:28).

Peter preached to them as he had done before. He told them, “We are witnesses...God raised Jesus from the dead – who you had killed. God exalted Him (Jesus) to His own right hand as Prince and Saviour that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel” (5:30–31).

The High Priest and all the members of the Sanhedrin were furious! They wanted to kill the apostles. While they talked about this, Gamaliel, one of their number said, “Be careful how you treat these men. If they are from God, you will not be able to stop these men, you will only...fight against God” (5:38–39). He told of two other rebels who had led revolts. They had been killed, their followers scattered and their revolts came to nothing.

TALK ABOUT 1. How is the Christian faith different from any other religion? 2. What did the angel tell the apostles to do? 3. What did James say sick Christians should do (James 5:14–15)? 4. Why did “great fear” fall on all the believers (5:11)? 5. Why must we preach and pray “in the name of Jesus Christ?” 6. What did Gamaliel suggest would happen to the Christians?

GOD DID GREAT WONDERS

👉 read Acts 6:1–15

The Christian community already numbered many thousands. Many were poor and the apostles were giving a lot of their time to help them.

At the same time the leaders of the Greek meetings said their widows were not treated fairly when food was given out (6:1–2). When the apostles heard the complaints of the Greek Christians, they called all the disciples to a meeting. They said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God...to wait on tables. Choose seven men from among you...we will turn this responsibility over to them and (we) will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (6:2–4).

This pleased the whole group, so they chose Stephen, “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” and six others. They brought these men to the apostles “who prayed and laid their hands on them” (6:6). This set these men apart for the ministry of helping others. Later, men who did this were called “deacons” (1 Tim 3:8).

“Stephen...did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.” He waited on tables and told people about Jesus. He prayed for the sick and God healed them (6:8).

Some men from Asia and North Africa did not like Stephen’s bold witness and what God was doing through him. They were called “Freedmen.” They had

been slaves, but had bought their freedom. They had their own meeting place called “the Synagogue of the Freedmen.” In their teaching, they held to the law of Moses (6:9,14).

They argued with Stephen and spoke against the gospel, “but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit...” So they got others to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemy against Moses” (6:10–15).

The religious leaders called Sadducees seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. There false witnesses said: “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place (the Temple) and against the law.”

TALK ABOUT 1. Why did the apostles choose Stephen? 2. Who accused him? 3. They all looked at Stephen; “his face was like that of an angel” (6:15).

Christian Leaders

1. Obey God and do not fear men
2. Wait on the Lord in prayer
3. Stand on the truth of His Word
4. See the ministry of the Word and prayer as their first calling.
5. Are willing to give other tasks to laymen

THE COURT QUESTIONED STEPHEN

👉 read Acts 7:1–36

The High Priest asked Stephen, “Are these charges true?” Stephen did not answer their charges. He spoke about Jesus Christ, the Son of David.

He told the Sanhedrin, “The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham” (7:2). Then God spoke to Moses, who “received living words to pass on to us” (7:38). Stephen used their own Scriptures to show them the greatness of God’s grace and love for them. And how in the promised land they had turned away from the living God to worship idols of wood and stone.

THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

👉 read Acts 7:37–53

Stephen went on to tell them of the judgment of God that fell on Israel: “Our fathers refused to obey Him (God). They rejected Him in their hearts and told Aaron, ‘Make us gods...’ (idols)” (7:40; Ex 32:1). Because they turned their backs on God, He turned away from them. He left them to go their own way (Rom 1:24). That is what God does. He does not force Himself on any man or woman. He freely offers us the light of Christ (John 1:9).

If we refuse the Light, God leaves us to go our own way (Rom 1:24).

“The Jewish leaders were furious and ground their teeth in rage” (7:54 TLB). But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to Heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the Father’s right hand. His Master stood ready to receive his spirit.

PAUL MET PRISCILLA AND AQUILA IN CORINTH

👉 read Acts 18:1–17

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth where he met a Jew named Aquila. Aquila had come from Italy with his wife Priscilla. They were tent makers. Paul was also, so he stayed and worked with them (18:1–3).

Corinth was a great city and seaport in Greece. Ships came there from all parts of the world and tentmakers in the city earned a good living making sails. Corinth was also a very wicked city, full of idols and pagan temples.

At that time Claudius was emperor of Rome (AD 41–54). Because of trouble between the Jews and the followers of Christ, Claudius had put all Christians out of Rome. So Aquila and his wife, who followed “The Way” (a name for the Christian faith), had come to Corinth and settled there.

Aquila invited Paul to stay with them. He worked with them while he waited for Silas and Timothy to join him (17:15).

Aquila and Priscilla helped Paul to preach the gospel. He called them fellow workers and said “they risked their lives for me” (Rom 16:3).

Every Sabbath, Paul taught in the synagogue. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul gave all his time to preaching and testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah (18:5). When the Jews opposed him, he shook out his clothes in protest and said, “Your blood be on your own heads!... From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

Paul went next door to the house of Titius Justus and met with the believers there. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, came to this house-church. He and his family believed in the Lord and Paul baptized them. Later these believers of “the Way” became “the church of God in Corinth” (1 Cor 1:2).

Many Jews hated Paul, but God protected him. One night, in a vision, the Lord Jesus came to him and said, “I have many people in this city... Do not be afraid; keep on speaking...For I am with you...” (18:9–10). Paul stayed for over a year teaching the people. Many who heard believed.

The Jews were angry and brought Paul before Gallio, the Roman proconsul. Because their case was about ‘words’ and ‘names’ and the Jewish law, Gallio would not hear it. “Settle the matter yourselves,” he told them, and threw them out of the courtroom. We are not told how Paul escaped without harm (18:10).

The Jews caught Sos’-the-nes. He was a synagogue ruler, perhaps after Crispus. He later became “a brother” (1 Cor 1:1). They beat Sosthenes in front of the court, but Gallio did not seem to care!

TALK ABOUT 1. Who did Paul stay with in Corinth? 2. What work did they do? 3. Where did Paul preach? 4. Why did he go to the Jewish synagogues?

As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea (17:10). The men of Berea received the gospel with great eagerness, and they examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true (17:11). But Jews from Thessalonica came and made trouble, so they sent Paul away. Timothy and Silas stayed at Berea (17:14). Later, they joined Paul in Athens, the chief city of Greece.

Paul travelled through the Roman provinces during the reigns of Claudius, AD 51–54, (Acts 11:28; 18:2) and Nero, AD 54–68 (Acts 25:11).

PAUL PREACHES AT ATHENS

👉 read Acts 17:16–34

In Athens Paul saw a “city full of idols.” Any other visitor might have seen the beauty of this great city, the seat of Greek culture and learning.

It was the Sabbath and Paul went to the Jewish synagogue. There he reasoned with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks. And he talked to people in the market place (17:17).

At the market, “philosophers began to dispute with him.” They studied the world’s wisdom and they argued with Paul.

The people of Athens spent their days hearing the latest ideas, so they took Paul to a meeting of the Ar-e-op’-a-gus, a high court or council. They said to him, “May we know this new teaching...” (17:19)?

The people of Athens knew nothing about God. To speak to them of the cross of Christ would have confused these Greeks, so Paul started at the beginning. First he told them who Almighty God is:

- God, the self-existent One, who needs no one (17:25).
- God, the Creator, who made the world and everything in it (17:24).
- God, the giver of life and the keeper of His creation (17:25).
- God, the owner of His creation and the Judge of it (17:30–31).

He agreed that they were “very religious.” But their religion demanded temples, demon worship, temple prostitutes and everything evil.

Paul said that if we have our very life because of the Creator, if we are His creation, how can we make silver images and worship them?

“The God who made the world...does not live in temples made with hands... He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.But now He commands all people everywhere to repent...” (17:24–31).

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.”

A few believed. Two of them were important people and their names are given – a man, Di-o-nys’-i-us, and a woman, Damaris (17:34).

TALK ABOUT 1. How did Paul explain who God is to the men of Athens?

Stephen spoke again: “Look,” he said... “I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” In his last hours, Stephen set their eyes on Christ. In their blindness the 70 raging council members rushed at him, dragged him away and stoned him. One of those watching was Saul of Tarsus (7:58).

TALK ABOUT 1. What were the “living words” Moses received from God (7:38)? 2. What makes us feel the other person is getting more than we are? 3. Why did the Freedmen not like Stephen (7:51–53)? 4. What did Stephen tell the Sanhedrin? 5. Why did they kill him? 6. Who was standing watching?

Jesus said, “Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On My account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.” (Matt 10:17)

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH SCATTERED

👉 read Acts 8:1–25

A great persecution of Christians started after Stephen’s death. The Jerusalem Christians suffered first. Many left the city. Everywhere they went, throughout Judea and Sa-mar’-i-a, they told people about Jesus (8:1).

Jesus said this would happen. He told the disciples, “You will be My witnesses...in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8).

Common people preached the gospel of Christ. They had no special training, but they had the Holy Spirit to give them words to speak (Isa 52:7).

Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee, persecuted the Christians and tried to destroy their faith. He went from house to house and dragged Christians to court and to prison (8:3). Saul went on doing this until God stopped him on the Damascus road (9:1–13).

Philip went to Samaria and preached the gospel. As a Jew he was not welcome there, but wonders followed his preaching (Heb 2:4). At his word, “evil spirits came out of many and....cripples were healed” (8:7).

Many Samaritans believed Philip’s message. They got caught up in a great movement of God’s Spirit. When they said they believed Philip baptized them. Some of them followed Philip around and saw the miracles God did through him. Simon, a witchdoctor, was amazed to see the miracles done in the name of Jesus Christ (8:13). He said he believed in Jesus, so Philip baptized him. Later he offered Peter money to have the same power.

THE SAMARITANS

Soon the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received God’s word. They sent Peter and John to find out what was happening (8:14). Before this, Jews did not go to Samaria or have any dealings with Samaritan people. Peter and John found the Samaritans rejoicing in the gospel, but not filled with the

Holy Spirit. We don't know how they knew this. "Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (8:17).

There are many different views of what happened. Most think the Samaritans did not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ until the apostles came and laid hands on them.

All who fully repent and receive Christ as their Saviour, have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them (Rom 8:9). We who know Jesus can pray for others to be filled with His Spirit, but we should always tell other Christians to ask for the Holy Spirit for themselves (Luke 13:11).

TALK ABOUT 1. What happened to the Christians in Jerusalem (8:1)? 2. What happened in Samaria? 3. The Holy Spirit does not give the same gifts to each person. He gives grace-gifts to whomever He will, and He gives special gifts at special times (1 Cor 12:28). 4. What was Simon's request (8:19)? 5. Did Peter baptize him? 6. Can money buy God's gifts (8:18)?

Peter told Simon, "May your money perish with you...You have no part...in this ministry (of the Holy Spirit), because your heart is not right before God. Repent...and pray to the Lord..." (8:21-23). Perish is a word Jesus used often. Men who do not believe in Jesus as their Saviour are perishing in their sins even while they live (John 3:36; 2 Peter 3:9).

Samaria and Mount Gerizim

Early in Jewish history, Omri, "a captain of the host" fought against the Philistines in the northern territory of Dan. After his victory, the army declared Omri 'king' of the area.

Later he bought Gerizim – a long, flat-topped limestone mountain – from a local man and built the city of Samaria there (1 Kings 16:24).

From that time on, Samaria became the center of the ten northern tribes, and the tribal leader who held Samaria was 'king' in Israel.

The mountain lay in Ephraim, near Shechem.

Omri's son was the wicked King Ahab. Ahab built a temple for the Canaanite god, Baal, on Mount Gerizim and made an altar to Baal (1 Kings 16:32).

After the captivity in Babylon, Samaria was occupied by mixed races. Sanballat was governor of the city (2 Kings 17:24). These 'mixed races' had a mixed religion. They took over the "high places" used by the Canaanites and worshipped there (2 Kings 17:29-33).

King Jeroboam of Israel set up calf idols in Samaria and Dan to stop the people going up to Jerusalem to worship (1 Kings 12:28-29). Samaria stood for idol worship.

God's name was set in Jerusalem (2 Chron 6:20).

A Samaritan named Manasseh built a temple on Mount Gerizim. He and his family became priests there. After that most of the Samaritans went to Mount Gerizim to worship.

The Samaritans had copies of the first five Books of Moses (the Pentateuch). They said their translation was superior to that of the Jews.

The Jews were always hostile toward the Samaritans and did not mix with them. When Jesus came He showed that His Kingdom was for all men. He offered the Samaritan woman to "drink the water of life" and be one with His people.

Paul told the jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved – you and your household."

Then the jailer's family gathered around Paul to hear the gospel and they all believed.

The jailer washed the men's' sore backs and gave them a meal. Then he asked to be baptized with his family. What a sight it must have been! The broken jail. The prisoners set free. The jailer and his family forgiven and "filled with joy because they had come to believe in God."

In the morning, the magistrates sent a message to the jailer to say, "Release those men." So the jailer told Paul and Silas they could go. "But we are Roman citizens and they beat us without a trial," Paul said. "Now they want to get rid of us quietly? Let them come themselves and escort us out of the town" (16:37). When the magistrates heard this, they were afraid. They came and asked Paul and Silas to please leave their city.

Paul and Silas went back to Lydia's house. They encouraged the believers, then they went on their way. They had hurried to Mac-e-do'-nia to answer God's call. Then this had happened to them; and only a handful of believers meeting in Lydia's house! Did they wonder why (16:39-40)?

Later, the believers in Phi-lip'-pi grew strong. They loved Paul and they cared for his needs when few others did (Phil 1:1; 4:15).

Remember, Satan uses fortune-telling to keep people in darkness. If you go to these people for advice, you will give Satan a foothold in your life.

TALK ABOUT 1. Why would this witch tell the truth about God? 2. How could Paul claim to be a Roman citizen? 3. What happened at the jailer's house (16:33)? 4. Satan uses fortune-telling to keep people in darkness ___ True ___ False?

PAUL CROSSED NORTHERN GREECE

read Acts 17:1-15

When Paul came to Thess-a-lo-ni'-ca, he went into the Jewish synagogue. On three Sabbath days, Paul taught the people (17:2-3). He used the Jews own Scriptures to prove that Jesus was the Christ. He told them, "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ (Messiah). Paul said that it was necessary for Jesus to suffer: a) To show the eternal plan of God (Eph 1:4). b) To fulfill what the prophets had said (Isa 53). c) To bring in the New Covenant of grace which He sealed with His own blood (Luke 22:20).

Many believed Jesus was the Christ "the Son of the living God." Luke notes three groups of people: Jews, God-fearing Greeks and important women in the city. Because of Paul's success, the Jews were jealous and stirred up trouble (17:5). They found some thugs in the market place and used them to cause a riot. They dragged Jason before the city officials and made him give them money (post bond) before they would let him go (17:9).

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given to men whereby we must be saved (4:12). “It is the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified. But God raised Him from the dead. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour. That he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel” (Acts 5:31).

That day, at the river, Lydia spoke to Paul and the others. She said, “If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded them (16:15).

TALK ABOUT 1. How did God direct Paul to Macedonia (16:9)? 2. How can we know what God wants us to do? 3. Why was Paul not afraid to go back to Lystra? 4. If circumcision was not important to Paul, why did he circumcise Timothy? 5. Tell what you know about Lydia?

As Paul and Silas were going to the place of prayer, they met a demon-possessed slave girl. She told people what would happen to them and earned money for her masters that way (16:16). People asked this witch for advice and she gave them oracles from the heathen gods.

The girl followed Paul and Silas. She shouted after them, “These men are servants of the Most High God...telling you the way to be saved” (16:17).

Satan stands against the truth; before God’s servants he was forced to confess it (Mark 1:23–24). Many times Jesus told demons not to say who He was. God does not want the testimony of demon spirits.

Paul commanded the demon: “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the evil spirit left the girl (16:18).

The girl’s owners were angry. Their hope of the slave girl making money for them was gone! So they took hold of Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place where the crowd attacked Paul and Silas (16:20).

They beat them and threw them into prison where the jailer put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks (16:24).

At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises to God. The other prisoners had never heard anything like it! Then the earth under the prison began to shake, doors burst open and the prisoners’ chains fell off.

The jailer woke up and rushed to the prison. When he saw the doors wide open, he took out his sword to kill himself. He thought the prisoners had escaped! Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

At Paul’s word, the jailer fell on his knees. He saw a beautiful peace in Paul’s face. He saw strength in suffering he’d never seen before! “What must I do to be saved?” he asked Paul and Silas. Had this jailer heard the slave girl shouting about being saved?

Paul accepted suffering

In his sufferings, Paul

- found fellowship with Christ (Phil 3:10).
- God perfected his faith.
- he became more like Jesus (Heb 2:10).
- God taught him obedience (Heb 5:8).
- God made his hope strong (1 Peter 5:10).

Simon was not a true Christian. He was not sorry for his sin and he was not ready to burn his fetishes. “Pray to the Lord for me, so that I might not perish,” he begged Peter. But every person must pray for himself.

The Bible says, “the whole world is a prisoner of sin...” (Gal 3:22). All of us are held captive by sin until God’s truth sets us free (John 8:32).

Sadly, many trust in priests or rituals or good deeds. Those things will not set them free. Only the power of God’s Spirit, living within, makes us free.

PHILIP AND THE OFFICIAL FROM ETHIOPIA

➡ read Acts 8:26–40

At the height of this blessing in Samaria, an angel met Philip. “Go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza,” the angel told him. Philip left Samaria at once. As Philip went along the south road, he saw a chariot in front of him. The chariot carried a very important man returning home to Ethiopia.

This man was a government official in charge of the Queen’s treasury (Canda’ce was a title for queens of Ethiopia, 8:27).

Then the Holy Spirit spoke to Philip: “Go to that chariot and stay near it” (8:29). So Philip ran and caught up with the chariot.

Philip heard the official reading aloud from the scroll of Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 53:7–8 TLB). The words in Acts 8:32 are taken from the Greek translation of Isaiah, called the LXX.

Philip called up to the official, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He answered, “How can I, unless someone explains it to me?” Then he invited Philip to come up into the chariot with him (8:31).

The official asked Philip, “Tell me, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Philip knew at once that God had sent him to tell the “good news about Jesus” to this man from Africa.

The prophet Isaiah wrote about Jesus Christ, the Son of God: “He was led like a lamb to the slaughter...and He did not open His mouth” (Isa 53:7).

Jesus was accused and tried before the High Priest of Israel, then before Pilate the Roman governor. At His trial false witnesses spoke against Him. Jesus did not reply. He stood silent before His enemies, like a lamb being killed at Passover (Ps 44:22).

After this mock trial, they led Jesus away to crucify Him. Jesus did no sin, yet He died a cruel death on a Roman cross to take away the sin of the world! (John 1:29).

Philip told the man, “God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact...” Right then, the official repented and believed the gospel.

The chariot rumbled on along the road. Soon they came to a small hole in the rocks. It was full of water. The man said to Philip, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” He wanted to obey God and let everyone know he was a changed man.

“Stop the chariot!” he ordered. Then he and Philip went down into the water and Philip baptized him. The servants watched as the two men came up out of the water with shining faces.

Suddenly, the Holy Spirit caught Philip away. The official got into his chariot and went home to tell his people about Jesus.

TALK ABOUT 1. What part of the Bible was the official from Ethiopia reading (Isa 53)? 2. What did Philip explain to the man (8:35)? 3. When the official understood, what did he ask Philip to do (8:36)? 4. Why do Christians get baptized? 5. Have you been baptized? If so, what did your baptism mean to you? 6. Why did Jesus ask John to baptize Him (Matt 3:15)? 7. Jesus had no sin, so His baptism was to
all.....

SAUL HATED CHRISTIANS

➡ read Acts 9:1–19

Saul, the Pharisee, hated Christians. When he found people of “the Way” (a name for Christ’s followers), he put them in chains and dragged them to court where they were sentenced to death.

One day Saul went to Damascus with letters from the chief priests to arrest Christians there. As he neared the city, a blinding light knocked him off his donkey. He lay on the ground and heard a voice: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me” (9:3–4)?

“Who are you, Lord (Yahweh)?” Saul stammered.

“I am Jesus, whom you persecute... Now get up and go into the

Believer’s baptism

Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River. This was a symbol. Baptism is a symbol of death and resurrection. Jesus would die to His own will and do only the Father’s will, even unto death (Phil 2:8; Rom 6:3,5).

For Jesus, this ‘death’ began the moment He left heaven’s glory. He died: a) To Heaven’s majesty and power and glory. b) To His own will. He “gave Himself up” in every way (Eph 5:25). c) On a Roman cross.

Believers’ baptism is also a symbol. Christians are baptized to show that they have died to their old self and that they have been raised to a new life in Christ. They already have this new life in them by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9).

The New Testament teaches us to follow Jesus’ example and be baptized. By being baptized, believers tell the world that they mean to let God do His work in them to the fullest (Phil 2:13).

Baptism does not save us. Baptism is only an outward sign of the change that has already taken place in our hearts. It is our testimony to others. We are saying to all the world, ‘I am trusting Christ fully, I will let Him be King in my life.’ (Matt 3:15)?

Words about Jesus

- He was oppressed...
- He was afflicted...
- He never said a word in self-defence...
- He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter...
- He stood silent...
- They led Him away to His death...” (Isaiah 53)

great Light knocked him off his mule. Husband, I want you to hear more about Jesus Christ, who was crucified and rose from the dead. Paul gave proof of this. And in Christ’s death and rising again He fulfilled all that the prophets’ wrote about Him.

“Husband. I believe I should close this business for a few days, even a week, while Paul and Silas are preaching in our city. The other sellers of purple in Thyatira can care for any merchants that come from Philippi, or Sardis or Per’-ga-mos.”

Lydia’s husband listened carefully. Lydia turned away as she spoke, “It seems strange that we have feared the Lord all these years, but I never really understood where forgiveness and salvation came from...Until I heard Paul preaching at the river today. Now it is all so clear to me!

“Dr Luke was there at the river and Silas. He is also a Roman citizen.

“I’m sure you believe as I do, husband. I want us to get baptized, as a family – all of us!”

“Woman! Woman! Not so fast. We are all God-fearing people. We tithe and give to the poor; we celebrate all the Feast Days! What more do we need to add to our good works?”

Lydia sighed, a frown on her dark brow. “Ah, husband. That is just it!

Our good works are not gaining for us the salvation first preached by Jesus...now by His apostles. There was always something missing in my heart. I felt so empty! I did not know what it was until now!”

“Now God has shown me...Nothing more can be added,” Paul said, “to what Christ has already done. Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins. He Himself said, ‘It is finished.’ No other sacrifice can be made than that which has been made...I believe! And you will, too.”

“Husband, I want so much to know more of God’s way for us as a family. To be able to teach the children. I know we have never had anyone stay with us as a guest before. But I would like to ask the brothers to make their lodging here. To come and go freely and not feel they have to pay.”

Lydia’s husband thought for a time. “Wife, why not?” he said at last. “God has been good to us and has given us all we have here.”

“We will be baptized, all of us.” Lydia went on. “After that I will ask the brothers.” The small group of people – Lydia and her husband and children, Paul, Silas, other disciples – climbed down over the rocks to the edge of the river where Paul waded into the water until he was waist-deep. Then he called to Lydia. She stepped forward boldly. Then she turned to those who were standing near and told them what the Spirit of God had shown her: That the grace of God and the work of Christ had saved her from her sins.

Her family followed her, one by one, and Paul baptized each person in the river. People from the city watched.

“I baptize you,” Paul told them, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” His voice rang out loud and clear.

and his grandmother, Lois, were both believers (2 Tim 1:5). His father was Greek and probably not a Christian.

The brothers at Lystra and I-co'-ni-um spoke well of Timothy (16:2). To the Jews Timothy was 'unclean,' so Paul circumcised him and took him with them. To Paul circumcision did not make men right before God, but he felt he must be "all things to all men," that he might win some to Christ (1 Cor 9:22). Paul loved Timothy and Timothy filled Mark's place on the team (19:22).

A PRAYER MEETING AT THE RIVER

👉 read Acts 16:11–40

Every day, Paul waited on God and the Spirit gave him directions. He would have turned south, but God changed his plan. Then they would have gone north into My'-si-a, "but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to" (16:7). The Spirit of Jesus is the Holy Spirit and He was guiding their steps as they went from town to town.

"So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas" on the coast. That night, as he slept, Paul had a vision of a man of Mac-e-do'-ni-a standing and begging him, "Come over to Mac-e-do'-ni-a and help us" (16:9).

He was a plain man, a begging man, not an angel. Come and preach the gospel to us...help us find Jesus, the man begged (16:9).

Next morning Paul and Silas talked about Paul's vision. Then they got ready to leave for Macedonia, "Concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them" (in Europe, 16:10).

Like Paul, we can trust the Lord to guide us when: a) We are honouring Him in what we do (1 Cor 10:31). b) We are filled by His Spirit (Luke 11:13). c) We are waiting on Him in prayer and Bible study (Ps 86:11).

Paul and his party sailed from Troas to Ne-a'-po-lis, the port of Philippi, in the province of Macedonia. Luke used the pronoun "we" in the last half of Acts. Many people think Dr. Luke joined Paul, Silas and Timothy at this time.

LYDIA AND HER FAMILY

Because there was no synagogue in Phi-lip'-pi, Paul and his friends went outside the city gate to the river. Christians often prayed there (16:13).

(People who love God often worship 'outside the city' – the city of business and bustle; outside the world of sports and movies, Heb 13:13–14).

At the river, Paul found women praying. The men sat down and began to speak with them. One named Lydia listened carefully to what Paul was saying (16:13–14). She was a native of Thy-a-ti'-ra, but lived in Philippi.

When the prayer meeting ended, Lydia hurried home to her family. She must have been very excited. Perhaps the talk went like this: "Husband, I heard Paul the great Apostle! He was preaching down at the river. He was telling the people how he met Christ the Lord when he was travelling to Damascus. A

city..." (9:5–6). That day Saul learned that Yahweh and Jesus are One! Jesus had stopped him in his mad rush to destroy Christians. Saul was blinded by the light from Heaven, so his friends took his hand and led him into Damascus (9:8–12). For three days he did not eat or drink anything. He waited for God to tell him what to do.

In that city there was a disciple named An-a-ni'-as. The Lord spoke to him in a vision: "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul..."

"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done...in Jerusalem..."

Ananias was afraid, but the Lord told him: "Go! This man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles..." (9:15). God would use Saul to speak to three different groups of people: a) Gentiles (people who are not Jews). b) Kings. c) Israel. The gospel is for all men (Matt 28:19).

Ananias found Saul at the house on Straight Street. "Brother Saul," he said, "the Lord – Jesus who appeared to you on the road...sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (9:17). At once, Saul's eyes were opened – 'as if scales fell off.' He got up, was baptized and ate food.

SAUL SPOKE OF HIS NEW FAITH

👉 read Acts 9:20–42

Saul began to preach in the synagogues of the Jews. He preached that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. People could not understand the change in Saul. They asked each other, "Isn't this the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name?" God, the Holy Spirit, had changed Saul from an angry persecutor of Christians into a patient preacher of the gospel. He was just as strong for God as he had been for Satan. He preached preach in the synagogues because God-fearing Jews went there.

The Jews in Damascus could not argue against Saul's preaching, so they made a plan to kill him. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates..." When the Christians learned of their plan, they took Saul by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall and he escaped.

Saul went back to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him. When Saul had no friends, Barnabas encouraged him and brought him to the apostles. Barnabas came from the island of Crete. He was the one who sold his field and gave the money to the poor (4:37).

The word went out, "Saul of Tarsus is here. He is speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus." No one could believe it.

The Grecian Jews asked Saul about his faith. They also tried to kill him, so

Saul of Tarsus

- a rebel soul
- a light from Heaven
- a voice – who is Jesus?
- a word of command
- go and tell lost Gentiles
- a mission – to open blind eyes (Acts 9:1–19).

the brothers took him down to Caes-a-re'-a and sent him home to Tarsus (9:28–30).

The Holy Spirit led Saul into the desert of Arabia. There God taught him more of the great truths of the gospel. While Paul was in Arabia, he visited Damascus again (Gal 1:17).

The Lord sent “a time of peace” to Judea, Samaria and Galilee. The Christians grew stronger in their faith, and they “lived in the fear of the Lord.”

TALK ABOUT 1. Where did Saul preach (9:20)? 2. What did he tell the people? 3. What was the result (9:28–30)? 4. What happened to Saul in Damascus? 5. How did Saul escape their plot to kill him? 6. What is the “fear of the Lord” (9:31)? 7. Why did the Jews hate Saul?

PETER VISITED THE CHRISTIANS

 **read Acts 9:32–42**

At that time Peter was visiting and teaching the small groups of Christians. In Lydda he saw Ae-ne'-as who had been paralyzed for eight years. Peter knew God wanted to heal this sick man, so he said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up...” (9:34).

Aeneas got up at once. He walked into the town and “all who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.” God did this miracle to touch the hearts of the people of Lydda.

In Joppa, on the coast, the Christians were sad. Dorcas had died. They told Peter, “She was always doing good and helping the poor” (9:36). Dorcas may have been a widow who sewed clothes for those in need. She had this ability and she used it for her Lord, but now she was dead!

The saints were not ready to bury her body, so they laid it in an upstairs' room. Maybe they were praying that God would raise Dorcas to life again. Then they heard Peter was in Lydda. Two men went to find him.

When they found Peter they begged him to “come at once” (9:38). Peter went with them to Joppa. At the house, Peter met widows standing around crying and showing the clothes Dorcas had made (9:39).

DORCAS RAISED TO LIFE

Peter heard their talk, but he was listening to hear what God would say. He believed God would work a miracle for them. Then he sent them all out of the room and got down on his knees to pray (9:40). Peter humbled himself before the Lord. God had worked many

Simon the tanner

A tanner took animal skins, cured them and made them into leather. Sea salt was used to cure the fresh skins.

The skins were made brown by leaving them in the sun and adding tannin, a plant dye. Then they were cut into strips and made into belts, sandals bags and harness, shields and fighting gear (10:6).

Some copies of the Bible were written on leather scrolls.

name” into David’s family and spreading His words throughout the whole world.

It was “the Lord, who does these things...” not Paul or James or Peter, or any other person. This was God’s plan from the beginning (Eph 1:4).

The apostles and elders, with the whole church in Jerusalem, chose men to carry a letter and sent them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. The letter was to “the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Ci-li'-ci-a” (15:23).

THEY DELIVERED THE LETTER

 **read Acts 15:24–41**

When the Christians in Antioch read the letter they were glad. The letter encouraged Gentile Christians to be careful and respect the Law of Moses because it was “preached in every city from the earliest times and read in the synagogues on every Sabbath” (15:21).

The letter also said, ‘stay clear of sex sins.’ God’s wrath against idols and sex sins was not something new. It went back to the beginning of time, before the Law was given.

Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch. They taught and preached the word of the Lord. Silas, from Jerusalem, may have stayed and helped them.

Then Paul said, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.”

Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them, but Paul did not. They could not agree, so they separated. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to his home country, Cyprus. After this, we don’t hear anything more of Barnabas. Paul took Silas (also called Sil-va'-nus). This was Paul’s second missionary journey.

TALK ABOUT 1. What caused the church in Antioch to send men to Jerusalem (15:1–2)? 2. What did the letter from the leaders in Jerusalem say (15:20)? 3. Were the Christian in Antioch glad to get the letter? 4. Did God tell His prophets about Gentiles being saved (15:15; Amos 9:11–12)?

THE YOUNG MAN TIMOTHY

 **read Acts 16:1–10**

Paul and Silas went first by land to Tarsus, Paul’s home town. Then they went to Derbe and Lystra where Paul had been stoned (14:19–20). He read the letter from the Jerusalem council and “strengthened the churches.”

In Lystra, Paul met a disciple named Timothy. Timothy’s mother, Eunice,

The letter said:

Don’t make it “difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.” Write to them as God directs:
a) Not to eat food offered to idols.
b) To turn away from immoral sex.
c) Not to eat blood or the meat of strangled animals (Acts 15:20).

they needed to know how God had answered their prayers.

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each group of believers (14:23). The word “appoint” can mean 1. To lay hands on. 2. To choose by a show of hands. 3. To elect by any method.

These elders were leaders in faith, worship and work. Paul chose key men of faith – maybe two or three in each place. “I laid a foundation,” he wrote to Corinth (1 Cor 3:10)... “and someone else is building on it.”

TALK ABOUT 1. What made the Jews angry (13:50)? 2. Paul called the message of Christ.....to those who received it? 3. What is it to those who do not believe (2 Cor 2:15–16)? 4. Where did Paul and Barnabas go to report what God was doing?

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

👉 read Acts 15:1–23 (Galatians 2:11–16)

Men from the party of the Pharisees came from Judea to Antioch. They told the people, ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved’ (15:1). These men came from ‘the circumcision group’ (15:5; Titus 1:10). This made divisions in the church, because Gentiles were getting saved but not being circumcised.

The believers sent Paul and Barnabas with some others to Jerusalem to tell the apostles about this teaching and to ask them what should be done.

James was a leader in the Jerusalem churches and Peter was there. Peter said Gentiles from every nation heard the gospel from his lips at Pentecost (15:7). God save many of them before his own eyes. Gentiles believed and received the Holy Spirit and none of them was circumcised. Peter said, “He (God) made no distinction between us and them” (15:9).

Peter asked, “Why do we try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear” (15:10)? The yoke Peter spoke of was the law of Moses.

Then James, the brother of Jesus, spoke. He said, “The words of the prophets are in agreement with this as it is written: ‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent...’ ” (15:15–16) The prophet Amos spoke of a time when God would show favour to the Gentile nations (Amos 9:11–12).

After this (after Amos’ prophecy), Jesus would come and raise up the tent of David “that the remnant of men might seek the Lord...” (15:16–17).

In the Gospel Church, God was “rebuilding David’s fallen tent.” The faith of God’s people (Israel) had fallen to its lowest point. God would revive His Church and add many more to it. Now God was bringing “all the Gentiles that bear My

Paul and the law

Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia: “We know that we cannot become right with God by obeying our Jewish laws, but only by faith in Jesus Christ to take away our sins” (Gal 2:14–16 TLB). “You are all sons of God **through faith** in Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:26–28).

miracles by Peter’s hand, but he waited to know God’s will at this time.

When Peter knew it was God’s will to raise Dorcas to life. He turned toward the dead woman and spoke to her in Jesus’ name: “Tab’-i-tha, (her Hebrew name), get up.” At once, she opened her eyes and sat up. Peter took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers...and presented her to them alive. News of this miracle went out all over Joppa and many believed in the Lord, so Peter stayed and taught the new believers.

TALK ABOUT 1. Why were the believers in Joppa sad (9:36–37)? 2. Why did they send for Peter? 3. What was Dorcas known for? 4. Does God work miracles today? 5. Who did Peter stay with in Joppa (9:42)?

CORNELIUS CALLED FOR PETER

👉 read Acts 10:1–23

Roman soldiers occupied Israel. They had their base in Caes-a-re’-a, 30 miles north of Joppa (8:40). A Roman centurion was in charge of 100 men (Luke 7:2). A legion was about 6,000 men (Matt 26:53). Each legion was divided into ten regiments and each regiment had a name (27:1). Cornelius is called “a centurion in the Italian Regiment.” He and all his family feared God. They did many good works, but Cornelius still needed to hear the gospel (Rom 10:14).

One afternoon, as Cornelius was praying, he saw an angel (10:3). The angel told him, “Your prayers and gifts...have come up before God. Now send men to Joppa and bring a man named Simon who is called Peter...” Cornelius called two servants and a devout soldier. He told them everything that had happened to him and sent them to Joppa to find Peter.

In the middle of the day, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He was hungry and fell asleep. In his sleep Peter saw a vision of a large sheet coming down out of the sky. In it were snakes and birds and small animals.

Peter heard a voice say, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat” (10:13).

“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten unclean creatures like this.” Peter was a devout Jew. All his life, he had been careful not to eat unclean foods (Lev 11).

Then God spoke again: “Do not call anything unclean that God has made clean” (10:15). This happened three times; then the sheet was taken away and Peter woke up.

While Peter was wondering about the vision, three men stood at Simon’s gate calling his name.

Peter heard God’s voice say, “Go with them, for I have sent them.”

“I’m the one you are looking for,” Peter told the men at the gate. “Why have you come” (10:21)?

They answered, “We have come from Cornelius. He is a Roman soldier, a righteous and God-fearing man. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house...” (10:22).

PETER WENT TO CORNELIUS

👉 read Acts 10:24–48

The Spirit told Peter to go, so he went with the men to Cornelius' house. Peter found Cornelius and his whole family waiting for him.

Cornelius greeted Peter and fell at his feet to honour him, but Peter lifted him up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself" (10:26).

Jews and Gentiles did not mix, so Peter said to Cornelius: "You know it is against the Jewish laws for me to come into a Gentile house. But God has shown me in a vision that I should never think of anyone as inferior" (10:28 TLB). Peter told of his vision of unclean animals and of God's voice.

Cornelius said to Peter, "It was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us" (10:33).

Peter preached the gospel to this Gentile family. He told them: a) God anointed Jesus the Messiah. b) Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons. c) The Jews in Jerusalem killed their Messiah. d) God raised Him from the dead. e) After Jesus rose from the dead, He was seen by many witnesses. f) Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins (10:43; Eph 1:7).

While Peter was still speaking...the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. Cornelius and his family received the gospel and God filled them with His Holy Spirit. The men with Peter were circumcised Jews and "They were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in other languages..." (10:45–46). Peter asked, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water" (10:47)? So they were all baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

TALK ABOUT: Again we see the same order: 1. Men and women were born again and gave testimony (John 3:8; Rom 10:10). 2. God sealed them by giving them His Spirit (10:44; Eph 1:13). 3. They were baptized in water (10:48). Peter said: a) Jesus' words had come to pass. b) The Gentiles had the same faith. c) The same Holy Spirit came on all who believed.

PETER TOLD WHAT GOD HAD DONE

👉 read Acts 11:1–18

When Peter went back to Jerusalem, the Jewish believers spoke badly about him. They said to him, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them" (11:1–3).

Peter told them about his vision (10:9–16).

All one in Christ

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:28–29). (Gal 3:28–29)

"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right" (10:35–36)

Peter in Acts 10:34–35

(Gentiles) believed the gospel that Paul preached. This made the Jews angry, so Paul and Barnabas "shook the dust from their feet" and went to the next town (13:51; Luke 10:10–11).

PAUL AND BARNABAS IN ICONIUM

👉 read Acts 14:1–20

In I-co'-ni-um Paul spoke boldly for the Lord and the Lord added signs and wonders (14:3). The Jews were angry and stirred up the Gentiles. Some Jews wanted to stone Paul, so he left I-co'-ni-um and went to Lystra and Derbe. These cities were in the province of Galatia.

In Lystra God healed a lame man. This man sat watching Paul preach and Paul saw faith in his eyes. "Stand up on your feet," Paul called to him. At once God healed the man. He stood up and began to walk.

The heathen crowd thought Paul was a god like their idol Zeus and they wanted to sacrifice to him. Paul told them, "We are only men, human like you... We are telling you to turn from these worthless things (idols) to the living God who made Heaven and earth...and everything in them" (14:15). They did not know the God of creation, so Paul had come to tell them of the true and living God. He had "not left Himself without testimony" among them (14:17). If they thought about it, they must realize God's goodness to them: a) The rains that fell from Heaven. b) The crops that grew in their seasons. c) The food that filled them with joy.

Angry Jews from Iconium rallied a mob and stoned Paul. They dragged him out of the city thinking he was dead (14:19–20). The disciples gathered around Paul and prayed for him and God raised him up. He went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

A young disciple, Timothy of Derbe (16:1), may have been there when Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city. Later Timothy became like a son to Paul and went with him on his missionary journeys (16:1–4; 2 Tim 3:10–11).

THEY RETURNED TO THEIR HOME CHURCH

👉 read Acts 14:21–28

After going to other towns, Paul and Barnabas went back to Antioch. At Antioch they gathered the Christians and reported all that God had done, and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (14:27). Paul gave account to those who stood behind him. They had sent him out. They had prayed and now

James, the Lord's brother (Acts 15:13).

- The Lord's brother (Gal 1:19).
- The risen Christ appeared to him (1 Cor 15:7).
- A 'pillar' in the Church (Gal 2:9).
- Paul saw James in Jerusalem on both visits (Gal 1:19; Acts 21:18).
- James was head of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:13).
- James was very well known (Jude 1:1).

he may not have fitted in with the leaders. When he wanted to join the men later, Paul would not take him (15:37–39).

From Perga Paul went to Ant’-i-och in Asia. “On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them...” Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak “ (13:15).

Paul always preached in the synagogues when invited. If the Jews did not want him to preach Christ, he moved to another place. At the synagogue in Antioch, Paul gave a great message: 1. He told them of Israel’s history and how God dealt with their ancestors. 2. He told how God kept His promise to send Christ (13:23). 3. He said that the Jews “did not recognize Jesus” (13:27). 4. In killing Jesus, their Messiah, they fulfilled “the words of the prophets.” 5. God raised Jesus from the dead (13:30). 6. This was the “good news” promised to their ancestor David and made good to them (Ps 16:10). 7. David died and was buried, but Jesus Christ lived on to serve His people (13:35–37). 8. He will save all who believe in Him.

THEY ASKED PAUL TO COME AGAIN

👉 read Acts 13:42–52

When Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue, many followed them. They asked Paul to come again the next week and he urged them to accept the mercies of God (13:42–43). To be saved, men must receive the truth in their hearts.

Those who received God’s word found it “the aroma of Christ.” To all who refused it, that word was “the smell of death” (2 Cor 2:15–16). God’s word had already condemned them (John 3:36).

Paul said, “We now turn to the Gentiles...” He used Isaiah’s words: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6).

“When the Gentiles heard this they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord...” (13:48). Many non-Jews

God’s promise to Abraham

God promised Abram a “seed” who would bless the whole world (Gen 12:3). God’s promise pointed to Jesus Christ. He came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Joel foretold this when he said, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (2:21; Joel 2:32). Paul called that time “the day of God’s favour” and “the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2).

The Synagogue

The name “Synagogue” means “congregation,” a place where the Jews gathered to worship. Most towns had a synagogue. Each congregation had a Rabbi in charge, known as the President.

In the first century, deacons (ministers) taught the people, and elders served the people. School for boys was held at the synagogue.

Jesus often went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. Mark 3:1–6.

He told them how God raised Dorcas from death at Joppa and about Cornelius and his family.

He told the apostles, “The Holy Spirit came on them (the Gentile believers) as He had come on us at the beginning” (11:15). Then Peter remembered what the Lord had said, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” If God gave the Gentiles the same gift of His Spirit, who was Peter or the leaders in Jerusalem to think that they could oppose God (11:17).

THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH

👉 read Acts 11:19–30

While Peter was preaching to Gentiles, other evangelists travelled to Phoe-ni’-cia, Cyprus and An’-ti-och and preached the gospel only to Jews. They were not ready to accept Gentile believers into their fellowships (11:19). Then men came from Cy-re’-ne in north Africa and spoke to all they met “telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.” The Lord’s hand was with these men, and a great number of people believed (11:20–21).

The apostles in Jerusalem heard about this and sent Barnabas to the new church at Antioch. Barnabas was “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith...”

Barnabas saw the grace of God at work in these new believers and he encouraged them. So many more people turned to the Lord (11:23–24).

Barnabas needed others to help him teach the new Christians, so he went to Tarsus to look for Saul. He found him and brought him to Antioch and for a whole year Barnabas and Saul taught great numbers of people (11:26).

“The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (11:26). “Christian” came to mean Christ’s men or of Christ’s party and their enemies used this name against them (26:28; 1 Pet 4:16).

Ag’-a-bus came to Antioch and said there would be famine in Judea. This did happen, so the Christians at Antioch collected money to help their brothers in Judea. Barnabas and Saul carried their gift to the elders in Jerusalem.

TALK ABOUT 1. What message did Peter bring to Cornelius and his family? 2. What

Jesus is our Passover

Jesus is our Passover. He was the lamb that took away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He sealed the New Covenant with His own blood. The Jews did not believe that the New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant (Heb 8:13). Ten years after Jesus was crucified, many went on worshipping at the Temple and keeping the laws of Moses. For them, it was as if Jesus had not lived and died.

Disciples with special gifts

- Apostles had special work (Eph 2:20) .
- Prophets taught the Scriptures (1 Cor 14:3–4).
- Evangelists went out to preach the gospel (21:8).
- Pastors and teachers cared for the Christians. (Eph 4:11).
- Elders chosen by believers governed their affairs (11:30).
- Apostles –missionaries who went beyond their own towns preaching the gospel.

happened to them? 3. Does the same Holy Spirit fill people today? 4. Was Agabus a true prophet of God? 5. What prophecy did he make? 6. Where were Jesus' followers first called "Christians" (11:26)?

HEROD RULED IN JUDEA

👉 read Acts 12:1–25

Herod Agrippa, the Roman ruler of Judea, arrested some of the Christians. He had James, the brother of John, put to death. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he seized Peter also and put him in prison (12:1–4). This happened during the Passover Feast (12:3–4; Luke 22:1).

Herod thought to put Peter on public trial after the Passover, but God had other plans. God is sovereign. He would show His victory over wicked Herod. In everything that happens, He is in control and He must get the glory.

AN ANGEL WENT TO PETER

In prison, Peter was chained to two soldiers. He was fast asleep. Suddenly, a light shone in his face and an angel's voice said, "Quick, get up!" At once, the chains fell off Peter's hands and feet. "Put on your clothes and sandals," the angel ordered, "and follow me."

The angel led Peter out of the prison. Peter followed, thinking he was having a vision (12:9). The angel went with him one city block, then left him. Then Peter knew that God had rescued him from Herod (12:8–11).

Peter went to Mary's house where many were praying (12:12). He knocked at the gate. When he went in, they were all amazed, so he told them how the angel brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, then he left for another place (12:17).

When the prison guards could not find Peter, Herod had them killed. Then Herod left the city and went to Cae-sa-re'-a. At his palace he made a public speech. The people shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." At once, "an angel of the Lord struck him down and he died because he did not give praise to God" (12:22–23). God is a jealous God (Ex 20:5). He will not give His glory to another (Isa 48:11).

PAUL AND BARNABAS

👉 read Acts 13:1–12

In the church at Antioch, there were prophets and teachers: Bar'-na-bas, Sim'-e-on, Lucius of Cyrene, Man'-a-en and Saul are named.

While the leaders were praying and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (13:2). The leaders fasted and prayed again. Then they placed their hands on Barnabas and Saul, prayed for them and sent them off. Barnabas and

Saul would take the gospel to "the ends of the earth," and John Mark would help them. So the church at Antioch sent them out as their missionaries.

The three men, Barnabas, Saul and John Mark went down to Se-leu'-ci-a. They sailed from there to the Island of Cyprus. The Holy Spirit was in charge and He was leading them. The Spirit said who would go and where they should go. All the Book of Acts is about the work of the Holy Spirit. That is why it is sometimes called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit."

THEY WENT TO THE ISLAND OF CYPRUS

Barnabas came from Cyprus where Sergius Paulus was the Roman governor or proconsul. Every year the Roman senate appointed an officer, a proconsul, to govern the affairs of the Island (4:36).

Their ship docked at Sal'-a-mis. Here Saul began to use his Gentile name, Paul. The three men found the Jewish synagogue at Salamis and preached to the Jews who gathered there.

They went on "through the whole Island until they came to Paphos" (13:6). There they met Bar-Jesus, a witchdoctor, a servant of Sergius Paulus. The proconsul sent for Paul and Barnabas because he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elymas (a name for sorcerers) opposed Paul and tried to stop the proconsul from believing in Jesus Christ (13:8).

Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at this witchdoctor: "You are a child of the devil," he said, "and an enemy of everything that is right!...Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you...You are going to be blind" (13:11).

At Paul's word, the witchdoctor became blind. When the proconsul saw what happened, he believed. He was amazed at the sign God gave through Paul (13:12; Heb 2:4).

All witchcraft and sorcery are against God. The prophet told what witchdoctors do: "Diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain" (Zech 10:2).

Sometimes we must speak out against Satan as Paul did. At other times, we must pray and claim the blood of Jesus against him.

TALK ABOUT 1. Who were the first missionaries to go out from the church in Antioch? 2. Where did they go? 3. What did Paul say to Bar-Jesus (13:11)? 4. When we use God's word against Satan, what does Satan do? 5. Satan can stop our friends from becoming Christians __ True __ False?

PAUL SPOKE TO THE PEOPLE

👉 read Acts 13:13–41

Paul left Paphos in Cyprus and took a ship to Perga in Pam-phyli'-i-a, a province of Asia Minor. There "John left them to return to Jerusalem" (13:13). We don't know why John Mark left the team. He may have been homesick. Or