



# *Empowered by the Holy Spirit*

*Studies from  
The Acts of the Apostles  
By Sharon A Steele*

## ***The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit***

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you  
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,  
and in all Judea and Samaria,  
and to the ends of the earth.*

Acts 1:8

Jesus spoke those prophetic words to the eleven apostles just prior to His returning to the Father. The book of Acts tells the exciting story of how it happened.

When Luke wrote his gospel, he carefully recorded what “Jesus **began** to do and to teach.” As Luke writes the book of Acts, he records the **continuing** work of Jesus through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. The eleven apostles, now filled with the Spirit, are no longer hiding behind locked doors. They are emboldened and if necessary, will give their lives for their risen Lord. The same Holy Spirit that empowered the early Christ-followers is available to us today.

The book of Acts is a fast-paced account of the birth of the Church, beginning with 120 Jews in Jerusalem. It records the phenomenal growth to include Gentiles and the geographical spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the known civilization at that time.

These studies were all written during the Covid 19 Pandemic and were studied by a group of women meeting by Zoom connection. In spite of the limitations, the ladies faithfully studied in advance and blessed me with their enthusiasm as we discussed the questions and studied together.

As you study these short lessons, I pray that God will encourage you in your walk with Him.

Please feel free to copy and to use for personal or group study.

Cover photo courtesy of Nathan Way

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## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson One—Acts 1:1-11**

The book of Acts is a fast-paced account of the birth of the Church beginning with 120 Jews in Jerusalem. It records the phenomenal growth of the first century church to include Gentiles and the geographical spread of Christianity from Jerusalem and Judea throughout the known world at that time. It records both the challenges and the victories of the first century church. It is a sequel to the book of Luke and records what Jesus **continued** to do through the apostles and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It was likely written while Luke was with Paul, during Paul's imprisonment in Rome. It ends rather abruptly, probably because the story was current and up to date. Paul was still in prison when it ended. It does not mention the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD, or the horrific persecution that begun under Nero in 64AD. For this reason, most scholars believe it was probably written around 62AD, about 30 years after the resurrection of Christ.

Although your Bible probably titles this book, *The Acts of the Apostles*, a more accurate name would be *The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles*. We will see the dynamic move of God's Spirit, leading, guiding, empowering believers to share the good news of Jesus, and we will see dramatic life-changing results. We will see many truths that can help and encourage us today. The Holy Spirit of the Book of Acts is the same Holy Spirit who indwells and empowers believers today.

Let's begin by comparing Luke's introduction to His Gospel and his introduction to the book of Acts.

#### **Read Act 1:1-2 and Luke 1:1-4—Author and purpose**

1. To whom did Luke address his gospel and what was his purpose in writing?
2. To whom is Acts addressed, and what can we assume about the purpose of the book of Acts?
3. Read the following references to see what we can learn about Luke from them?

Colossians 4:10-14

Acts 16:10

2 Timothy 4:11

Philemon 23-24

We can see from these passages that Luke was a faithful companion of the Apostle Paul, often traveling with him and staying with him. Luke is the only Gospel that gives an account of Jesus sending out the 72 to minister and preach the Gospel. Chapter Ten of Luke describes this ministry in detail and many feel Luke was among the 72 sent out by the Lord to witness. One early copy of the manuscript is entitled, "*The Acts of the Apostle, by Luke the Evangelist.*"

**Key verse—Acts 1:8** outlines what will take place in the book of Acts.

- Powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit (beginning in chapter 2)
- Witnesses in Jerusalem (chapters 2-7)
- Witnesses in Judea and Samaria (chapters 8-12)
- Witnesses to the ends of the earth—known civilization at that time (chapters 13-28)

## **Key Characteristics of the Book of Acts**

- Focuses heavily on the power of the Holy Spirit
- Power that changed the Apostles from fleeing and hiding to avoid persecution to boldly proclaiming the Gospel in spite of danger to themselves.
- Power to heal
- Power to raise the dead
- Power to forcefully proclaim the Gospel with incredible results
- Angelic rescues from prison
- Power to face prison and martyrdom and yet remain true to Christ

*Acts tells the story of the disciples receiving what Jesus received in order to do what Jesus did.*

### **Read Acts 1:3-5 and Luke 24:36-49**

4. What do these passages reveal about the post-resurrection time?
5. What topic does Luke identify that Jesus talked about with His apostles? (v.3) What do you think is meant by that phrase?
6. What specific commands did Jesus give the apostles in verse 4?
7. What gift did Jesus promise to the apostles?
8. Why do you think Jesus asked them to wait and to not leave Jerusalem? (See Luke 24:45-49)
9. When is waiting the easiest for you and when it is the hardest? What makes the difference?
10. What do you think it means to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? In what ways does that compare to being baptized with water? How are they alike and how are they different?

As we begin our study of the book of Acts, we see Jesus asking His disciples to stay where they were and to wait. Then He leaves them. We will quickly see what happens as a result of their obedience and their willingness to wait.

### **Read Acts 1:6-8**

11. What does verse 6 reveal about their understanding or lack of understanding regarding the promise Jesus made?
12. How did Jesus respond to the apostles' question in verse 7? What does his answer reveal for us today?

13. How does verse 8 reinforce the promise from verses 4-5?
14. What does Jesus say will be the result of the baptism of the Holy Spirit that they were about to receive?
15. What assignment are the apostles given? How would they be able to carry out such an enormous task?

**Read Acts 1:9-11**

16. How did the apostles react to Jesus' departure?
17. Who were the figures in white and what question did they ask? How did they encourage the apostles?

**Applications**

18. How does Jesus' final promise and command relate to you?
19. How do you know when the Holy Spirit is at work in your life? How can you invite the Holy Spirit to be more powerfully at work in you throughout this week?
20. When you talk to a nonbeliever about Christ, what proofs of Jesus' resurrection can you offer?
21. How should the prospect of Christ's return affect the way you live your daily life?
22. What steps can you take to be more actively involved in telling others about Christ?
23. Do you need to take time to wait for God to move in a specific circumstance in your life? Will you spend time this week seeking Him and allow Him to work in His timing?

***To Memorize***—*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8*

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Two—Acts 1:12-26**

Waiting is hard for most people. Whether it's something as minor as waiting at a stop light or something as serious as waiting to start treatment after a serious medical diagnosis, the waiting is difficult. As we deal with Covid 19, we are being asked to wait and for many of us, the waiting is challenging. The question to consider is—what are you doing during the time you are asked to wait?

In our last lesson, we saw that Jesus gave specific instructions to the apostles as to what they needed to do after He ascended into heaven. This lesson will show us what they did during that difficult *waiting period*. The actions they take in this passage will set the scene for the dramatic occurrences of Acts 2.

#### **Read Acts 1:12-14**

1. Where did the apostles go after the ascension and why did they go there? (See Acts 1:12-13; Mark 14:13-15 and Acts 12:12)
2. Who was present at this gathering (vv. 13-14)?
3. What can we learn about 'the women' from the following passages?
  - a. John 19:25
  - b. Luke 23:49, 55-24:1
  - c. Mark 15:40-41, 47; 16:1
  - d. Matthew 27:55-56; 28:1

Often we picture Jesus traveling with just 12 men, but we can see from these verses that women believers also traveled with them and some supported Jesus and his disciples financially. The women were the last to leave the cross and the first to come to the tomb. Women played an important role in the ministry of Christ and we still do!

4. Read John 7:3-5. How do you account for this change in Jesus' brothers? (I Corinthians 15:3-8)
5. Acts 1:14 indicates they were all joined together constantly in prayer. Put yourself in their sandals, what would you be asking God to do?
6. What do you find the most difficult or discouraging about praying? What do you find the most rewarding?

Sometimes we make prayer more complicated than it really is. We assign formulas or think that prayer needs to be long and use flowery words, assuming we must include certain elements or God won't hear us. That's a bunch of baloney! Remember God is a loving father who desires to talk with His children. Just as you desire intimacy with your children, God wants you to talk to Him, to share your needs, your hurts, and your joys.

If you study the prayers in Scripture, many are very short. There are times when God may lead us to an extended time of prayer, but prayer doesn't need to be long and complicated. The model prayer, (which we often refer to as the Lord's Prayer), can be said in less than one minute. (Matthew 6:9-13) Jesus warned against praying just to look righteous and against using meaningless repetitions, thinking God will hear us because of our many words. Think of prayer as sharing your heart with someone who loves you, can help you, and is totally worthy of your trust.

**Read Acts 1:15-26**

7. How many believers were involved in this prayer meeting? How might this large, extended prayer meeting have contributed to unity among the believers?
8. Who took the leadership and how did he exert his leadership?
9. Recalling that Peter denied Jesus earlier, how do you think the others felt about Peter's leadership?
10. Do you find it difficult to follow someone who has failed dramatically in the past? Why or why not?
11. How might Jesus' conversation with Peter in John 21:15-19 have calmed their fears? How might it have encouraged Peter to assume the leadership role?
12. When is it most difficult for you to assume a leadership role? Does past failure hinder you from stepping into a leadership role when God calls you to do it?

Every one of us has failed in one way or another. If God only used those who have never failed, He would have zero work force. Yes, Peter had denied even knowing Jesus, yet Jesus encouraged Peter to, "Feed my lambs", "take care of my sheep", and "Feed my sheep."

Don't allow failure to hinder you from serving the Lord. Your area of failure may be the area where you are the most effective in helping others. The daughter of a friend of mine was overwhelmed with grief and guilt following an abortion. After God healed her grief and assured her of His forgiveness, she began a ministry to other women who needed healing after an abortion.

13. How does Peter explain Judas' betrayal in verse 16?
14. How can we reconcile Luke's account to Judas' end with Matthew 27:1-10?



15. What did Peter propose to do about the vacancy left by Judas and why did he feel a replacement was needed?
16. What steps did they take in choosing a replacement?
17. What can we learn from the apostles' prayer in verses 24 and 25?
18. Read Luke 6:12-13. How do the actions of the believers compare with Jesus' actions before choosing the 12?

### **Applications**

19. What can we learn from this passage regarding making important decisions?
20. What can we learn regarding God's desire to use those who have previously failed?
21. What can you do this week to improve your prayer life?
22. Ask God what He wants to say to you through this passage. Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Three—Acts 2:1-41**

In the opening verses of Acts, we saw that Jesus gave His followers a commandment to wait for the power that would come to them when they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. In our last lesson, we saw that the followers spent their waiting time together and in prayer. This week's lesson will spotlight the beginning results of their obedience, their prayers, their unity, and the powerful filling of God's Holy Spirit.

Acts Chapter Two takes place ten days after Jesus left then and ascended to Heaven. The 120 believers have waited in Jerusalem, just as Jesus instructed. Jews and converts to Judaism from all the surrounding nations have gathered to observe the Festival of Weeks, one of three spiritual festivals that Jewish men were required to celebrate in Jerusalem at least once in their lifetime (Deuteronomy 16:16-17).

The Festival of Weeks was held in gratitude for God's gracious provision in harvest and was to start seven weeks (49 days) after the beginning of harvest. The first day was a special celebration called *The Day of First Fruits* (Numbers 28:26) and later referred to as the Day of Pentecost based on the Greek translation of the word *fifty*. The Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 also appears to be 50 days after the resurrection of Christ. **Jesus did not leave His disciples to abandon them, but to empower them!**

#### **Read Acts 2:1-13**

1. What do verses 1 and 2 tell you about the believers and what is the significance of their actions?
2. What did they hear and what was its source?
3. In what ways is the wind similar to the Spirit of God?
4. What did they see?
5. In what ways is the Holy Spirit like fire?
6. How does verse 4 say happened to them and what were they enabled to do as a result?

It is important to note the source of this powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The 120 were **sitting** in the house when suddenly the sound like a blowing of a violent wind came **from Heaven**. Imagine the sound of a hurricane force wind descending on our church. The sound was so intense that others in Jerusalem came in bewilderment to investigate. **All the believers** were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in languages they had never learned. They were speaking like trained translators!

7. From verses 5-11, count the number of different people groups who were gathered in Jerusalem for the Festival.
8. What did they experience and how did they react?
9. What does verse 13 tell you regarding human nature?

10. Had you been in the crowd in Jerusalem, how do you think you would have reacted?
11. Had you been one of the 120 believers, how do you think this experience would have affected you?
12. What is the significance of the different languages and how does it relate to Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8?

Miraculously people from 15 different people groups were able to hear the believers speaking in their native languages. This is God's Holy Spirit powerfully at work enabling these 120 uneducated believers to share the Gospel in languages they had never learned. No wonder the crowd asked, "What does this mean?" What a tremendous opportunity for Peter and the Apostles to explain exactly what it meant. We are not told that Peter had any time to prepare, but we must recognize that this is not really Peter's speech; this is the Holy Spirit speaking through a yielded Peter. (As an interesting side-note this is the first of 32 speeches in the book of Acts and they comprise approximately 25% of the book.)

**Read Acts 2:14-21**

13. Whom did Peter address and what he ask of them (v. 14)
14. How did Peter respond to the accusation of drunkenness? In what way could being *filled with the Holy Spirit* be similar to drunkenness?
15. How did he explain what had happened (vv. 16-21)?

As Peter preaches to this group of Jews and Jewish converts, he quotes three Old Testament passages (Joel 2:28-32, Psalm 16:8-11, and Psalm 110:1) to connect Judaism to Christianity. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and the empowerment they have witness had been foretold by the prophet Joel. He validates what they are seeing as being from God, predicted by God, and a result of the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit.

**Read Acts 2:22-36**

16. How did Peter describe Jesus of Nazareth in verse 22?
17. How did Peter describe the role of men in the crucifixion of Jesus?
18. In what greater way was God in control of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?
19. What does verse 24 tell us about Jesus' resurrection?
20. What point is Peter trying to make in his references to David's prophecy (vv. 25-36)? How did Jesus fulfill what David had prophesied?

21. What does verse 33 reveal about the current position of Jesus?
22. What did Jesus receive from the Father (v.33)? (See also John 14:16-18.) What did Jesus do with what He received?
23. How does Peter conclude his remarks in verse 36?

### **Read Acts 2:37-41**

24. What is the initial reaction of those who heard Peter speak (v. 37)? How do you account for their reaction?
25. What question did they ask and how did Peter respond (vv. 37-40)?
26. What actions did Peter urge them to take?
27. What was the amazing result?

### **Applications**

28. How would you react if we were to suddenly experience a wind sound filling our church or tongues of fire resting on our heads? How would you respond if people began speaking in tongues? Would it freak you out or excite you? Why?
29. What does “being filled with the Holy Spirit,” mean to you?
30. How can we cultivate a greater sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit?
31. What is God saying to you from this passage? Write it down.

### **Worship Moment**

***Come, Holy Spirit, I need you; Come, sweet Spirit I pray.***

***Come in your strength and your power. Come in Your own gentle way.***

*Come as a rest to the weary. Come as a balm to the sore.*

*Come, Lord, as strength to my weakness; Fill me with joy evermore. (repeat first 2 lines)*

*Come like a spring in the desert; come to the withered of soul.*

*Lord, let your sweet healing power, touch me, and make me whole. (repeat first 2 lines)*

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Four—Acts 2:42-47**

Acts, Chapter Two is a dynamic demonstration of the power of God—it shows the Holy Spirit continuing to do what Jesus started to do. We saw how God’s Holy Spirit descended with the sound of a hurricane force wind and with what appeared to be tongues of fire resting on the heads of each of the 120 believers who had stayed in Jerusalem. An inquisitive crowd rushed together to see what was occurring and in amazement people from 15 different people groups heard believers praising God in their own languages.

As Peter shared the story of Jesus and linked what they were experiencing to Old Testament prophecies, hearts were moved. That day 3,000 people became believers and were baptized. Imagine a church with 3,000 brand new believers. Their knowledge of Jesus and His teachings is very limited. Many may be returning to their homes at the conclusion of the seven-day Festival of Weeks. The concluding verses of Chapter Two give us a beautiful picture of a healthy church in action. As you study this passage, ask God to reveal what He wants to say to you and show you ways to strengthen our church.

#### **Read Acts 2:42-47**

1. From verse 42, list the four activities that Luke identifies as the primary focus of the first church.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
2. What do you think the phrase, “*they devoted themselves to*” means?
3. Why was it important to devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching?
4. What happens to a church that ignores that focus?
5. The second focus Luke describes in verse 42 is *to the fellowship*. What do you think that means and why is it important?
6. How do verses 44 and 45 describe the depth of their devotion to the fellowship?
7. How does their willingness to give demonstrate their love for Christ and for His church?
8. What do verses 46 and 47 tell us regarding when and where they met?
9. What do these verses tell us about what the believers did when they met in the homes?

10. What emotions were evident as they joined together?
11. What happens to a believer when *devotion to the fellowship* is lacking?
12. How does Hebrews 10:24-25 describe the importance of devotion to the fellowship? What positive results of meeting together are described in these verses?
13. How does *neglecting* to meet with others impact you?

The Church is not perfect as we well know, and will see in future studies. Made up of imperfect humans, it is a “hospital for the sick and hurting, and not a rest home for saints.” You may have had an unhealthy church experience, but we need to recognize The Church is described as the Body of Christ (Ephesians 5:23) and as the Bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7). Imagine a blind date and the romantic guy says, “I love your face, but I can’t stand your body!” I can’t imagine a second date. Or, should you tell a new groom, “I like you, but I really don’t like your bride.” The Body of Christ is not nearly as lovely as the Head, which is Jesus, but instead of neglecting or abandoning the Body, let’s do what we can to make it attractive to others. (Maybe exercise and a better diet?)

14. Verse 42 also indicates they devoted themselves to *breaking of bread*. What two aspects of church life could this refer to and why is each important?
15. The fourth aspect of church life that the new church devoted itself to was *prayer*. Why is prayer so important?
16. How does their devotion to prayer relate to the results in verses 43-47?
17. How does v. 47 describe the growth of the early church? What do you think led to its growth?

### **Applications**

18. Look again at verse 42. How do these apply to the church in 2020?
19. Which of these four would you say is our church’s greatest strength? Which is our weakest point? What can you do to help strengthen our church?
20. The early church was joyful, victorious, and full of praise. How can you as an individual help our church become more like that?
21. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Five—Acts 3:1-26**

In Chapter Two, we saw an amazing demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power dramatically filling the apostles with His presence, enabling them to speak in languages they had never learned. We saw how His presence gave the apostles great boldness and power in witnessing. As a result 3,000 were added to their number in a single day.

Last week we studied a young church devoting themselves to the Apostles teachings, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and prayer. The Lord added to their number daily. Everyone was filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. Chapter Two did not give us any details regarding these wonders and signs.

This week's passage will detail the apostles' first recorded miracle of physical healing. As you study this passage, think of those you may know who are "crippled". Don't limit your thinking to only the physically crippled. Consider also those who may be emotionally, mentally, spiritually or financially crippled. Is there a way you can minister to them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ?

#### **Read Acts 3:1-10**

1. What does verse 1 tell you about Peter and John?
2. What does verse 2 reveal about the man they encountered?
3. What did the beggar do when he saw Peter and John approaching?
4. How did the two apostles first respond to the crippled man (v.4)?
5. Why do you think Peter asked for direct eye contact?
6. How important is eye contact to you when you're discussing important issues with others?
7. What does verse 5 tell us about the man's response? What do you think he expected to receive?
8. What did Peter say to the man in verse 6 and what can we learn from Peter's example to apply to our lives?
9. How did Peter follow his words with actions and what was the result? (v.7-8)?
10. After he was healed, where did the man go and what did he do? Who was with him?

11. How did the people feel about what had happened to the crippled beggar (vv. 9-10)?

12. In what ways is this “crippled beggar” a picture of humanity without Christ?

This beggar was in a helpless, incurable condition and there was nothing he could do to correct his condition. No amount of Physical Therapy or self-effort could have healed him. He was reaching out, hoping to get a little bit of money to provide for himself. He was not expecting a miracle. We’re not even told that he had faith when he asked Peter and John for a handout. He got so much more than he was expecting! He went leaping for joy, unable to contain his praise for God. It appears he had experienced both a physical and a spiritual healing.

Without Christ, we are in a hopeless, incurable condition, spiritually crippled by our sin nature. There is nothing we can do through our own efforts to correct this condition. We’re like beggars seeking scraps and God wants to give us so much more! Through the finished work of Jesus, we receive God’s gift of salvation as a free gift and instead of being beggars, we become children of God and joint heirs with Christ. (Romans 8:17 and Ephesians 3:20) What a tremendous cause for rejoicing!

**Read Acts 3:11-16**

13. What does verse 11 tell us about the reaction of the crowd?

14. What disclaimer is implied in Peter’s opening words (v.12)?

15. How does Peter explain the miraculous healing (vv. 13,16)? What can we learn from his example?

16. List all the terms Peter used to describe Jesus in verses 13-16. What does each mean to you?

a.

b.

c.

17. How do these descriptions of Jesus help to explain the miraculous healing?

18. How does Peter describe the actions of the Jews toward Jesus in verses 13-15?

**Read Acts 3:17-26**

19. What does verse 17 tell us about why some of the Jews had mistreated Jesus?



20. How did their ignorance further God's purpose and plan? (*Isaiah 53; Psalm 2*).
21. What did Peter tell his listeners to do in order to receive forgiveness?
22. What result did he promise to those who responded?
23. Peter urged his audience to **listen** to Jesus, the one Moses had predicted would come.
- a. In what ways do we listen to God today?
  - b. How do we fail to listen to Him?
  - c. What is the danger of not listening to Him? Why do you think this is true?
24. How did Peter offer hope to his audience?
25. What does verse 26 tell us about one way that God wants to bless us? How can this be a blessing?

Just as the people came rushing to investigate in Acts 2:6-12, once again a crowd gathers to see what has happened. They knew this man, who was in his 40's, had been crippled from birth! (4:22) His life had gone through an amazing transformation! Peter is quick to give all the glory to God and to point them to Jesus. Peter was not a "faith healer" and he seized the opportunity to share that faith in the name of Jesus was the power at work in this man. Then he proclaimed the Gospel to those who had gathered.

First he shared that the power to heal was from Jesus. Next, he addressed their sin and offered the hope of salvation. "Repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out and that **times of refreshing** may come from the Lord." (vv. 19-20) Jesus came to bless us by turning us from our wicked ways, but Peter warns of the consequences of rejecting the free gift that God has offered. (v.23)

### **Applications**

26. Does your level of joy show others that your relationship with Jesus is something worthwhile?
27. Are there attitudes toward the weak and needy that you need to change before God can effectively use you to minister to them?
28. What are some specific ways that Christians can help those who are struggling with an area of being crippled in their lives? If you are struggling with crippling thoughts or feelings, how can we support you and encourage you?
29. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

# **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

## **Lesson Six—Acts 4:1-31**

Choices! Choices! Choices! I'm sure you have made some good ones and some bad ones! I certainly have! As my mom was in her 97<sup>th</sup> year, she told me. "I've made some pretty dumb choices in my life, but the best choice I ever made was to give my life to Christ. That's a decision I have never regretted." As we study this chapter, we will see choices that some in the crowd make, choices the religious leaders make, and choices that the apostles make.

In Chapter Three, we learned of an amazing healing miracle of a man who had been severely crippled from birth. (It would be good to review Chapter Three as this study is closely connected to the events of that chapter.) As a result of this dramatic healing, people were drawn to the apostles in amazement, seeking to learn more. The apostles are quick to take advantage of this excellent opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ and they begin to teach the crowd who has gathered. This raises the hackles of the religious elite and persecution begins. At this point choices must be made.

### **Read Acts 4:1-4**

1. Why did the religious officials approach Peter and John and what was their initial reaction?
2. Why were the leaders so distraught?
3. What happened to Peter and John as a result?
4. How was the reaction of the common people different from the reaction of the religious leaders?
5. How do you account for the differences? How does this relate to choices?

### **Read Acts 4:5-12**

6. Describe the group of leaders who assembled in Jerusalem to question Peter and John. (See also John 18:12-14 and John 11:49-53)
7. What question did they ask (v.7)?

When these religious leaders asked, "By what power or what name did you do this?" they were asking Peter and John to reveal who gave them the authority to act. The **name** represented the person and the authority of that person. In Chapter Three, Peter had declared to the crowd, "By faith in the **name** of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' **name** and the faith that comes through him that has given complete healing to him." As you study this passage, pay attention to the references to the **name** of Jesus and remember these refer to the **person** of Jesus.

8. How does verse 8 relate to Jesus' prediction in Luke 21:12-15?

9. How does Peter describe the source of this miraculous healing?
10. What terms does Peter use to describe Jesus in verses 10-11? (See also Psalm 118:22.) What does each term mean to you?
11. How did Peter use this opportunity to proclaim the way of salvation?
12. How does Peter's declaration in v.12 echo the words of Jesus from John 14:6?

Jesus boldly declared that He was the only way to the Father. Peter echoes this same truth in the passage. There is no other **name**, no other person who can bring us into right relationship with God.

Many people struggle with the exclusiveness of this doctrine. These religious leaders thought all their ritualistic observance to the Law and their ceremonial washings could cleanse them and make them right with God. Peter is declaring to them that Jesus is the only way! Jesus is the cornerstone, the cap stone, the essential one. Without Him everything else crumbles.

These leaders had condemned Jesus to death, but God had raised Him from the dead. The resurrection showed that God had fully accepted this sacrifice to pay the penalty for sin of all who would believe. His sacrifice had fully accomplished the work of salvation for all who would choose Him.

**Read Acts 4:13-22**

13. How does verse 13 describe Peter and John? What does that say to you?
14. How did the authorities react to Peter and John's courage? Of what did they take note and how does that relate to you?
15. What did the religious leaders know to be the truth (vv. 14, 16)?
16. What choice did the authorities make in spite of what they knew to be true (vv. 17-18, 21)?
17. What choice did Peter and John make in response to the authorities threats and orders (vv.19-20)?
18. Why were the authorities limited in what they could do to the apostles? (vv.21-22)

**Read Acts 4:23-31**

19. What did the believers do in light of the threats they had received?
20. What is the emphasis of David's prophecy, (vv. 25-26; Psalm 2:1-2) and how did the actions against Jesus and the apostles fulfill it?
21. How was God's hand in all that was plotted and done against Jesus?
22. What is the essence of their prayer request in verses 29-30? What might happen in our church if we were to earnestly pray this prayer?
23. What happened after they prayed?

**Applications**

24. What does God want to say to you from this passage about God's using ordinary people?
25. What does God want to say to you regarding the importance of "being with Jesus"?
26. How does this passage emphasize the truth that "Believing is a choice"?
27. Peter and John chose to obey God rather than man. Are there choices you need to make to be obedient to God, regardless of the consequences?
28. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Seven—Acts 4:32-5:16**

In the first four chapters of Acts, we see a church powerfully united, caring for each other, and growing at a phenomenal rate. This lesson shows that even in such an awe-inspiring church, there can be problems. This lesson is a contrast between truth and deception, between being real and being a hypocrite, and between generosity and hoarding.

As you study this lesson, ask God to show you if there are areas where you are sacrificing doing what is godly in order to gain the approval of others.

#### **Read Acts 4:32-35 – A Church United and Caring**

1. What does verse 32 tell us about the church fellowship?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How does the unity of the believers relate to their willingness to share with others?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How does verse 33 describe an answer to the apostles' prayer in 4:29 and how does it relate to unity?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Notice **great** power was on the apostles as they preached boldly, but **great** grace was upon them all (NET). How is grace related to our willingness to be generous in our sharing?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How was the early church a demonstration of God's plan from Deuteronomy 15:7-8, 10-11
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. How did the generous actions of the wealthier believers impact those who were needy?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How do these verses show the fallacy of the health, wealth, and prosperity teachings?

Please note this text does not describe communism as we know it. The communism of our day says, "What's yours in mine." The community of believers in Jerusalem said, "What's mine is yours." There is a world of difference. Communism seizes property from those who have. Theoretically, it then distributes wealth among the poor, but this seldom happens. More often, it lines the pockets of those in authority who have taken it. Christianity voluntarily gives property to relieve the needs of those who do

not have. It appears that individuals retained possession of their property until a need arose, and then some would sell a particular possession to help meet the needs.

**Read Acts 4:36-37 – A stellar example**

8. How is Barnabas an example of the actions described in verses 34 and 35? What kind of recognition might he have received as a result of his generous giving?

These verses introduce us to Barnabas who plays an important role in the book of Acts. Note that the apostles nick-named him Barnabas, which means Son of Encouragement. Barnabas seems to be blessed with two obvious spiritual gifts—the gift of encouragement and the gift of giving (Romans 12:6-8). In Acts 4 we see him giving of possessions which would definitely be an encouragement to the apostles and to those in need. For further study, I encourage you to take a look at his work of encouragement from the following passages:

Acts 9:26-28—Encourages Paul when he introduces this former persecutor to the Jerusalem believers

Acts 11:22-24—Sent to Antioch to encourage the new believers there

Acts 11:25-26—Goes to find Paul and bring him to Antioch to help the new church there

Acts 13:1-14:28—Accompanies Paul on his first missionary journey

Acts 15:36-39—Brought John Mark back into ministry in spite of past failure

**Read Acts 5:1-11**

9. How did Ananias and Sapphira's transaction compare with Barnabas' action?

10. What four questions did Peter ask Ananias? What is implied in each?

a.

b.

c.

d.

11. How do you think Peter knew that Ananias was lying?

12. To whom did Peter say Ananias was lying and in what way do you think that was true?

13. What do you think might have been the motivation for Ananias' lie?

14. What happened to Ananias after hearing Peter's words (vv. 5-6)?
15. What does verse 2 tell us about Sapphira's knowledge of what Ananias had done?
16. What question does Peter ask Sapphira and why do you think he asks?
17. What does her response reveal about her and what was the tragic result?
18. Why do you think God dealt so severely and promptly with this couple?

Interestingly, this passage does not indicate that Peter told Ananias that he would die. It may be that Peter was surprised to see how severely God dealt with Ananias. After Ananias dropped dead at his feet, Peter gave Sapphira the opportunity to tell the truth—to repent from this deception. When she repeated the lie, Peter assumed that God would deal with her the same way He had dealt with her husband. It appears that Ananias came and presented the offering alone, but that he had indicated it was the entire amount of the sale. They were under no obligation to sell the property, and no obligation to bring the entire amount to the church. The sin was not what they brought; the sin was pretending that it was the entire amount to make themselves look more generous than they were.

This is the only church at that time—and the action of Ananias and Sapphira threatened to corrupt it from the start. This is hypocrisy and that is the one sin that Jesus probably dealt with the most harshly—pretending to be one thing, when in actuality they were something totally different. To see more about Jesus' reaction to hypocrisy, read Matthew 6 and Matthew 23. He strongly warns against doing what we do, "to be seen my men". **God hates hypocrisy and even believers need to be cautious that we don't allow what others think of us change the way we respond to God.**

Probably the number one reason that unbelievers say they do not attend church is because, "The church is full of hypocrites!" Let it not be true of us!

We also need to be aware that although the Holy Spirit was powerfully active in this church, Satan was also at work. Peter asked Ananias, "How is it that *Satan* has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit?" Also at work is our human nature when Peter asked, "What made *you* think of doing such a thing?"

19. How did these events affect all who heard what had happened?
20. Compare the motivations of this couple with those of the apostles as stated in Acts 4:19 and 5:29.

### **Read Acts 5:12-16**

21. What does verse 12 tell us about the activities of the church after this event?

22. What do verses 13-14 reveal about the reaction of the people? How do you explain the mixed reactions?
23. What results are recorded in verses 15-16? How might these results have been impacted had deception gone unchecked in the church?

#### Applications

24. Ask God to show you if there are times when you seek the approval of others over His approval?
25. What steps can you take to be more honest with God and with others?
26. What material possessions is God asking you to share with those who are less fortunate? In what ways might you be tempted to hold back what God is asking you to give?
27. What does God want to say to you from this lesson? Write it down.



## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Eight—Acts 5:17-42**

When Jesus was preparing His apostles for the work they would do after He left, He warned them it would not be easy. “In this world you will have tribulations; but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) As we have studied the book of Acts, we have seen the Holy Spirit powerfully indwelling the apostles and continuing the work of Jesus through them. God validates their message by empowering them to boldly speak the truth and perform amazing miracles.

A man, lame from birth, is healed and while the crowd is amazed at this outstanding miracle, it raises the hackles of the religious leaders. They jail Peter and John overnight and command them to quit preaching about Jesus, but they indicate it is better to obey God than man. (Acts 4:19-20) After a powerful prayer meeting, the apostles continue to boldly proclaim the resurrection of Jesus.

In our last study, we saw the Holy Spirit moving on the hearts of the believers. They were a church in unity, taking care of each other to such an extent that there was not a needy person among them. We were introduced to Barnabas, who sold a piece of property, and gave the proceeds to the apostles to care for those in need.

The Church was flourishing, but there was trouble inside the Church. Hypocrisy was dealt with severely and great fear arose. Some were afraid to join this group, but God continued to work through the apostles to perform many miraculous signs and wonders. More and more people believed in the Lord and were added to the Church. The religious leaders who have ordered them to stop preaching take notice and they are not pleased. While last week’s lesson dealt with trouble from inside the Church, this passage deals with opposition from an outside source.

#### **Read Acts 5:17-26**

1. What does verse 17 tell us about the opposition and their motivation?
2. What might have caused their jealousy?
3. What action did the religious authorities take as a result of their jealousy (v.18)?
4. How did God thwart their actions (vv.19-24)?
5. What did the angel tell the apostles to do and how did they respond to the angelic direction?
6. What truths do you think are involved in sharing the “full message of this new life”?

God miraculously releases the apostles from prison. The officers find the prison still locked, the guards still stationed outside, yet the cells are empty. No wonder everyone is puzzled!

7. The leaders learn the apostles are in the temple court teaching. What did they do as a result and how did their fear of the people affect the way they treated the apostles?
8. What does this tell you about how the common people felt regarding the apostles?

**Read Acts 5:27-32**

9. What accusations did the high priest make against the apostles (v.28)?
10. Were they guilty of Jesus' blood?
11. How did Peter respond to the accusations and how does his response point to Jesus as the source of salvation?
12. What two sources of witnessing does Peter refer to in verse 32 and how do these two sources work in cooperation? (See John 16:7-8)
13. What key to receiving the Holy Spirit does Peter mention in verse 32? Why is this so important? (See John 14:23)

**Read Acts 5:33-40**

14. What was the reaction of the Sanhedrin to Peter's words (v. 33)?
15. Who intervened on the apostles' behalf and what line of reasoning did he use? (vv.34-37)
16. What recommendation did Gamaliel make regarding the apostles and why did he make it (vv. 38-39)?
17. What do you think motivated Gamaliel to act on behalf of the apostles?
18. Since the apostles were put out of the room during Gamaliel's speech, how do you think Luke learned of it?

19. In what ways do people fight against God today?
20. How do we confuse fighting against men with fighting against God?
21. How do we confuse fighting against people with fighting against spiritual powers in high places (Ephesians 6:11-12)?
22. What effect did Gamaliel's speech have on them and what actions did they take in spite of his reasoning (vv. 33,40)?

**Read Acts 5:41-42**

23. Surprisingly, the apostles react to the beatings by rejoicing because they had been "counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name". What do you think that means and what are the implications for us today?
24. How is it possible to have joy in the middle of difficult circumstances? (John 15:9-11)
25. What does verse 42 tell us about the daily activities of the apostles?
26. What stops people today from sharing the good news? What might stop you?

**Applications**

27. In what ways can you experience God more fully, so that you are set free to rejoice no matter what sufferings you experience?
28. Is there an area in your life in which you are currently fighting God? If so, will you determine to surrender to His will today?
29. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Nine—Acts 6:1-8:3**

As we have studied the first five chapters of Acts, we have seen tremendous and rapid growth in the church. With rapid growth, there are often “growing pains” and we will see that the dynamic church of the first century also experienced struggles related to rapid growth. There is much for us to learn as we see how the apostles used Spirit-inspired wisdom to deal with what could have been a divisive incident inside the young church. Although peace is achieved inside the church, the opposition from outside becomes deadly. This passage covers the story of Stephen, the church’s first martyr.

This lesson covers a large passage and we will not cover all of it in detail in class. However, it would be good to read the entire passage, asking God to reveal lessons that He wants you to apply to your life.

#### **Read Acts 6:1-7**

1. What was the problem facing the church as described in verse 1? What factors do you think led to the problem?
2. How can being “overlooked” lead to complaining?
3. How does complaining impact a church? A home? The work place?
4. What steps did the apostles take to address the situation and what can we learn from their example?
5. What were the priorities of the twelve and why do you think they chose those priorities over the more practical ministry of caring for the widows?
6. What solution did they suggest and how was their suggestion received?
7. What qualifications were required of the helpers?
8. What were the results of their solution?

This was a situation that could have caused a deep division in the church. The Grecian-speaking Jews had likely been raised outside of Israel and had migrated there because of their heritage and faith. They were likely among the group who heard the Apostles speaking in their own languages on the Day of Pentecost. This was a rapidly growing church with 3,000 new believers on the Day of Pentecost (2:41), increasing to 5,000 men after the healing of the lame man (4:4). New people were being added daily, but some were complaining because the Grecian-speaking widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

The priority of the Apostles was the Ministry of the Word of God and prayer. It would have been easy to get bogged down in the more practical and that would have diminished the effectiveness of their ministry. They would have been spread so thin that they could no longer have been effective in what

was the most important. When the Word of God and prayer are neglected, the ministry suffers. It would not have had the power. Someone has said that prayer is not preparation for ministry or spiritual warfare; prayer is ministry and spiritual warfare.

We also need to remember that our pastors can't do it all—their task is to equip believers for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16). With more people involved, the ministry of the church can expand. If individuals don't become involved, the ministry is limited and hindered.

### **Read Acts 6:8-15**

9. What can we learn about Stephen's character and his actions from verses 5 and 8?
10. Who began to oppose Stephen and how did they show their opposition?
11. Why do you think they couldn't win in the arguments with Stephen? (See Luke 21:14-15)
12. What did they do as a result?
13. How does verse 15 describe Stephen and why do you think he looked that way? (See also Exodus 34:29-35.)

### **Read Acts 7:1-50**

This is a lengthy passage, which we will not have time to read in class. In this section, Stephen gives a history lesson of the interactions between God and the Israelites. I encourage you to read it and let God show you what He wants you to learn from it.

The following is a brief synopsis of the main points of Stephen's speech.

- 7:1-8—God appeared to Abraham and established the Abrahamic Covenant. He promised him the land and predicted his descendants would be enslaved by another nation for 400 years, but would come out a great nation.
- 7:9-16—Joseph is abused by his brothers, but is exalted to a high position in Egypt, leading the Israelites to settle in Egypt.
- 7:17-19—There is a great increase in the number of Israelites, and they experience great oppression by Pharaoh.
- 7:20-38—The story of Moses and his failed attempt to help the Israelites in his own strength. He spends 40 years as a shepherd, and then he meets God out of the burning bush. He is called and empowered to deliver the Israelites at the age of 80! Great miracles and signs are performed as God leads them out of Egypt and gave them the law.
- 7:39-43—In spite of all the miracles and signs, the Israelites rebel against God, making sacrifices to the Golden Calf and taking Egyptian idols with them. Because of their repeated idolatry, God sends them out of Israel and into exile in Babylon.
- 7:46-50—David's desire to build the temple and his son Solomon's building the temple.

14. How does this speech relate to the accusations against Stephen (vv.13-14)?

**Read Acts 7:51-8:3**

15. How does Stephen's accusation in verses 51-53 relate to the rest of his speech?
16. List the different things Stephen accuses them of doing or being.
17. How did they react to this bold statement by Stephen? (vs.54)

Stephen accused them of being stiff-necked with uncircumcised hearts and ears, just like their fathers. He had spoken of the abuse the sons of Jacob had heaped upon Joseph, and he had shared that even those God had delivered through Moses had sinned against God and turned back to the gods of Egypt. The idolatry was so ingrained in their lives that God finally sent them into captivity in Babylon. They had rejected His prophets, and they had not responded to the light that God had given them. Instead they had killed the messengers. If they didn't like the message, they attacked the messengers.

18. What did Stephen see and how do you account for this vision (vv.55-56)?
19. Verse 57 indicates the people covered their ears and yelled at the top of their voices as they rushed him. What does this teach us about human nature?
20. What actions did they take against Stephen and who was there observing their activity?
21. What were Stephen's last two requests before he died and what can we learn from his example? (See also Luke 23:34, 46.)
22. How do you think Stephen's prayer might have impacted Saul?
23. How did this incident change the church (vv. 8:1,3,)?

**Applications**

24. In what ways are Christians sometimes "stiff-necked people" today? What are some ways we resist the Holy Spirit?
25. In what ways can we better minister to those who might feel overlooked or neglected?
26. What qualities of Stephen's life would you most like to see strengthened in your own life?
27. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Ten—Acts 8:1-25**

We are living in difficult and confusing times. So was the first century church. In Chapters 1-5 we saw a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit which led to explosive church growth, but that growth was not without opposition. After the healing of the lame man, Peter and John were jailed overnight and commanded not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus! They replied that they needed to obey God rather than man. After praying for boldness, they continued to teach others about Jesus.

In Chapter 5, Luke records that the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders and more and more people became believers. The jealous religious leaders had all of the apostles arrested and put into jail, but God sent an angel who led them out and told them to continue preaching. The apostles immediately return to the temple courts and continue to teach and preach. The confused religious leaders brought them before the Sanhedrin to face charges. They decide the only way to silence the twelve is to put them to death, but Gamaliel warns them that they might be fighting God. They listen, but they have the apostles flogged and once again command them to cease speaking in the name of Jesus and let them go. The apostles are listening to a Higher Power and until their dying breaths, they will continue to declare the good news of Jesus.

In our last lesson, we learned about Stephen whose speech was a historical recitation of how Israel had rejected God's law and His prophets. Enraged at his accusations, they become an angry mob and put Stephen to death by stoning. It would appear that Stephen's message was a dismal failure.

God uses sermons for different purposes. Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost resulted in 3,000 people believing. Stephen's message was not a salvation message, yet God used it. The ones who will be saved are not the ones who heard Stephen's sermon. Those who will hear and believe will hear because of the scattering of the church. In our Bible passage for today, the new church is on the move—a move no one wanted, forced by fierce persecution that erupted after the death of Stephen. ***A sovereign God can just as easily employ the intense opposition of an unbeliever to spread the Gospel as the faithful preaching of the Saints.***

As you study this lesson, ask God to reveal to you how He might want you to respond to any difficult situations you are currently encountering.

#### **Read Acts 8:1-4**

1. How do these verses describe the difficulty the church was facing and what happened as a result?
2. What does verse 3 tell you about who was instrumental in the forced move? Describe the intensity of his opposition. Why do you think he was so radically opposed to Christianity?
3. What does the intensity of his opposition tell you about human nature?
4. What does verse 4 reveal about the activity of those who had been forced to move and what can we learn from their example?
5. How does this passage relate to Jesus' promise to his followers in Acts 1:8?

Saul seems to have been a driving force in the efforts to destroy the church. Shortly after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, we see the church enjoyed a time of peace (Acts 9:31). When Stephen was being put to death, Saul was there giving approval, but that was only the start. He began to destroy the church, going from house to house having believers put into prison. The relentless intensity of his persecution was likely because he was fighting God. He was faced with a choice of either joining this bunch or fighting them. They were a threat to his way of life and against his culture. Saul was never a passive individual. When he became a Christian, he was just as passionate about sharing the good news as he had been about destroying the church.

Often those who fight the most intensely against Christianity are those who are under conviction of the Holy Spirit. They are facing a choice—they must either submit to God or fight against Him.

### **Read Acts 8:5-8**

6. Where did Philip go and how do these verses describe his activities there?
7. How do you account for the miraculous events that occurred during his ministry? (See also Acts 6:3-6)
8. How did the people respond to his preaching and what were the results?
9. What do you think caused “great joy”?
10. How was God’s hand at work in the difficulties and opposition the believers faced?
11. What can we learn from this passage regarding the challenges that we face in life?

Chapter Eight is the start of the second section of the book of Acts. It was God’s plan for the Gospel to be preached in Judea and Samaria and to the remote parts of the world. He allowed the persecution to move the believers out of Jerusalem and out of their comfort zones to bring more people into His kingdom.

God allows difficulties for a purpose. He is far more concerned about your character than your comfort. God has you where you are right now for a reason. It might be for your own personal growth or to help others grow. It might be for the salvation of others. God is concerned about the eternal destiny of people.

### **Read Acts 8:9-25**

12. From this passage and verses 5-8 compare Philip to Simon the Sorcerer. How do their words, actions attitudes and motivations compare? What was the source of power for each? How did people react to each? (Use chart on next page.)



Compare	Philip	Simon
Words		
Actions		
Attitudes		
Motivations		
Power source		
People's Reaction		

**Sorcery** was prohibited in Old Testament in Leviticus 19:26. Deuteronomy 18:9-14 links sorcery to sacrificing of children and is given as a reason God drove the Canaanites out of the land. 2 Chronicles 33:6 links sorcery to divination and witchcraft. In Acts 13:6-12 another Sorcerer, named Elymas is stricken blind because he tries to influence Sergius Paulus against the faith. In Acts 19:19 new believers in Ephesus brought their sorcerers scrolls and burned them in a demonstration of their new faith in Christ. There are many references to sorcery in Scripture and none of them are favorable.

13. What does verse 13 tell us about Simon? Why do you think he followed Philip everywhere?
14. What happened as a result of these people hearing Philip preach?
15. Who came from Jerusalem and why did they come (v. 14)? Considering how most Jews felt about Samaritans, (See John 4:9 and Luke 9:51-56) why would this be a new and unusual occurrence?
16. What did Peter and John do after they got there and why did they do it?
17. What do you think it means that the *Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them*? (This passage can be puzzling and various people interpret it in several different ways.)
18. In light of the Jewish-Samaritan division, why might the Father have delayed pouring out His Spirit until Peter and John had arrived?
19. How do you think this may have affected the way the apostles viewed the Samaritans? (See also verse 25) How might it have affected the way the Samaritans viewed the Jews?

Most likely there had not been a visible manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit similar to what had occurred when the Holy Spirit had come so powerfully on the Day of Pentecost. The manifestation could have been speaking in tongues or some other Spirit-given gift, such as prophesy, healings, casting out of demons. Usually the Holy Spirit is given when a person becomes a believer. (Rom. 8:9)

God probably wanted the apostles to be a part of what was happening in Samaria. He wanted them to see it first hand—to be personally involved in seeing these people who had been despised empowered for ministry. He wanted to change their mindset toward the Samaritans and it appears they went away with changed attitudes. On their return to Jerusalem, they preach in many Samaritan villages (v.25). They now want these people to come to know Christ and His power.

20. What do you think was Simon's motivation in his request (vv. 18-19)?

21. Look at Peter's response to Simon in verses 20-23. Why do you think he was so harsh in his response? What does it reveal about the sincerity of Simon's relationship with God?

22. What does Peter's response to Simon teach us about effective ministry?

23. In what ways are people today often more interested in the blessings and the gifts of God than in a deeper relationship with God?

24. How do people try to buy God's favor today?

25. What is God's purpose in gifting different people in different ways? (See Ephesians 4:11-16) How can this help to shed light on this passage?

Peter had the gift of discernment (e.g. Ananias and Sapphira) and he saw what was inside of Simon. He knew the gifts of the Holy Spirit would not be used for the glory of God, but rather for the glory of Simon—very possibly for financial gain. Simon was interested in spiritual power at a price, not in serving at his own expense. Simon's request was a sin against the grace of God, believing that he could buy what God gives freely. There is no sign of repentance when Peter confronts him. He is concerned with the consequences, but does not acknowledge his guilt.

We have no part in effective ministry if our hearts are not right before God. He won't honor false motivation and deceptive hearts. God gives spiritual gifts to help others and for the common good of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7). He does not give gifts that will be used to bring glory to ourselves.

### **Applications**

26. Ask God to show you if your heart is right with Him. Ask Him to show you if there is any area of bitterness that would keep you from being effective in your ministry.

27. Ask God to reveal your motivations for ministry. What would motivate you to grow deeper in relationship to God?

28. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Eleven—Acts 8:26-40**

“God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.” I looked for that verse this week and discovered it in a blog entitled, ***Favorite Bible Verses that aren’t in the Bible!*** It’s actually from a poem written by 18<sup>th</sup> century poet David Cowper. I thought that Scripture verse, which isn’t a Scripture verse, would be a great way to describe the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts.

In verses 1-4, we learned of a vicious persecution led by Saul against the church in Jerusalem. The church was scattered, but everywhere they went they shared the Gospel. In verse 5-13, we read that Philip had gone to a city in Samaria and a great spiritual awakening resulted. People became believers and were baptized. God was moving among them in a powerful way. You might think with such great things happening, God would leave Philip right there to lead the first church in Samaria. But God’s ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). God had another plan for Philip.

#### **Read Acts 8:26-35**

1. What direction did Philip receive from the Lord and how did he receive it?
2. In light of what God was doing through Philip in Samaria (See Acts 8:5-13), why might this message from the Lord have seemed unusual?
3. The Greek word that is translated *angel* in verse 26, literally means a *messenger*. What are some of the messengers that God uses to speak to you?
4. How did Philip respond to the message he received from the Lord? What does this tell us about Philip?

Philip was in the midst of an awesome evangelistic crusade in Samaria. People were being saved and baptized. There were many new believers who probably needed instruction in the way of the Lord, but Philip was being asked to go out into the desert. Amazingly, we see that Philip didn’t argue with the angel, he just started out toward the desert.

5. Describe the individual Philip met as he traveled toward the desert road. (vv.27-28)
6. Look again at your description of the person. What evidences of God’s work in preparing the man to receive Christ do you see?
7. What was he doing as he traveled and why do you think he was doing it (v.28)? Why might this have been unusual?

8. How did Philip receive direction from the Lord in verse 29 and what direction did he receive?
9. Put yourself into Philip's shoes. What might have made it easy or difficult for you to respond to such a prompting of the Spirit?
10. How did Philip respond? What does his response show about him?

Twice Philip has received divine direction from God. The first directive was from an angel of the Lord, which is the primary way God guided individuals in the Old Testament. The second directive was from the Holy Spirit, which is the primary means of guiding individuals in the New Testament. In this passage we see both the Old and the New Testaments working in harmony in the matter of reaching out to this one man. Philip probably would not have chosen to set aside the Samaria ministry without divine guidance.

Philip's response to both directives is a beautiful example for us. When the angel of the Lord told him to go to the desert, ***he started out***. When the Holy Spirit guided him to approach the chariot, ***he ran to the chariot***. He was eager to respond in obedience. ***Note that God is leading Philip one step at a time***. Had he not responded in obedience the first time, he would not have been available for the second leading of the Spirit.

11. What question did Philip ask and why do you think he asked it (v. 30)? What can we learn from Philip's example?
12. Why are questions important when trying to share Christ?
13. What does verse 31 reveal about the man? What did he do to increase his understanding?
14. Philip asked a question in v.30 to gain understanding. Now the Eunuch asks a question for the same reason. What question did the eunuch ask in verse 34?
15. The passage the man was reading is from Isaiah 53:7-8, but we can logically assume he had just finished reading verses 4-6. Read Isaiah 53:4-8 and describe how you would have explained this passage to the man?

16. How can we prepare ourselves to answer questions people may have for us? What is our part and what is God's? (1 Peter 3:15-16; Luke 21:13-15)

**Read Acts 8:36-40**

17. What desire did the eunuch express?

18. Some manuscripts answer the eunuch's question with a verse 37. Check your footnotes and most likely you will find a verse 37. What does verse 37 tell us in regard to baptism? Why do you think some early believer added that explanation?

**Read Romans 6:1-4**

19. How do these verses describe the meaning of baptism?

20. **Reread Acts 8:26-38**, and list all the phrases that show God's hand at work in bringing new life to this one individual.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

g.

21. What can we learn about God from this story?

22. What do verses 39-40 tell us about the eunuch's new life and what do they tell us about Philip?

This Ethiopian Eunuch is the first Gentile specifically mentioned as becoming a believer. He could be considered a type of "first fruit" among the Gentiles—an indication of more fruit to come. It is

interesting to see how God sought this man. Philip was guided to the man, but was not told what to say. The message was to be indicated by the passage where the man was reading. He had been to Jerusalem to worship which indicates a strong commitment to Judaism. He had likely heard about Jesus while in Jerusalem, but God chose to meet him in the desert.

God had placed in his heart a desire to know Him as evidenced by his pilgrimage to Jerusalem and his reading of the Word. The fact that he had a scroll of the book of Isaiah is unusual. It would have been very expensive and perhaps he purchased it while in Jerusalem. The Old Testament gave prophecies of a Messiah to come, while the Gospels tell of the fulfillment of those prophecies.

The word *eunuch* usually refers to a castrated male, but can also be used to apply to those who have renounced marriage to better serve the Kingdom (e.g. Matthew 19:12). If he was truly a castrated male, that condition would have excluded him from approaching God, but God approached him! He was brought near to God by faith in Jesus, through the ministry of Philip. God put a longing into his heart and then he personally sent Philip to bring the good news of salvation through Jesus to him.

In the same way, God gently draws us into relationship with Himself. He longs to pour out His love and grace into your life. He loves you and cares about you as a person. Responding to the light He has given opens us to receive more light.

Scripture does not tell us what happened to the Ethiopian eunuch, except that he went on his way **rejoicing**. He had no one to mentor him or disciple him in his new walk with God, but he had the Holy Spirit and he had the Word of God. The Holy Spirit would enable him to understand God's Word and to see how Jesus was the fulfillment of the Scriptures he was reading. Early church tradition indicates that this man became an evangelist to Ethiopia.

### **Applications**

23. This man was obviously sought by God. God used two different methods to direct Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch. God desires a personal relationship with every one of us. God has a personal interest in you because He loves you. Let His love touch you and bring healing to those parts of your soul that are broken.
24. Will you ask God to guide you and direct you and give you boldness to share? There are people who are hungry to find the hope that is in Christ. God is in the work of preparing hearts to receive Jesus. Will you do your part in sharing with them as He leads?
25. What can you do to help answer questions about Scriptures that you don't understand?
26. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Twelve—Acts 9:1-19; 22:2-16; 26:9-18**

***But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest parts of the earth.***

As we have studied the amazing continuing work of Jesus through the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, we have seen the partial fulfillment of Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8. Truly His apostles received great power when the Holy Spirit descended upon them and they were His witnesses in ***Jerusalem***.

Persecution led by Saul reared its ugly head and Stephen was put to death because of His declaration of the sin and rebellion of the people. In Chapter Eight, we learned that God used the persecution to scatter the church throughout ***Judea and Samaria***. Wherever the believers went, they preached about Jesus with power. In spite of the intentions of Saul to squelch this movement, God used the circumstances to spread the Gospel.

Chapter Nine tells the dramatic story of Saul's encounter with the risen Lord. In God's sovereignty, He had used Saul to scatter the church and the message of salvation. He will use the converted Saul to powerfully proclaim Jesus as Messiah to ***the remotest parts of the earth***." But first, God must get Saul's attention and He does so in dynamic fashion.

The story of Saul's conversion is told three times in the book of Acts. I encourage you to read each of them. The first (Chapter 9) is told as an account of what happened to Saul that day. The second (22:2-16) and the third (26:9-18) are shared in the first person as a part of Saul's testimony. Saul's conversion is an important turning point in the book of Acts and in the history of Christianity.

#### **Read Acts 9:1-2 and Acts 26:9-11**

1. How is Saul described in these verses and how do these descriptions relate to Acts 7:57-8:3?
2. Consider the fact that Damascus was 150 miles from Jerusalem. What does that tell you about Saul and his intentions?
3. How had he prepared for this journey and what does his preparation tell you about him?
4. What do you think is meant by *the Way* and how does the term relate to Jesus' words in John 14:6?

Saul is a determined and passionate man, intent on utterly destroying Christianity which is a threat to his way of life. He seems to be consumed by his hatred of this group. He had gone to great lengths, going to the high priest and getting letters to the synagogues in Damascus which would enable him to take any believers he finds back to Jerusalem to be tried. It doesn't matter if they are men or women, he is ready and eager to destroy the church. He has totally ignored the counsel of his teacher, Gamaliel (Acts 5:33-39). He is determined to stomp out Christianity regardless of the effort to himself or the pain to others.

#### **Read Acts 9:3-9 and 26:12-18**

5. What did Saul see and hear that dramatically interrupted his journey?

6. What question did the voice ask Saul (v.4)?
7. How did the voice identify Himself and what does that tell you about how the Jesus regards His church?
8. What were the first instructions Saul received (9:6)?
9. What additional information was given to him by the voice as it spoke to him (26:16-18)?
10. What are we told about Saul's traveling companions? (9:7; 22:9; and 26:13-14)
11. When Saul opened his eyes, he could see nothing. Why do you think God struck him blind?
12. What do you think was going through Saul's mind as he was being led into Damascus?
13. Why do you think Saul didn't eat or drink during the next three days?
14. What might have been God's purpose in allowing Saul to experience three days of blindness?
15. What changes do you think occurred in Saul during those three days?

Interestingly, all who were traveling with Saul heard the sound, but the others did not distinguish the words spoken. All saw the light, but only Saul was blinded by the light.

The resurrected Lord called him by name. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting **me**?" In that question, Jesus totally identified Himself with His church. To persecute His church was to persecute Him. To ignore His church, is to ignore Him. Jesus strongly identifies with His followers!

The strong and powerful Saul had to be led like a child into Damascus and then he would be told what he needed to do. Jesus was leading him one step at a time, but he also told him He had a purpose for His life. (See Acts 26:16-18) God had a plan for Saul—sharing the Gospel with Gentiles and his own people. God was sending him, but first Saul needed to be cured of his spiritual blindness. For three days, he was physically blind. I am sure there was a lot of introspection going on during that time. This was a time of deep humbling, a time in which he had to rely upon others. Saul was an extremely proud man, determined and intelligent. He needed this time to focus upon God and upon Jesus, the Messiah.

**Read Acts 9:10-19; 22:12-16**

16. How do these verses describe Ananias?
17. What specific direction did he receive from the Lord?



18. What was Saul was doing during his three days of blindness? (vv. 11-12)
19. Put yourself in Ananias' shoes; how would you have responded to this directive from the Lord?
20. How did the Lord confirm his direction to Ananias and what did the Lord reveal regarding the plan he had for Saul?
21. The Lord showed Ananias that Saul would be God's *chosen instrument to carry His name to others*. What do you think that means?
22. In what way is each of us chosen to be His instrument to carry His name to others?
23. List the different ways Ananias responded to the Lord's directive?
24. What did Ananias say to Saul after he had placed his hands on him? What can we learn from his words?

It is easy to understand the reluctance of Ananias when he first received this vision from the Lord, but God confirmed it by telling Ananias that He had a plan for Saul. In spite of a brief argument with God (who always wins), Ananias went to the house and entered it. (God had already given him the address!) Interestingly, Saul also had a vision—that a man named Ananias would come and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight. (9:12) Both men were being prepared.

In obedience, Ananias goes to Saul, places his hands on Saul and says, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." At this point, Ananias totally received Saul as a Brother in Christ, based on what God had told him, not on any actions from Saul.

25. Since Jesus had already appeared to Saul directly, why would he want an individual to be an instrument in Saul's healing?
26. Saul becomes famous after this, but we never hear of Ananias again. Why do you think God involved him and what can we learn from it?
27. Compare Saul's physical blindness and the scales falling from his eye to his spiritual condition?

28. What actions did Saul take after receiving his sight?

God wants Saul to see, but even more He wants him to be filled with the Holy Spirit. More important than the healing of Saul's physical blindness is the healing of his spiritual blindness. As Saul sat in physical blindness, I believe God allowed him to recognize his spiritual blindness—to recognize Jesus for Who He is, and to see how much he had missed. God will allow us to go through times of great challenge to help us see our need of Him and to cure our spiritual blindness.

When Saul came face to face with the glorified and risen Lord, he was physically blinded, but in a real sense he was brought to the Light. (John 9:5) After his encounter with the Light of the World, Saul was dramatically and instantly changed—he is truly a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Our next study will show the extent of the changes in this man who had so violently opposed any and everything that pertained to Jesus.

### **Applications**

29. Ask God to show you individuals for whom you are His chosen instrument to carry His Word?

30. Whom do you need to pray for that spiritual scales would be removed from their eyes?

31. Ask God to show you if there are spiritual scales that are keeping you from accepting or receiving truth?

32. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Thirteen—Acts 9:19b-43**

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.  
2 Corinthians 5:17*

In our last study, we learned how Saul, rabid in his intention to destroy the followers of Jesus, started on a journey to arrest believers in Damascus. The risen and glorified Jesus met him as he traveled. Stricken blind by the intensity of The Light, the humbled Saul was led like a child into Damascus.

During three days of blindness, God worked in the heart of Saul and in the heart of the Ananias. The conversion of Saul was totally orchestrated by God. It is the living Lord who confronts, convicts, and converts. We have no evidence that anyone was even praying for his conversion, but God sent two visions—one to a reluctant Ananias to go and lay hands on this enemy of the faith and the other to Saul that a man named Ananias would come to him to restore his sight. God would use Ananias to open his physical eyes, but God worked in Saul to cure him of his spiritual blindness.

This lesson's passage will focus on three distinct miracles that take place. As we study these three miracles, we will see the awesome power of God to bring about dramatic change. The first miracle in our study is the miracle of a transformed life! What an incredible difference Jesus made in the life of this persecutor of believers. This lesson will show us how the persecutor became the persecuted; the one who fought against the spread of the gospel is now willing to risk his life to share it. Thank God, He is still in the business of transforming lives.

As you study, ask God to show you what He wants you to learn from this passage.

#### **Read Acts 9:19b-25**

1. What evidences of a radical change do you see in Saul's life?
2. What was the focus of Saul's message (vv.20,22)?
3. How did the listeners react to this former persecutor of Christians?
4. What arguments do you think Paul used to prove that Jesus was the Christ? What were the results?
5. What did the Jews plan for Saul and how did he outwit them?

Saul's conversion was instantly obvious:

- He was baptized and immediately identified with the believers in Damascus
- He began to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah
- He grew in strength as his messages were irrefutable
- It seemed the only way to shut him up was to kill him and he quickly became a target

Saul was a man of great learning—he had studied the Scriptures and after God opened his spiritual eyes, he saw how the Old Testament prophecies found their fulfillment in Jesus. Interestingly, Saul is such a natural leader, that already we see people being referred to as Saul's followers—they were his flock.

**Read Acts 9:26-31**

6. What was the initial reaction of the Jerusalem church to Saul's coming? What caused that reaction?
7. How did Barnabas help Saul transition into the church?
8. What can we learn from Barnabas' example to help a newcomer at CrossPointe feel welcome?
9. How did Saul spend his time in Jerusalem and what were the results?
10. Where did Saul go after this persecution and how might that fit into God's plan as expressed in Acts 1:8?
11. What does verse 31 tell us of the state of the church after Saul left for Tarsus? How might the relative peace in the church relate to the conversion of Saul?
12. What is the difference between opposition to the message and opposition to the messenger?
13. What is required for a believer to have a significant witness to family, friends and work associates?

It's interesting to note that Saul, who had played a role in Stephen's death, became in a large measure his replacement. Note the similarities in the life of Stephen and the life of Saul.

- Both were Hellenistic Jews, raised away from Judea
- Both spoke with such authority and power that opponents could not refute their testimony
- Both had a ministry that focused on Hellenist Jews
- Hellenistic enemies of the Gospel killed Stephen and tried to kill Saul
- Stephen's death, assisted by Saul, led to intense persecution and the scattering of the Church into Judea and Samaria
- The persecution of Saul led him away from Judea and Samaria and into Gentile territory
- While Stephen's death led to persecution, Saul's conversion seems to lead to a time of peace.

**Read Acts 9:32-35**

The last we heard of Peter, he and John had traveled to Samaria to minister to those who had believed through the ministry of Philip. When they left that group, they started back to Jerusalem, continuing to preach the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. (Acts 8:14-25)

14. What does verse 32 indicate regarding Peter's activity at this time?
15. What can we learn about Aeneas from verse 33?
16. What did Peter say to Aeneas and what was the result?
17. What do Peter's words to Aeneas show us about God's plan for a life that has experienced God's healing?

God had a plan and a purpose for Aeneas and Peter told him to get up and to get busy taking care of his own needs. God never heals us with a purpose of just allowing us to sit, soak, and sour! God heals us to give us purpose and meaning.

**Read Acts 9:36-43**

18. How is Tabitha/Dorcas described in verse 36? What further details are revealed in verse 39?
19. Why do you think the disciples sent for Peter? (v.37)
20. Although Peter had healed many people, as far as we know, he had never raised anyone from the dead. What might he be feeling as he travels to Tabitha's home?
21. Why would he want to be alone during this time?
22. What do you think gave Peter the boldness to tell Tabitha to arise? (See also Mark 5:21-24, 35-43)
23. What do verses 35, 41-42 reveal about the purpose for these awesome miracles? (See also Acts 2:22,43; 4:30, 5:12-14)
24. Where did Peter stay after this event and why is this significant?

As God is doing miracles through Peter, He is also doing a work **in** Peter. God has moved Peter away from Jerusalem and the legalistic Pharisees and Sadducees. When Peter entered the room where Tabitha lay, he was allowing himself to become ceremonially unclean (Numbers 9:6-11). When he stays at the home of Simon, the tanner, he is staying in the home of a person who makes a living working with the carcasses of dead animals, which is also considered unclean. (Leviticus 5:2). God is preparing Peter, who has been ministering to Jews, for a dramatic change which we will see in Chapter Ten.

25. How does this lesson demonstrate the difference between the ministry of Peter and the ministry of Paul? How can that be an encouragement to you?

As we study the ministries of these two incredible giants of the faith, we will see a difference in the way God used them. Peter's ministry was often accompanied by great miracles, which God used to validate the message of the power of Jesus to work in phenomenal ways.

By contrast, Paul's ministry is predominantly using the Word of God to help people see that the Old Testament prophecies are all fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

We need to understand that God works in different people in different ways. Comparing our gift, talents, and ministry to that of others is unproductive and unwise (2 Corinthians 10:12). Humbly use what God has given you and let the Giver of the gifts be exalted in and through you.

### **Applications**

26. Am I making enough difference to the cause of Christ that the enemies of Jesus would want to silence me?
27. To what newcomer can I be a Barnabas-buddy this week?
28. How have I experienced God's healing in my life? How can I share that with others to bring glory to Jesus?
29. How can we pray for those who are spiritually dead?
30. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Fourteen—Acts 10**

Prejudice is rampant and prejudice is ugly! My first real encounter with racial prejudice was as a bride traveling through the Deep South to where my new husband was stationed in Florida. I was shocked and appalled by signs on rest room doors and drinking fountains that harshly warned, “Whites Only!” I saw white churches where people of color could serve on the janitorial staff, but would not dare to even try to worship in the same sanctuary. I think God must have wept. The past few months have brought to light tremendous amounts of prejudice and injustice that still exist. It’s ugly and I believe it still breaks God’s heart.

Prejudice is not new. In the crucial Tenth Chapter of Acts, we see God at work to open the eyes of Peter and the First Century Church to see the worth of every individual. In this chapter we see God uses visions to give direction to two people, just as He did with a reluctant Ananias and Saul in Chapter Nine. One vision gives Cornelius directions, and a second vision shows Peter that God values all people. This important chapter shows how God worked powerfully to help Peter and other Jewish believers to overcome a strong prejudice in their lives.

Be open to see what God wants to teach you from this passage.

#### **Read Acts 10:1-8 and Acts 11:13-14**

1. What can we learn about Cornelius from verses 1-2?
2. What in his background could have caused Jews to view him with prejudice?
3. What do verses 3-6 tell us about God and how God regarded Cornelius?
4. What specific directions did the angel give to Cornelius and how did he respond?
5. What additional information does Acts 11:13-14 tell us about the angel’s message to Cornelius?

Cornelius was a man with an open heart toward God, but he did not know about Jesus. It is important to understand that although Cornelius was an individual who had performed many notable deeds, he still needed to be saved. His good works were not enough to save him. The angel did not tell him how to be saved, but directed him to send for Peter who would explain it to him. (11:14)

#### **Read Acts 10:9-23**

6. Describe the vision Peter saw and the voice he heard?
7. Why would eating those animals have been difficult for Peter? (See also Leviticus 11:4-7, 13-19, 29-31.)

8. What did God tell Peter in response to his hesitation and what do you think God meant?
9. Why do you think Peter had the same vision three times?
10. What do verses 9, 17, and 19 reveal about God's timing?
11. What did Cornelius' men do when they found Simon's house (vv.17-18)? Why do you think they did that?
12. How did God communicate with Peter in verses 19-20 and what were the instructions he received?
13. Compare the description of Cornelius in verse 22 to the description in verses 1-2. What additional information does verse 22 give us and why do you think Cornelius' men shared that?
14. What does verse 23 tell us about Peter's action toward Cornelius' men? What can we learn from his actions?

God's timing is perfect! About noon **as** the men are approaching, Peter has the vision. **While** he is wondering about it the men arrive at the gate. **While** he is still reflecting on its meaning, God speaks to him through the Holy Spirit. As in the case of Philip and the Ethiopian, God uses a vision first, and then He speaks to Peter through the Holy Spirit.

The three Gentiles from Cornelius stopped at the gate, knowing it was unlawful for a Jew to associate with a Gentile (v.28). But God was obviously doing a work in Peter's heart, and he invited them in and gave them lodging.

**Read Acts 10:23b-33**

15. Who accompanied Peter and Cornelius' men and why do you think they went along?
16. What had Cornelius done in preparation for Peter's visit?
17. What was Cornelius' initial reaction to Peter and how did Peter respond?
18. How does Peter address the prejudice issue in verses 28-29? What can we learn from that?
19. How does verse 28 explain the meaning and purpose of Peter's vision?



20. What does verse 33 tell us regarding Cornelius and his guests and what can we learn from their example?

**Read Acts 10:34-48**

21. Peter addresses the prejudice issue again in verses 34-35. What do these verses teach us about God?

22. What are the main points of Peter's message?

*a) vv. 36-37*

*b) v. 38*

*c) v. 39*

*d) vv. 40-41*

*e) v. 42*

*f) v. 43*

23. What important truth regarding Jesus does Peter reveal in verse 43?

24. What happened as Peter was speaking and why do you think God gave this particular gift to them? (vv. 44-46)?

25. What was the reaction of Peter's traveling companions and what does their reaction reveal?

26. What question did Peter ask and answer in verse 47? What does his response show?

27. Give reasons why you think God chose to send Peter to Cornelius and his household when He could have had the angel share with them instead.

The main character in this story is neither Peter nor Cornelius. The main character is definitely God! He is the one who sends an angel to Cornelius and a vision to Peter. His Holy Spirit has prepared Cornelius to receive the truth and His Spirit has urged Peter to welcome these Gentiles and to go with them. Peter and the Jewish Christians did not know that God would accept the Gentiles the same way He accepted them.

The first obstacle he needed to overcome with God's truth was that God loves all people. The second obstacle Peter needed to overcome is that he would probably be faced with eating food that was not kosher. He stayed with Cornelius several days, and likely some of the food he was served would have been considered unclean by Jewish law. Jesus had addressed the matter of diet in Mark 7:14-23. It's not what a person eats that defiles a person because that merely goes through the digestive system and out of the body. It is what comes from within—our sinful thoughts and desires are what cause an individual to sin.

It is interesting to note, that Peter asks, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." When a Gentile became a Jewish proselyte, it was required that they be circumcised. God had poured out His Holy Spirit on these uncircumcised Gentiles in a way that these Jewish Christians recognized as being from God. They received the same gift that the first believers received on the Day of Pentecost. (Chapter 2)

Peter and those who had accompanied him realized that God had accepted these Gentiles and the first step of obedience as new believers was to be baptized. Truly, every part of this incredible story points to God as being the main character. He is the one at work preparing the hearts of Cornelius and his family and friends and He is the one working in the hearts of Peter and his companions.

### **Applications**

28. Are there some types of people (ethnically, socially, politically, age-wise) who might not feel they belong in our church? What are some ways we could break down barriers between us?
29. Will you give God permission to use you to reach out to others who are different from you?
30. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Fifteen—Acts 11**

God's love is not limited to one specific people group. In Chapter Ten we learned how God did an incredible work of orchestrating the salvation of a group of Gentiles. In visions, God had directed Cornelius to send for Peter and had shown Peter that He values people of all races. I can imagine Peter and those traveling with him left Caesarea and returned to Jerusalem filled with joy and awe at how God had so powerfully worked among the Gentiles. They had seen a "large gathering of people" saved, filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized. They had witnessed God at work!

One might think that believers everywhere would rejoice in this great move of God. However, we will see from this week's passage, that Peter faced a rather different welcoming committee.

#### **Read Acts 11:1-18**

1. How did the circumcised believers react to the news of what had happened in Caesarea? (vv.1-3)
2. What was the basis of their criticism and how might it relate to the vision Peter received described in Acts 10:9-16?
3. How did Peter respond to their criticism?
4. Why do you think Luke goes into such detail in repeating this story that he had already told twice in chapter 10?
5. How do these verses show the wisdom Peter used in taking six other believers with him to Cornelius' home?
6. What does verse 14 tell us regarding the angel's message to Cornelius that Acts 10:4-6 and 30-32 omit?
7. Review Peter's message in Acts 10:34-43. What was the message by which they could be saved?

Peter's message was a very simple presentation of the Gospel. Peace with God and with others is available through Jesus who is Lord of all. God anointed Jesus with Holy Spirit and power and He went around doing good—healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him. Jesus died on the cross, but God raised him from the dead and caused Him to be seen by many witnesses. Jesus is the One appointed as judge of the living and the dead and the prophets foretold His coming. **Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness through His name.**

Peter had hardly begun to speak when the Holy Spirit descended on this group of Gentiles. This is a crucial point in the spread of the Gospel. No wonder Luke repeated it three times!

8. What does verse 16 tell us that Peter remembered after the Holy Spirit came in power upon Cornelius and his gathering? (See also Acts 1:5)
9. How does Peter sum up his argument in verse 17?
10. In what ways do people oppose God today? How can we recognize if upholding tradition might find us guilty of opposing God?
11. How did God use the criticism against Peter to help the church?
12. What can we learn from the way Peter handled the unfair criticism leveled at him?
13. Why do you think God chose Peter for the Cornelius assignment?

Peter was at this time the most obvious and influential leader in the church. He was highly respected, a powerful man of God and being used of God in tremendous ways. He needed to experience it himself and he probably needed to be the one who reported what had happened. Remembering his strong refusal to eat those reptile hors d'oeuvres, "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean!" He might have been one of those leading the opposition had God used someone else on this assignment.

In Chapter 15, conflict arises in the church when circumcised believers insist that Gentiles must be circumcised before being added to the church. The influential Peter will again share the story of how God had accepted these Gentiles, pouring out His Spirit on the uncircumcised. God had shown him that it is only through grace that both Gentiles and Jews are saved (15:11). His influence helps to sway the church to decide that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised to become Christ-followers.

**Read Acts 11:19-26**

14. How do verses 19-20 contrast two groups of believers? With which group do you most readily identify?
15. How do these verses further illustrate God's purpose expressed in Acts 1:8?
16. What caused the Gospel to have such a positive effect among many who heard it (v 21)? For further understanding read 1 Corinthians. 3:5-8.
17. Why do you think the Jerusalem Church sent Barnabas to Antioch? (vv.22-24) (See Acts 4:36; 9:26-28)
18. What did Barnabas see when he arrived? Describe what that means to you?
19. What were the initial results of Barnabas' ministry in Antioch?
20. Why do you think Barnabas went to look for Saul? What does that tell you about Barnabas and what does it tell you about Saul?

Barnabas recognized Saul's abilities as a teacher—the church was growing and there were many new believers who needed teaching. Baby Christians need to be fed and sometimes that means spoon-feeding them. They need attention and Barnabas knew he needed help.

Barnabas has enough confidence in himself and his relationship with God that he doesn't feel threatened by asking for help. He is not ashamed to say, "I can't do this alone, I need help." He is not threatened by bringing into the ministry someone who is more gifted than he is. Saul quickly becomes the primary leader in their ministry efforts and I think Barnabas was aware that could easily happen. Barnabas is determined enough that he goes to Tarsus to look for Saul. He doesn't send a letter or another individual; it appears he recognizes that he may be able to have a greater influence to bring Saul than another person would. It also tells us that Saul is a talented leader and his talents are recognized and encouraged by Barnabas.

21. How did God bless their ministry together?

22. What name were the disciples in Antioch given and what does that name mean to you personally?

**Read Acts 11:27-30**

23. What do these verses teach us about the character of the Antioch Church? Why might the Jerusalem church have needed help more than other believers in the region?

24. What can we learn from the way the Antioch believers responded to a need in another area?

25. How does what happened in Antioch validate God's promise in Romans 8:28?

The church at Antioch was a giving church. When prophets foretold a severe famine, they responded by sending help. Each gave according to his ability. Claudius was emperor between 41-55 AD and historians tell us the famine was in 44-46 AD. The Jerusalem and Judean churches were facing greater persecution from the Jews than the Antioch Church in Gentile territory. This made it more difficult for the Judean Christians to provide for vital needs. In the same way, we who have been blessed need to give to those who are in dire need. We are called to give to help others according to our ability.

**Applications**

26. What can I do to remain open to a new move of God?

27. What character qualities of Barnabas would you like to see developed more in your life? What steps can you take this week to begin the process of growth?

28. What could you do this week to enlarge the circle of people you reach out to?

29. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Sixteen—Acts 12**

*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble.  
But take heart! I have overcome the world. John 16:33*

As we have studied the book of Acts, we have seen the truth of Jesus' words. Don't be surprised by the opposition! Certainly the new church experienced much persecution. Religious leaders had Peter and John put in jail after the healing of the lame man and ordered them to quit talking about Jesus (Acts 4:1-20). The Church continued to grow and the jealous religious leaders had all the apostles jailed, but God sent an angel who opened the door and let them out, with an order to keep preaching (Acts 5:17-20). The apostles were flogged and given more orders to cease preaching.

Opposition arose from Hellenistic Jews and resulted in the mob-style execution of Stephen. The Church was scattered to new territory as a result (Acts 6:8 – 8:3) While the church continued to grow, the opposition escalated and opposition arose from a new source—the government.

Chapter 12 deals with what appears to be a power struggle between Herod Agrippa I and the Church. However, in reality, it is a struggle between Herod and the Lord God Almighty, and you can easily guess who wins. The New Testament mentions four different kings named Herod. This Herod appears to have been the grandson of Herod the Great (the one who ordered all the Bethlehem baby boys killed in an effort to destroy the baby Jesus) and the nephew of the Herod who ruled during Jesus' ministry.

#### **Read Acts 12:1-4**

1. What can we learn about the actions of this Herod from verses 1-4?
2. In verse 3, Luke indicates that the death of James *pleased the Jews*. Prior to this time, the apostles and the Church had been persecuted by spiritual leaders, but were held in high regard by the common people. What might have caused the change in attitude?
3. What special time of year was this and what impact did that have on Herod's plans?

It appears that while Herod was persecuting believers, the most prominent church leaders had become an especially tempting target. His intention seemed to be to destroy the Church by eliminating the leaders. Jesus had three apostles in His inner circle—Peter, James, and his brother John. Herod's first target was James and then he zeroed in on Peter.

James' execution appears to have happened shortly before the Passover and Peter was imprisoned soon after James' death. The Passover seems to have delayed Herod's plans in regard to Peter. The Herod family members were Jews and Herod would not have sought to put Peter to death during this most holy festival.

#### **Read Acts 12:5-11**

4. What was the church doing during this difficult time (v.5)?
5. Describe what it means to you to pray earnestly? See also James 5:16-18.

6. What special effort did Herod take to keep Peter securely locked up (vv.4,6) and why do you think he took such precautions?
7. Verse 6 describes Peter as sleeping soundly. Why do you think he was able to sleep soundly, considering that another apostle had just been put to death?
8. List the different miracles in verses 6-10 that allowed Peter to escape.
9. What did Peter think was happening during this miraculous escape? Why might he have believed that?
10. What does verse 11 indicate Peter had been rescued from? Describe what you think, that implies?

It appears the Jewish people were anticipating the execution of another apostle. James was the first of the 11 apostles to be martyred—all the others except John will follow in Martyrdom. Yet, Peter has the peace of God and is getting a good night's sleep. Having seen the risen Jesus, I think Peter fully believes he will step into the presence of his living Lord. He is no longer the cowardly Peter who three times denied that he even knew Jesus. Perhaps he sees this as the fulfillment of what Jesus had told him in John 21:18 and he is not afraid.

**Read Acts 12:13-17**

11. Where did Peter go after he realized he was really set free? Why do you think he went there?
12. What hinders Christians from realizing we have been really *set free*?
13. What are some ways that Christians who have been set free act as though they are still in bondage?
14. What does the humorous incident in verses 13-16 tell you about the faith of those who were praying?
15. What does it reveal about God's desire to answer our prayers?
16. Are you ever hesitated to pray because you lack faith to believe for an answer? What can we learn from this example? (See also Matthew 17:20.)



17. Who did Peter want them to tell and why do you think he wanted them to know?

18. What did Peter do after this meeting? Do you think his action showed a lack of faith? Why or why not?

Peter went to the house of Mary, mother of John Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. This is likely where their house church met—many believe it housed the upper room where Jesus and the 12 celebrated the Lord's Supper before his death (Acts 1:13, Luke 22:7-12). It appears to have been a big house where a lot of people could gather, and Peter seemed to know that the church would be gathered there.

Their requests to God far outweighed their belief that God would answer. They did not expect a miracle and absolutely didn't believe that Peter had been released. First, they accuse Rhoda of being a nut case, and then they decide it must be Peter's angel.

God wants to answer our earnest prayers, even when our faith is weak. Answered prayer will build faith faster than anything else we can do. If you lack faith, pray anyway! If we have prayer even as small as a mustard seed, we can move mountains. God is more powerful than my doubts and I need to keep praying and not let Satan deter my prayers because of doubts that I may have. Never underestimate the power of prayer.

After connecting with the church, Peter went to another place. This does not show a lack of faith. Rather, it is a show of wisdom. Peter's request that they tell James (half brother of Jesus) and the other brothers indicate that the church leaders may not have been present during this prayer meeting. They may have gone "underground" as a result of the death of James and the arrest of Peter.

Herod and his soldiers would definitely be looking for Peter. The execution of the guards gives us an accurate picture of what Herod and the Jews had intended for Peter. When a prisoner escaped, the guards faced the sentence that had been given to the escaped prisoner.

### **Read Acts 12:18-25**

19. What do verses 18-19 tell us about Herod?

20. Why were the people of Tyre and Sidon so eager to gain an audience with Herod?

21. What did they say as Herod gave his public address and what do you feel was their motivation?

22. Compare Herod's reaction to this adulation from the crowd to Peter's reaction when Cornelius tried to worship him (Acts 10:25-26).

23. What was the result of Herod's accepting worship from these people?

24. What does verse 24 indicate happened during this time?

25. How does Chapter 12 demonstrate the truth of Ephesians 3:20-21?

Truly God can answer prayers way beyond our expectations. Perhaps this prayer group was only praying that Peter's death might be quick and merciful. When they suggested it could be Peter's "angel" at the door, did they fear that he had already died? God not only miraculously delivered Peter, He also took out the opposition. Herod had James killed, but he could not kill the church. He planned Peter's death, but did not anticipate his own.

An angel of the Lord struck Herod down, and he was eaten by worms and died—what an ignoble way to go! The historian, Josephus, reported that just after delivering this oration, Herod was struck down with a violent pain in the stomach and was carried to the palace, where, after five days of suffering, he died. His death occurred in AD 44, and Judea was then placed under Roman governors.

Chapter 12 is a turning point in the book of Acts. Luke's focus will move away from ministry to the Jews who have rejected the message of Jesus to Gentiles who are eager to receive. Peter almost disappears from the scene and Luke focuses on the Apostle Paul and his missionary activities. The focus moves away from the church in Jerusalem to the church in Antioch.

### **Applications**

26. How can we guard against pride and conceit that could destroy us and/or our witness?

27. What does God want you to learn about prayer from this passage?

28. What can you learn from this passage when you are facing opposition to your faith?

29. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Seventeen—Acts 13:1-13**

Prayer has power! Chapter 12 is a beautiful example of how God answered the prayers of a group of believers way beyond their expectations. Peter was miraculously released from prison and the opposition to the church was removed by the ignoble death of Herod. In Chapter 13, we will see another way God works when His people pray.

In our previous studies, we have seen God working to break down prejudices between the Jewish disciples and the Gentiles who were eager to receive the truths of the Gospel. Now that breakthrough has been achieved in the church's key leaders, God is ready to send them out in a far greater way. This lesson begins a new chapter in the life of the church. Up until this time, the disciples who had been scattered by the persecution of the church were sharing on a limited scale. Most were sharing only with Jews, while the group in Antioch reached out to Gentiles as well. This week's lesson shows a new move of God as they are being deliberately sent out on an extensive mission trip to reach others with the Gospel. This is the birth of foreign missions—being sent out by God, not as a result of persecution.

This passage also begins to refer to Saul (his Semitic name) as Paul (the Greek translation) of his name. This is a further indication of Paul's call to ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). From this point forward, he will be referred to as Paul except when he talks of his experience on the road to Damascus, when he heard the voice of Jesus saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

#### **Read Acts 13:1-5**

1. What two types of leaders are described as being in the church in Antioch?
2. List the different church leaders named in verse 1. What do we know about each?
3. Verse 2 indicates they were worshipping the Lord and fasting (NIV). What does the word *worship* mean to you? What helps you to worship?
4. How can worship and/or fasting make us more open to hearing God's direction?
5. What specific direction did the church receive from the Holy Spirit? How do you think they received this direction?
6. List the four actions of the Antioch Church in response to God's direction (v.3)?
7. Verse 3 mentions that the church sent them off and verse 4 tells us that the Holy Spirit sent them. Why are both of these important in a genuine call of God to ministry?

It's interesting to take a closer look at each of these five leaders who are identified as teachers and prophets.

**Barnabas**—The encourager, from Cyprus, was sent by the Jerusalem Church to the group of new believers in Antioch (11:22-24). Likely Barnabas served in a lead role, similar to our senior pastor.

**Simeon, called Niger**—The word Niger means black. Simeon is thought by many to be the Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross of Christ. He was likely one of the scattered believers who began telling others of Jesus. (Acts 11:20-21)

**Lucius of Cyrene**—is also thought to be one of the founders of the Antioch Church (Acts 11:20).

**Manaen**—had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch. This Herod ordered the beheading of John the Baptist. This strange tidbit of information is given to us, but now Manaen is identified as a follower of Christ and a leader in the church.

**Saul**—came to Antioch after Barnabas went to Tarsus to get him and bring him into the ministry. Together they taught for a whole year (Acts 11:26). Saul is powerful in the Word and may have been one of those identified as a teacher. He may have been the rookie in this group of five leaders.

As these five leaders were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit impressed upon them to set apart two of their key leaders for a different task. While Paul and Barnabas would certainly be missed, there are still three strong leaders to carry on the work in Antioch. The church in Antioch will become the sending church for the ministry to Gentiles.

8. The missionary team traveled first to Cyprus. What does Acts 4:36 tell us about Barnabas and his connection to Cyprus? What role do you think this may have played in their decision to sail the 150 miles from Seleucia to Cyprus?
9. Where did they proclaim the gospel after they arrived in Cyprus? Why do you think they chose these as their starting points?
10. Who was traveling with them and what was his role? What do we know about him from Acts 12:12,25?

Not surprisingly, the first place they go is to Cyprus where Barnabas was born. We are told they proclaimed the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues. The pattern for ministry is established on this initial journey as they preach the Gospel first in the Jewish synagogues. Throughout the rest of the book of Acts, you will find the missionary teams reaching out to the Jews first. Jesus was and is the true Messiah and the Jews need to know of the salvation that is available through Him.

### **Read Acts 13:6-13**

11. Whom did they meet in Paphos, and what do verses 6-7 tell us about this individual?
12. Why did Sergius Paulus send for Barnabas and Saul and what does that indicate about him?

13. What did Elymas do in response to Sergius Paulus' interest in the Gospel? What do you think was his motivation?
14. What four accusations does Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, make against Elymas?
15. How did Elymas' actions demonstrate the truths behind Paul's accusations?
16. What are ways people pervert the "right ways of the Lord" today?
17. What judgment came upon Elymas as a result of his attempts to turn Sergius Paulus away from the Lord? What effect do you think it had on Elymas?
18. How might this temporary blindness been an act of compassion toward Elymas?
19. What effect did the temporary blindness of Elymas have on Sergius Paulus?
20. In what ways are Christians sometimes stumbling blocks to those seeking God?
21. Why is it such a serious matter to be a stumbling block to another individual? (See Luke 17:1-2.)
22. When is it right to strongly confront those who oppose the faith?

The Scripture identifies Bar-Jesus (Elymas) as a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet who was an attendant to Sergius Paulus, a Roman official. Perhaps Sergius Paulus was seeking truth about God when he engaged this Jewish man. Unfortunately Elymas was a false prophet and might have been teaching a mixture of Judaism and pagan religions. As a sorcerer, he could have possessed some demonic powers which he used to gain influence with those who listened to his false teaching.

When Paul confronted Elymas, he assumed the leadership role of the team. Barnabas, the encourager, would have had a harder time confronting. Paul, having formerly opposed Christianity goes hard line on Elymas. Remembering his three days of blindness, during which he fasted and prayed, Paul's confrontation may have been an act of compassion toward Elymas. He will have time to meditate, to examine his own life, to choose to reject or accept the truth he has heard. Scripture does not tell us how long he was blind or if his blindness led him to repentance. However, we can assume he will not again attempt to turn anyone away from the faith.

## **Applications**

23. Will you ask God to show you if there is anything in your actions or attitudes that might be a stumbling block to another? Will you submit to Him anything that might hinder others?
24. What would help you to worship more sincerely? What steps can you take to remove any hindrances to worship?
25. In what ways can you support others who have been called to the mission field?
26. What mission field has God given to you? If you don't know, ask God to show you.
27. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Eighteen—Acts 13:13-52**

*If you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak. Acts 13:15 (NIV)*

2020 has been a year we will not forget! Wildfires, choking smoke, Covid 19, isolation, economic challenges, school closures, social injustice, civil unrest, rioting, deep division, hurricanes—the list seems endless and we need to hear some words of encouragement!

In the first section of Chapter 13, we saw Paul and Barnabas set apart by the Holy Spirit for a specific work that God had planned for them. Anointed by God and sent out by the church at Antioch, they began a long journey to share the message of hope and encouragement that comes in and through Jesus. As they travel into Gentile territory, Saul is now referred to as Paul, the Greek translation of his Jewish name. At this point, Paul has become the leader of the team and Barnabas is the behind-the-scenes partner in ministry.

The rest of Chapter 13, Luke will continue to track and record their journey as they travel hundreds of miles to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. This passage contains the first recorded sermon preached by Paul and his longest documented in the book of Acts. Likely this message contains the truths he will be sharing as they travel to different locations. The news of forgiveness and freedom that are available in and through Jesus are definitely words of encouragement.

As you read of their time in Pisidian Antioch (not to be confused with the Antioch in Syria), ask God to show you what He wants you to learn from this passage.

#### **Read Acts 13:13-15**

1. Verse 13 tells us that John left the team in Perga and returned to Jerusalem? Give reasons why you think he may have left?
2. From Cyprus to Pisidian Antioch is approximately 350 miles over sea and land. What does the willingness to travel so far under primitive conditions tell you about Paul and Barnabas?
3. What does verse 14 tell us about where Paul and Barnabas went after arriving in Pisidian Antioch? Compare this with 13:5. What pattern do you see and why do you think they are going there first?
4. What can we learn from verses 14-15 about what would be included in a typical Jewish Sabbath Day worship service?
5. What question did the synagogue rulers ask Paul and Barnabas and why do you think they asked?

When Paul and Barnabas traveled to a new location, they always preached to the Jewish population first. The Jews were their own people and many were waiting for and expecting the Messiah. Paul and Barnabas wanted them to know that Jesus was and is the Messiah who came to save.

Verses 13-15 give us some clues regarding a typical Sabbath Day service in a Jewish synagogue. It would likely have included a reading from the books of the Law and another reading from the Prophets. It was not unusual to ask a guest to speak (e.g. Luke 4:16-30).

**Read Acts 13:16-41**

6. To whom does Paul address his comments and what can we learn from that (v. 16)?
7. List the ways Paul mentions that God has acted on behalf of the Israelite people from verses 16-23.
  - V.17a
  - V.17b
  - V.18
  - V.19
  - V.20
  - V.21
  - V.22
  - V.23
8. How does Paul's sharing of God's actions toward Israel open the door for him to share about Jesus?
9. Compare Paul's words regarding David in verses 22-23, 35-36 with Peter's words in Acts 2:29-31. What points are they trying to make in regard to David?
10. Why is David such an important figure as they share the story of Jesus with the Jewish people? See also Romans 1:3.

As Paul shared the blessings that had come to the Jewish people, he directed their attention to David, the "man after God's own heart." The Jews knew that the Messiah was to be a descendant of David. Paul presents Jesus as a fulfillment of God's promise to David that he would have an everlasting descendant upon his throne. Both Peter and Paul mentioned David's words that "You will not let your Holy One see decay" (Psalm 16:10). Since David had died and his body had decayed, it is obvious that David was



speaking prophetically about Jesus, the descendant of David, whose body would be resurrected and would not see decay.

11. How did John the Baptist, the last of the Old Covenant prophets, point to Jesus (vv. 24-25)?
12. What point is Paul making in verses 26-29?
13. What aspects of Jesus' life is Paul emphasizing with the three quotes in verses 33, 34, and 35?
14. Note the phrases from verse 30-37 that refer to the resurrection of Jesus. What does this repetition tell you in regard to the importance of the resurrection?
15. What is the climax of Paul's message in verses 38-39?
16. How could this be considered a message of great encouragement? To whom might it be most encouraging?
17. Rewrite verses 38-39 in your own words, personalizing and describing what these words mean to you?

Paul was speaking to a group of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles who thought keeping the law would make them right with God. Unfortunately, no one can keep the law perfectly: we all sin. We cannot be justified by keeping the Law. It is **through Jesus** that forgiveness of sin is available. This is encouraging to anyone who recognizes the fact that he/she is a sinner—probably those most encouraged by this message are those who are most aware of their own sin.

**Read Acts 13:42-52**

18. How did those who heard the message respond and what can we learn about them from their response (vv. 42-43)?
19. What does verse 44 tell us happened the following Sabbath Day and what do you think caused this phenomenon? What can we learn from it?
20. How did the Jews react to this big crowd and what caused their reaction (v.45)?

21. What do verses 46-47 tell you about why Paul and Barnabas began their ministry in the Jewish synagogues whenever possible?
22. What does verse 47 tell us regarding God's purpose for the Jews?
23. How did the Gentiles respond to Paul and Barnabas' words (v. 48)?
24. What were the results of their ministry in Pisidian Antioch (vv. 48-49, 52)?
25. How did the jealous Jews respond (v.50)? What does this tell you about the influence of women?
26. What might have been God's purpose in allowing Paul and Barnabas to be deported?

After Paul and Barnabas had shared the encouraging message that forgiveness is available through Jesus, those who heard wanted to know more. Some followed them as they left the synagogue not wanting to wait for the next Sabbath to learn more. The next week almost the whole city gathered to hear the Word. I think those who had attended the first week were so excited they told their neighbors. Excitement is contagious—if we get excited about what we have, others will want to know why.

God had wanted the Jews to be a light to show the way to the Gentiles (v.47). That's part of the reason that Jesus and the apostles always went first to the Jews. However, when there is a move of God, you can anticipate opposition will arise. Some Jews who were jealous incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their region. Women have powerful influence for good or for evil!

Although they were expelled from the area, notice that the "Word of the Lord spread though the whole region" and many came to believe. The new disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Truly God had done a work in this area and will now send Paul and Barnabas to a different location where they will again share with others the encouraging word of forgiveness through Jesus.

### **Applications**

27. Will you ask God to show you someone who needs a *word of encouragement* from you this week? Ask Him to show you specific ways you can encourage them. Will you respond by being that encourager for them?
28. Will you ask God to give you an excitement to share His words of encouragement so that others may desire to come to know Him too?
29. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit

### Lesson Nineteen—Acts 14

*The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. Acts 14:4*

Divisions are ugly, whether in a family, a church, a city or a nation. As Paul and Barnabas continue on their journey into Gentile territory, deep divisions arise between those who believe and those who refuse to believe. They still exist today! In spite of powerful preaching, miraculous signs and wonders, the divisions become more obvious and the opposition becomes more intense.

When Paul and Barnabas preached in Pisidian Antioch, they were speaking to a group of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles (Acts 13). They told of God's blessings on Israel and shared the good news that forgiveness and justification are available through Jesus. Although many believed, jealousy reared its ugly head and the apostles were expelled from the region. That did not stop them from preaching the good news of salvation available in and through Jesus.

As they travel on, the opposition follows them, becomes fierce, and turns violent. As they move into pagan territory, they must use a different approach. Telling these people about God's blessings on Israel will not work. They must start with what their audience already knows.

Ask God to show you what He wants you to learn from their example and their determination.

#### Read Acts 14:1-7

1. Where did the apostles begin their ministry in Iconium and what were the results?
2. How did “those who refused to believe” oppose what Paul and Barnabas were doing (v.2)?
3. What did the Lord empower Paul and Barnabas to do (vv. 1,3)?
4. What did the opposition plot against the apostles and how did Paul and Barnabas react when they learned of the plot? What can we learn from their example?
5. What did Paul and Barnabas do in Lystra and Derbe in spite of the setback they had suffered in Iconium? What do you think motivated them?
6. What are some ways people *can embitter* or poison the minds of others toward a person? Toward the Gospel?

God empowered Paul and Barnabas to speak so effectively and boldly that many believed. In addition to powerful preaching, God confirmed their message by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders, but that did not stop the opposition. Those who *refused to believe* stirred up the Gentiles and *poisoned their minds* against the believers. Notice that the poisoning of the minds led to divisions and divisions led to plotting violence with a plan to kill.

When they learned of the plot, they wisely left the area, yet they continued to preach boldly. Paul and Barnabas remind us of Peter, who when ordered to quit preaching, declared, “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). In 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 Paul indicated he had no right to boast about his preaching, because he was compelled to preach—he could not stop preaching. If he had a choice, he could boast, but he had no choice! Second Corinthians 5:11 and 14 give us the motivation for Paul’s boldness when he said, “Christ’s love compels me” indicating Christ’s love was the driving factor. He had to speak.

**Read Acts 14:8-13**

7. How does this story compare to the miracle described in Acts 3?

**Compare the following:**

	<b>Acts 3:1-11; 4:4</b>	<b>Acts 14:8-13</b>
<b>Setting:</b>		
<b>Miraculous healing:</b>		
<b>Religious beliefs of crowd:</b>		
<b>Reactions of the people:</b>		

8. What does the reaction of the people in Lystra tell you about them?

**Read Acts 14:14-18—Paul’s message to the Lystra crowd**

9. How does Paul describe himself and Barnabas? How is that an example for us?

10. What does he ask them to turn from? To turn to? Why are both important?

11. How does Paul describe God in verse 15?

12. How had God revealed Himself to these people (and all people) in the past?
13. How is Paul's speech to this crowd different from his sermon in the synagogue in 13:17-41?
14. What can we learn about sharing our faith with various types of people from these examples?
15. What effect did his words have on the people and why you think they reacted that way?

These Pagans were truly astonished and recognized that a genuine miracle had occurred among them. However, they had no clue as to the source of the power. They reverted back to their native tongue—many in this part of the world were bi-lingual then even as they are today. It appears that Paul and Barnabas did not understand what they said, but when they saw the bulls and wreaths being brought out to sacrifice to them, there was no missing their understanding of what was happening.

Paul urged them to turn from these **worthless things** to the **Living God**. We cannot turn away from worthless things, unless we replace them with the Living God. Without their recognizing the source, God had shown them kindness by sending rain to produce crops in their season, providing them with food and filling their hearts with joy. Even after Paul's denial of their own deity, they still had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. They didn't get it yet—this was such a new concept to them and at this point most weren't ready to give up their idolatry.

This sermon is very different from the one Paul preached in the synagogue to Jews and Gentiles who believed in the one true God. There he recalled the history of God's working with the Jews leading up to sending of the Messiah. These pagans have no clue as to who the one true God is. In Lystra he starts by telling them about the one true God who is our creator and sustainer of life. In the same way, we must start where people are and share what they understand. If we begin spouting deep theological truths to those who haven't a clue what we're talking about, we can't expect them to get it.

#### **Read Acts 14:19-20**

16. What does verse 19 tell us regarding the fickle nature of human beings?
17. Since Antioch was about 100 miles away, what does that tell us about the opposition Paul and Barnabas were facing?
18. What did the crowd do to Paul and what happened next?
19. Many Bible commentators feel this incident is what Paul is describing in 2 Corinthians 12:1-7. How can the passage in Acts help us to better understand Paul's words to the Corinthians?

Paul may have experienced what is referred to today as a “near-death experience”. He had seen heaven and he didn’t know if it was in his body or an out-of-body experience, but he had such a vision that it changed him forever. This may have been why he told the Philippians, “To live is Christ, but to die is gain” and “to depart and be with Christ is far better” than living on this earth (Philippians 1:21-23).

### **Read Acts 14:21-28**

20. What were the results of the apostles’ ministry in Derbe?
21. What cities did Paul and Barnabas visit after Derbe? After the strong opposition that they had previously received, do you think the believers expected them to return? Why or why not?
22. How would you have felt, had you been one of those new believers and learned that they had returned?
23. List the different ways that Paul and Barnabas ministered to these new churches as recorded in verses 22-23. Why were these actions important for the new churches?
24. What did they do after returning to Antioch and why was that important?

Amazingly, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra (where Paul had been stoned), Iconium (where they plotted to stone him), and Antioch (where they had been expelled from the region). Although some might have thought this journey a disaster, in each location they left new believers and those new believers needed care. On the return trip, they appointed leadership in each church and then after prayer and fasting committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. They trusted God to take care of these new believers.

At the conclusion of this 1100 mile missionary trip, they gathered the believers in Antioch and reported all that God had done. This gave the sending church an opportunity to rejoice at what God had done and to pray for the new believers. They had accomplished on this first missionary journey what God had set them apart to do.

### **Applications**

25. What are some worthless things that people are tempted to worship today?
26. What can you do to encourage a new believer this week?
27. How does this passage emphasize the importance of praying for church leaders and missionaries?
28. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Twenty—Acts 15:1-35**

*Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional. (Max Lucado)*

Conflicts happen—in a family, in a church, in a nation and between best friends. The results of the conflict can be devastating, or they can be helpful. Much depends on how the conflict is handled. The 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Acts tells the story of two different conflicts. The first could have destroyed the unity of the Church and the message of the Gospel and the second could have divided a strong missionary team. Amazingly, God used both conflicts to accomplish a greater purpose and to further His Kingdom.

After Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch following their first missionary journey, Jewish Christians came to the Gentiles in Antioch and began to teach that further requirements were needed for them to be saved. It appears that this teaching was widespread and they had also infiltrated the Galatian churches (Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe). Many Biblical scholars feel Paul's letter to the Galatians was written about this same time. The book of Galatians deals extensively with this same issue and it would be helpful for you to read it along with the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts. This issue is of critical importance to the First Century Church and to the Twenty-First Century Church. Ask God what He wants to teach you from this passage.

#### **Read Acts 15:1-4—A Problem Emerges**

1. What were the men from Judea teaching the Christians in Antioch (v.1)?
2. How did Paul and Barnabas react to what was taught? Why do you think they responded that way?
3. What did they determine to do in an effort to resolve the issue? Give reasons why they may have chosen this option.
4. What did they report to the Jerusalem church and how were they received?

Some issues are worth fighting for and some are not! Those men from Judea were teaching that salvation came by trusting in Jesus **plus** being circumcised. They were clinging to the Old Covenant requiring obedience to the law and were trying to add that as a requirement before a person could be saved.

The question of how a person comes to salvation was worth fighting for and Paul and Barnabas were determined to resolve the issue. They had seen God work in miraculous ways among the Gentiles who had accepted Christ without becoming Jewish proselytes. Wisely, they took the question to the Apostles and the leaders of the Church.

#### **Read Acts 15:5-12—The Intense Discussion**

5. What conditions for salvation did the Pharisee believers want to require for Gentiles?

6. What beliefs or practices do some Christians/churches try to add to the requirements for salvation?
7. What do verses 6-7 reveal about the process the leaders took to resolve this issue?
8. List the different points of Peter's argument in verses 7-11.
  - a. V.7
  - b. V.8
  - c. V.9
  - d. V.10
  - e. V.11
9. Verse 7 indicates God specifically chose Peter to share the Gospel with the Gentiles (Chapter 10). Why do you think God's choice of Peter for this task was ideal?
10. What do you think Peter meant by the phrase, "a yoke that neither we, nor our fathers have been able to bear?"
11. What is Peter's conclusion as stated in verse 11?
12. What did Paul and Barnabas add to the discussion according to verse 12?
13. How does Galatians 2:15-16 emphasize Paul's agreement with Peter's conclusion?
14. What does Galatians 3:19-25 reveal regarding the purpose for the Law? See also Romans 3:20-24.



Notice that this group did not quickly and easily come to a decision. The Scripture indicates they had **much** discussion and some of it may well have been heated! They talked about this for a long time and then different leaders shared their perspective.

Peter was a principal leader and probably his input from his experience with Cornelius was a key factor in making the decision that was made. Upon his return to Jerusalem Peter had been called to give an account of why he had gone into a Gentile's home and eaten with them. It wasn't until after he explained the remarkable, God-ordained circumstances that the Jewish believers came to the conclusion that "God has granted *even the Gentiles* repentance unto life. (Acts 11:18).

As Peter appealed to them to not place a yoke on the Gentile disciples that neither they nor their ancestors could bear, he was talking about all the Jewish laws—no one could keep them in their entirety. Only Jesus, the perfect One, was able to keep the Law of Moses and He didn't keep all the laws that the Jewish religious leadership had added to the requirements of God. Peter's concluding statement gives the way of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. ***It is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.***

As Paul wrote to the Galatians churches, he explained that the law was put into place to show us our need for a Savior and to lead us to Jesus. No one can keep it all and no law can impart life. If we could be saved by keeping the Law, then Christ's death would have been unnecessary.

### **Read Acts 15:13-21 – Decision reached**

15. How did James, the half-brother of Jesus, deal with the issue from a Biblical perspective (vv.15-18)?  
See also Amos 9:11-12.

16. Why is it important that James backed up their decision by using Scripture?

17. What practical judgment did James make (vv. 19-20)?

18. Why was it wise to use a council of the apostles and church leaders to resolve the difficult issue of how non-Jews could be saved?

James, the half-brother of Jesus, appears to have taken an important leadership role in The Church at this time. When he gave his decision, he tied Peter's experience with Cornelius and his family to a Scripture from the Prophet Amos about God's plan to include the Gentiles. God's plan has always been to reach the Gentiles. (Acts 13:47 quote from Isaiah 49:6). Experience needed to be confirmed by Scripture.

James concluded they should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. When he urged them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood, he was referring to practices commonly associated with idolatry which could easily lead to divisions between Jewish and Gentile believers.

Paul and Barnabas needed the authority of the church leadership and The Church needed to be unified in this decision. Peter was convinced by his experience with Cornelius and his family—he saw God work powerfully among uncircumcised Gentiles. Paul had received a direct commission from God to minister to the Gentiles and both he and Barnabas had seen God's awesome hand at work among the Gentiles.

James must have felt the Lord's heart in this matter. It was vital that the way of salvation be clarified for all and these four men all played an important role in the decision.

**Read Acts 15:22-29—The Letter to the Gentiles**

19. What does verse 22 reveal about the unity of the church?
20. Who went to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas and what does this passage teach us about them (vv. 22,32)?
21. Why was it important that the church leaders sent men along with Paul and Barnabas (v.27)?
22. In whose name was the letter sent and to whom was it addressed? Why was it important that this decision was put into writing?
23. What does verse 28 reveal about how the church leaders came to their conclusion regarding requirements for Gentiles?

Very wisely the leaders in Jerusalem chose to send godly men along with their letter. Had Paul and Barnabas carried it back, some could have doubted its authenticity. Silas and Judas were sent for validation and encouragement of the believers.

**Read Acts 15:30-35—The Reaction of the Gentile Church**

24. How did the Christians in Antioch respond to the letter from Jerusalem?
25. What does verse 32 tell us about the ministry of Silas and Judas during their stay in Antioch?

**Applications**

26. What can we learn from this chapter about resolving differences and disagreements between believers?
27. Are there important issues about which you need to make your voice heard this week?
28. Who could use a letter of encouragement from you this week?
29. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Twenty-One—Acts 15:36-16:15**

*I have become all things to all men, so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this all for the sake of the Gospel that I may share in its blessings. I Corinthians 9:22-23*

The fifteenth chapter of Acts begins with a sharp disagreement between the church leaders in Antioch and the visiting teachers from Judea who declared circumcision necessary for salvation. Paul and Barnabas have strong personalities and both will fight for what they think is right. Paul and Barnabas had seen God's hand moving mightily in uncircumcised Gentiles. This was a matter worth fighting for and they wisely took the question to the apostles and church leaders in Jerusalem. The results of the meeting was the declaration that both Jews and Gentiles are saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus (Acts 15:11). The apostles and elders put that decision into writing for Paul and Barnabas to share with the Gentile believers.

After they returned from the Jerusalem Council with the good news that both Gentiles and Jews are saved through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, they began to make preparation for a second trip. This lesson marks the start of Paul's second missionary journey. Before the journey begins there is another sharp disagreement, but this time it is between our two heroes of the faith, Paul and Barnabas. They are both strong leaders, but with different spiritual gifts. This leads to a sharp difference of opinion and neither is willing to bend in what he believes to be right. As you study this passage, note how God uses this difficult disagreement to further His kingdom. Ask God to show you what He wants you to learn from this passage.

#### **Read Acts 15:36-41—Disagreements and Dissention**

1. Where did Paul suggest going and what was the intention of this second journey?
2. What caused the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas? (See also Acts 13:5, 13)
3. How would you rate Paul and Barnabas in regard to being people-oriented or task-oriented? How would their focus impact how they looked at this situation?
4. What was the result of this disagreement and how did it ultimately work to further God's kingdom?
5. Why do you think Barnabas chose to take another chance on Mark and why do you think they sailed for Cyprus? (See also Acts 4:36 and Colossians 4:10.)
6. What do the following verses from Paul's writings tell us about how he later regarded Mark?
  - a) Philemon 23-24
  - b) 2 Timothy 4:11

c) Colossians 4:10

7. Whom did Paul choose to go with him and what do we know about this individual? (See also Acts 15:27,32 and 1 Peter 5:12)

**What can we learn from this disagreement between two godly men?** *(The following is an adaption from a sermon on Acts 15 by Bob Deffinbaugh on Bible.org )*

- Each is addressing the situation based on his own spiritual gift and conviction. Both were acting in accord with own calling. Barnabas, the natural encourager had encouraged Paul when he needed it and now Mark needs it. Paul was focused on the completion of the ministry.
- They disagreed face to face—no indication they involved others.
- Didn't take the problem personally and did not let their disagreement alienate them as friends and brothers in Christ.
- They saw the matter through to resolution and stuck to their convictions.
- Neither acted in self-interest. Both were convinced they were right and were unwilling to compromise their convictions.
- Neither sought to prove the other one wrong. It was not a biblical issue and they weren't willing to make it one. Both were right in what they did.
- Both ministered to John Mark by what they did. Paul's refusal to take him probably served as a wake-up call to Mark. The willingness of Barnabas to invest his life and ministry in Mark, even though he had failed in the past, likely encouraged him to do his best.
- The separation was a cooperative action, not a competitive one. Their itinerary was cut in two. Barnabas was from Cyprus and likely felt a call to his home territory and a place where Mark had functioned well. Paul's call and gift was to evangelize new areas. (2 Corinthians 10:16)
- Time shows that both Paul and Barnabas acted in a way beneficial to them, to Mark, to each other, and to the Gospel. The book of Mark is a result of Barnabas' believing in Mark.
- As the partnership between Paul and Barnabas comes to an end, Silas becomes his partner and is likely a better fit for the evangelism ministry that is Paul's gift and passion. Paul will also add and train other ministry team members as they travel.
- Christians can disagree and both be right.
- Disagreements can serve a useful purpose. This was a division that resulted in a multiplication and not a divorce.

**Read Acts 16:1-5—Timothy Joins the Team**

8. What do verses 1-3 tell us about Timothy and his character? (See also 2 Timothy 1:3-7)
9. Considering the decision that was reached in chapter 15 regarding circumcision, why would Paul turn around and circumcise Timothy?
10. How can 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 help us to understand Paul's double standard in this matter?
11. In what ways are those in ministry sometimes called to a different standard?

12. What do verses 4-5 tell us about their activities and the results of their ministry?

Timothy was a disciple, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. Other believers spoke highly of him. Timothy is described as having a sincere faith that was first in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Paul later urged him to fan into flame the gifts of the Spirit that had been given to him and implies that Timothy may be a bit on the timid side.

While Paul and Barnabas had fought against those who taught that circumcision was required of the Gentiles, he now has Timothy circumcised before he joins the ministry. Is he using a double standard? Not really. Because Timothy's mother was a Jewess and his father was a Greek, the Jews in that area would have known he was uncircumcised. That would have hindered his ability to minister to the Jewish population. Paul knew that circumcision was not necessary for salvation, but in this case Timothy needed it to be able to enter a Jewish synagogue. If he wanted to minister to Jews, he needed to be circumcised. We can see that Titus, who was a Greek helper of Paul, was not required to be circumcised. (See Galatians 2:3)

Paul's desire to reach others would lead to making decisions that would open doors for ministry and not close them. That's why he indicated he had become all things to all people so that he could win them to Christ. Ministry to others requires a different set of standards!

### **Read Acts 16:6-10—Closed Doors and Open Doors**

13. List the phrases from verses 6-7 that indicate closed doors for Paul and his team? How do you think they received this leading from God?

14. How did God communicate to them once they arrived in Troas and how did they respond to God's direction?

15. Notice the change in pronouns in verse 10. How does this imply another change in Paul's missionary team?

16. What can we learn about God's guidance from this example?

We're not told how they received this leading of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps it was merely a check that something just didn't feel right. It could have come by a prophetic word to one of the members of the group, or perhaps the doors just closed and they recognized God's hand in it. When God says no, we need believe him. If He closes one door, it's because He has another that He wants to open.

### **Read Acts 16:11-15—The Beginnings of the Philippi Church**

17. Where did they go on the Sabbath and what does that tell you about Philippi?

18. Whom did they meet there and what does this tell you about the people of Philippi?
19. What can we learn about Lydia from verse 14?
20. What does verse 14 tell us about why she responded to Paul's message? How can that help us in our witnessing?
21. How did Lydia demonstrate her faith (v. 15)? What can we learn from her example?

Paul and his team went to the river where they expected to find a place of prayer. If there was no Jewish synagogue in a location, the Jews would meet by a river on the Sabbath for a time of prayer. A synagogue required at least 10 Jewish men and this implies either a small Jewish population or Jewish men who weren't interested in spiritual matters. Those who gathered were women. These women needed to worship and they didn't let the fact that their men wouldn't join them keep them from seeking God.

Notice it was the Lord who opened Lydia's heart to respond to Paul's message. We plant, we water, but only God can open the heart to receive. It is His job to convict and to open hearts. It's our job to give them an opportunity to hear and to respond. Lydia demonstrated her belief by being baptized and then she invited them into her home. She was willing to publicly declare her faith by baptism and then she became a partner in the ministry by opening her home to them.

### **Applications**

22. Is there someone that you need to give a second (or third, or 100<sup>th</sup>) chance this week?
23. Do you consider yourself to be predominantly a task-oriented person or a people-oriented individual? When you have disagreements, why is it important to try to see the issue from the other person's point of view?
24. Whom would you like to touch for Jesus? How might your actions be impacted by the beliefs of those you are seeking to reach for Christ?
25. How can you be more open to the leading of God's Spirit?
26. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Twenty-Two—Acts 16:16-40**

*I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for you I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 1:3-6*

The church at Philippi held a special place in the heart of the Apostle Paul. His letter to the church in Philippi is filled with affection and appreciation for this group of believers. I encourage you to read the book of Philippians this week, along with the lesson.

In our last study, we saw Barnabas and John Mark separate from Paul's missionary team and sail away to Cyprus. Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy form a new missionary team. After God closed several doors, they responded to God's call through a vision of a man pleading with them to "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After receiving God's clear direction, they sailed off to Macedonia and then traveled inland to Philippi, the leading city of that region and a Roman colony. They went to a river where they expected to find a place of prayer and met with women who had gathered there for worship. We were introduced to Lydia who became a believer and urged the missionary team to stay at her house.

In this week's lesson, the missionary team meets with intense opposition that would put the vast majority of us in the depths of agonizing depression. As you study this lesson, pay particular attention to how Paul and Silas respond to the very difficult circumstances they encounter. Ask God to show you how you can apply the principles learned from their example to the discouraging experiences you face.

#### **Read Acts 16:16-24**

1. What do verses 16-18 tell us about this girl?
2. Although her statement was true, how might she hinder the effectiveness of the missionary team?
3. What can we learn from the way Paul gained victory over the girl's demoniac condition?
4. What does this passage imply about "fortune tellers"?
5. Retell verses 17-21 from the perspective of the girl's owners. How do you feel about the girl? About your money? About Paul and Silas?
6. The girl's owners rejected the gospel because it cost them financially. What financial concerns keep some people from faith today?

7. How did the slave girl's owners react to this financial loss?
8. What evidences can be seen that racism could have been a factor in these charges against Paul and Silas?
9. Who joined in the attack and what does that tell us about human nature?
10. List the different ways Paul and Silas were abused from verses 22-24.
11. If you had received the treatment described in verses 22-24, would you still trust that God had called you to this place? (See 16:9-10.) Why or why not?

This girl was a slave possessed by a spirit which enabled her to predict fortunes and earned a great deal of money for her owners. Although what she was shouting about the men was true, you can imagine how distracting it was as they attempted to share the Gospel with others. We are not sure why it took Paul so long to address the situation, but it appears he just got frustrated and then, in the name of Jesus commanded the demon to come out of her. Her ability to foretell the future which was due to demonic possession was gone. We need to be aware that fortune telling and other psychic phenomena is often linked to demonic activity. You would be wise to avoid anyone who attempts to foretell the future whether using a glass ball, tarot cards, palm reading, Ouija board or whatever other devices they may use. You may be opening yourself up to satanic influence that you don't want.

There appears to be a lot of Anti-Semitism in Philippi. Paul and Silas, the only Jews on the team, were seized and the charge leveled against them is that they were Jews, advocating customs unlawful for Romans to accept or practice. When the fact that they are Jews is mentioned, the whole crowd joins in the attack. This seems to be racially-motivated mob mentality.

### **Read Acts 16:25-28**

12. How does verse 25 describe what Paul and Silas were doing around midnight?
13. Who was listening (v.25)? How can knowing that others are "listening" impact us during trying times?
14. About 12 years later, Paul wrote to the church at Philippi from another prison cell. Relate Paul's behavior in Acts 16 to Philippians 4:4-7, 11-13.



15. What can we learn from Paul and Silas about knowing peace and joy in the midst of difficult trials?
16. From verses Acts 16:26-28, list the phrases that imply a mighty miracle from God.
17. Why was the jailer suicidal when he realized the prison doors had all been opened? (See Acts 12:18-19.)
18. How did Paul reassure him? What do you think kept the other prisoners from fleeing?

Paul and Silas are a beautiful example of godliness in the face of abuse. They had been severely flogged and we might expect them to be cursing and complaining. Instead they were praying and praising and others were listening. We aren't told the details of what they were praying but the other prisoners knew they were praying to and praising their God. When God showed up with such power, the other prisoners didn't even attempt to escape.

We need to know that others are listening to us and they watch our response to the difficulties we face. We have a powerful God who loves to respond to our prayers and praises.

**Read Acts 16:29-34**

19. What question did the jailer ask and why do you think he asked it?
20. How did Paul and Silas respond to his question (vv.31-32)?
21. From verses 33-34, list the different ways the jailer expressed his new faith in Jesus.
22. What emotion did the jailer experience and what was the cause?

Coming to faith in Christ results in a changed life (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is obvious in the story of the Philippian jailer. Very possibly he was involved in the severe flogging that Paul and Silas had received. Now he washes their wounds, takes them into his house, and feeds them a meal. He and all of his family became believers and were baptized. A final note indicates they were filled with joy! God had miraculously opened the prison doors and released the chains of the prisoner, but He also set the jailer and his family free to experience new life in Christ.

**Read Acts 16:35-40**

23. Given the charge against them in verses 20-21, why might Paul have insisted on his rights as a Roman citizen?
24. How might Paul's Roman citizenship have been helpful for the new Philippian Church?
25. What did Paul and Silas do after they were released?

We're not sure why the magistrates sent word to have Paul and Silas released, but Paul wisely uses his Roman citizenship to address the role of the officials in the mistreatment they had received. Paul's action may well have protected the new church in Philippi from further abuse.

Notice Paul and Silas went to Lydia's house where they met with other believers and encouraged them. We're not given details on who the other new believers are, but we can assume that some came to believe as a result of the "many days" Paul and Silas spent sharing the Gospel (vv 17-18).

Starting in Chapter 17, Luke is no longer traveling with the team. There is speculation that he may have stayed behind to help the new believers become grounded in their faith. Luke will rejoin the team at a later time.

**Applications**

26. If a person asked you, "What must I do to be saved?" how would you answer?
27. In Acts, the disciples are sometimes freed from difficult trials and other times they have to go through them. What can you learn from their experiences that will help you as you encounter painful situations?
28. How do I handle difficult situations? What comes out of my mouth?
29. What impact am I having on those who are *listening* to me?
30. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Twenty-Three—Acts 17:1-15**

*We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor promoted by love and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3*

Paul and Silas were severely beaten in Philippi and thrown into a maximum security jail, but they, like Peter in Chapter 12, were miraculously delivered by the mighty hand of God. God used that situation to lead a jailer and his family to faith in Christ. When the authorities asked Paul and Silas to leave the territory, they complied, but they left behind a new church. The mistreatment they received did not stop them from continuing to share the Gospel and in each place they go, there are those who believe.

As Paul, Silas, and Timothy continue their missionary journey, they travel to two more cities, Thessalonica and Berea. These cities are similar in culture and opportunities, yet their ministry has different results. One group is described as being more noble than the other. Their nobility was determined by how they treated the Word of God. As you study these passages, ask God to show you if you have attitudes toward Scripture that need to be changed. What can you learn from their examples?

#### **Read Acts 17:1-4 and 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10**

1. What do verses 1-2 tell you regarding Thessalonica and the length of time he spent ministering there?
2. What do verses 2-3 tell us regarding Paul's method of sharing the good news in Thessalonica?
3. What was the conclusion to his message (v.3)?
4. List the results of his ministry from verse 4?
5. From 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10, list phrases that tell of the impact Paul's visit had on those who believed.

Although Paul and the missionary team were only there three weeks, they obviously made a powerful difference in the Thessalonians as recorded in the letters that Paul wrote to them. Their faith had produced work, their labor had been motivated by love, and their endurance and been inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. They had welcomed the message and as a result they had received the joy of the Holy Spirit. They became a model to other churches and their faith had become known throughout the region. They had turned to serve the living God and to wait for the return of Christ.

#### **Read Acts 17:5-10a and 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16**

6. What was the motivation of Paul's opposition? (v.5 and 1 Thess.2:14-16)
7. What steps did the opposition take to try to stop the spread of the Gospel?

8. What were the accusations against Paul's team? Against Jason?

The opposition to the missionary team was caused by jealous Jews, who were angered that the salvation of the Jews was being offered to Gentiles. They rounded up some "bad characters" and deliberately disturbed the peace. They manipulated the crowd, stirred them into a mob and started a riot. Does this sound like Seattle streets today?

Paul and Silas were accused of "causing trouble all over the world" (NIV). Interestingly, many versions translate that phrase as "have turned the world upside down" (KJV, AV, LNT, RSV). When these men preached the Gospel, they changed the world. They were also accused of defying Caesar's decree, saying there is another king, one named Jesus. The question of whether Jesus or Caesar was lord would soon become a life or death issue to the new church.

Jason's posting a bond may have been conditional on Paul's leaving the area. Their ministry was cut short, but Paul would continue to minister to this new church through mail. The truths from First and Second Thessalonians are available to us as a result of this setback. Reversals and setbacks from a human view may prove to be advances from a divine perspective.

9. Summarize Paul's feelings about the time spent in Thessalonica and the persecution he faced as described in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16. What impresses you most?

**Read Acts 17:10-12**

10. What does verse 10 tell us about Berea?

11. What actions of the Bereans led Luke to describe them as being of noble character?

12. Why is it commendable to examine the teachings of preachers, Bible study leaders, and evangelists in the light of God's Word?

13. What is the danger of accepting or rejecting a teaching without the authority of God's word? Can you share an example?

14. List the results of Paul's ministry in Berea from verse 12. Compare this to the results in Thessalonica. (See question #4)

15. What do you think made the difference in the two cities?

The Berean Jews demonstrate Judaism at its best. They were looking for the Messiah and they received the message with eagerness, but not blindly. Daily, they searched the Scriptures to make certain that what Paul was preaching was in line with the Word of God. They didn't allow Paul to do their thinking for them. They were people of the Word who eagerly received that which was consistent with Scripture, once they had confirmed it for themselves.

In contrast with the Thessalonian Jews who were seeking power, prestige, and position, the Berean Jews were seeking truth. Their confidence in Scripture predisposed them to be able to accept Paul's teaching about the messiah. As a result many Berean Jews believed, while in Thessalonica only a few Jews believed.

We can learn so much from the example of the Bereans. Powerful speakers can lead people astray, simply because they can be so convincing in their arguments (e.g. Adolf Hitler, great orator). It's vital that we study the Scriptures to make sure the speakers are not teaching false doctrine.

### **Read Acts 17:13-15**

16. How did the unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica react when they heard Paul was preaching in Berea? What do you think fueled their opposition?
17. What happened to the missionary team after this latest opposition?
18. Why do you think Paul was sent away while Silas and Timothy stayed behind in Berea?
19. Since his conversion in Acts 9, this is the seventh time Paul has been forced to leave an area because of persecution. How would you feel about your mission if that happened to you?

### **Applications**

20. How willing are you to allow God's Word to change your way of thinking? Are there areas in your life where God's Word has not been allowed to penetrate and change?
21. In terms of time, consistency and intensity, how would you rate your Bible study? What can you do to become more like the noble Bereans?
22. Who is lord of your life?
23. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Twenty-Four—Acts 17:16-34**

*We preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

*For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. I Corinthians 1:23-25*

For the first time in Paul's missionary journeys, he finds himself alone. The believers at Berea, fearing for Paul's life, sent him away in a hurry. This was the seventh time he was forced to leave an area of ministry due to persecution and death threats. Luke seems to have stayed in Philippi to strengthen that group of new believers. Paul leaves Berea accompanied by men who may have traveled with him to ensure his safety, but Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. Paul does not allow the absence of his team members keep him from sharing Jesus.

Paul's ministry in Athens seems to be a turning point in Luke's narrative, moving more away from ministry to Jews and more toward Gentiles. Although Paul visits the synagogue in Athens on the Sabbath, we read very little of what happened there. Instead, Luke includes much detail about Paul's time in the public market and before the Areopagus. No longer sharing with Jews and God-fearing Gentiles who are looking for a Messiah, he is talking to a group of pagans who really know nothing about the Creator God. This is a totally different audience and he needs to begin where they are.

As you study this passage, put yourself into Paul's shoes. How would you react to a group like the one Paul is facing? What can we learn from his example?

#### **Read Acts 17:16-21**

1. What can we learn about Athens and its people from verses 16-17, 21?
2. What was Paul's emotional reaction to what he saw in Athens? What do you think caused that reaction?
3. In what different places did Paul attempt ministry to the people of Athens (v.17)? Why do you think he chose each place?
4. Whom did Paul encounter in his "marketplace evangelism" and how did they respond to his message (v.18)?
5. What does verse 18 tell us regarding what Paul was trying to share with the people?
6. Where did the Philosophers take Paul and for what reason (vv.19-21)?

Athens was full of idols and its people were greatly involved in idol-worship. Paul was greatly distressed as the Spirit of God in him is reacting with grief to all of these people being so deceived. There was obviously spiritual hunger which cannot be met by worshipping items created by man.

Athens was, at the time, the world's most famous intellectual center. Even young men of Rome often went to Athens for their university training. He was speaking to a bunch of intellectuals who loved to spend their time talking about and listening to the latest ideas. Paul encountered two groups of philosophers. The **Epicureans** believed that the gods existed but had no interest in the welfare of men. The chief end of life was pleasure, which was to be sought in a happy and tranquil life, free from pain or trouble or fear, especially the fear of death. The **Stoics** believed that God was the world's soul, which indwelt all things, and that the happy life was lived in accordance with nature. Since God was in all men, all men were brothers. Many Stoics were men of high moral principal. These philosophers began a discussion with Paul, not always treating him with respect.

They invited him to the Areopagus so he could share the new teaching he had been presenting in the market place. The term, Areopagus, may designate either the Mars Hill where it was located, or the council which met there. Mars Hill was a small hill covered in stone seats used as a forum for the rulers of Athens to hold trials, debates and discuss important matters. This council was not a trial court, but a group of men who supervised religious and educational matters. Always eager to learn the latest, they invited Paul out of curiosity, not out of hostility.

Mars' Hill and Areopagus are the same Greek word, translated differently in different versions of the Bible.

### **Read Acts 17:22-31**

7. What did Paul observe about the people of Athens and what led him to that conclusion (vv. 22-23)?
8. How did Paul use his knowledge of the Athenians' "unknown god" to present the true God (v.23)?

The *Altar to the Unknown God* has an interesting history. Based on historical documents from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC, Athens was being devastated by a mysterious plague. They assumed the gods had been angered, but with so many gods they had no idea which one. After trying to appease each of them without success, they brought in a consultant who concluded it was not one of the known gods of Athens, but an unknown god. He proposed a course of action which might provide a remedy to the plague. A flock of choice sheep was kept from food until they were very hungry, then they were turned loose on a very succulent pasture on Mars Hill. The sheep were expected to begin eating, but several lay down instead. Altars were erected at each spot where the sheep had lain down, dedicated to the *Unknown God*. Then the sheep were sacrificed on that altar and almost immediately, the plague began to subside. Over the years most of the altars were forgotten and began to deteriorate. One was restored and preserved and this was the starting point for Paul's message. It enabled him to connect with what they already knew.

9. How did Paul describe God to those who were listening?
10. What was God's purpose in revealing Himself in creation?

11. What does verse 28 tell us about our reliance upon God?
12. How did Paul use Greek poetry to tell the Athenians about Jesus?
13. What argument did Paul use to try to convince the people of Athens that the true God was not an idol made of silver or gold?
14. What does verse 30 tell us that God commands of all people?
15. What would that mean for the people of Athens? For the people of the Pacific Northwest?
16. Why is repentance so important? (See Luke 13:3,5)
17. What proof of coming judgment did Paul give (v. 31)?
18. How did Paul tailor his message to the Athenians? What can we learn from his example?

As Paul spoke to this group he turned to a point of reference well known by his audience. He talked about their being religious; he used the example of the altar to the unknown god, and used their own poets as a starting point to bring the truths about the Living God to them. They had an altar to the Unknown God, but interestingly, not an idol. This God was not made of stone or precious metals. He urged them to repent as God will no longer tolerate worshiping the work of our hands, instead of the God who gave us the hands.

Those in Athens would need to turn from the worship of idols and give their allegiance to the Creator God. It would mean the same for the people of the Pacific Northwest. Are we worshipping the creation and not the Creator? He calls us to return to Him and put Him in His proper place.

**Read Acts 17:32-34**

19. The response to Paul's message was mixed. How did the three different groups respond?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.



20. Many people view Paul's ministry in Athens as a failure. Would you agree or disagree and why?

21. How should we react when others mock our beliefs?

22. What incorrect views of God are held in our society?

Paul's ministry in Athens did not seem to be as effective as in many other places, yet there were some whose lives were changed for eternity. This was a different group of people—the intellectuals, who often do not see their need of a Savior. Although they had many gods, the altar to the Unknown God shows that the gods of silver and gold could not satisfy their deepest spiritual needs. The intellectuals may have been unwilling to accept what they could not explain and they couldn't explain the resurrection. We can learn from Paul's example that he took time to engage with the people he met in the market place. He shared Jesus with them there and some mocked him, yet he continued to share. If you are mocked for your beliefs, hang on to God and don't quit sharing. There are some who will respond and some whose lives will be changed.

There are many misconceptions about God today. Some believe He is distant, untouchable, unconcerned about humans—that He put the universe into motion and then stepped out of the picture. Some believe He is all accepting and that he receives us without requiring us to repent. Others think all beliefs are of equal value—if we are sincere in our belief, it doesn't matter what we believe. Some see Him as an angry father, ready to pounce on us if we make a mistake. Some believe if you have enough faith, God will prosper you financially and give you great health. The misconceptions about God are numerous—these are only a few of many. We must use the Bible as our source for truth—anything else will lead us astray.

### **Applications**

23. What would help you persevere in your witness when others seem disinterested or when they make fun of your beliefs?

24. Who do you know who has little or no church background? What can you do to build a relationship that would give you the opportunity to help that person learn about the true God?

25. What can you do to make the message of Christ more understandable to non-Christian friends or co-workers?

26. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Twenty-Five—Acts 18:1-22**

*And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city. Acts 18:9-10*

Can you imagine the apostle Paul fearful, weak, and trembling? That’s not usually how we picture him, but that’s exactly how he described himself upon arrival in Corinth (1 Corinthians 2:3). On his missionary treks, Paul had been beaten, stoned, and left for dead. He had been run out of town seven times and had recently been mocked in Athens. No wonder he needed encouragement!

We’re not told how long Paul stayed in Athens, but long enough to share the Gospel and to leave behind a small group of believers. Although Luke doesn’t record a lot of new believers in Athens, it is one of the few places Paul was able to leave of his own choosing.

Timothy and Silas had stayed in Berea to minister to the new believers there. Paul had ministered alone to a group of intellectuals in Athens and then traveled the forty miles on to Corinth. Although Paul arrived alone, he soon connected with a godly couple who became ministry partners with him. Paul never tried to be a “Lone Ranger” Christian. He knows he needs other believers working alongside him, to support and encourage each other.

Chapter 18 will conclude Paul’s second missionary journey and will focus on his time in Corinth. Corinth was a prosperous commercial center, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. It was famous for its cosmopolitan character and notorious for its sexual immorality. Ask God to show you what you need to learn and apply from this passage.

#### **Read Acts 18:1-4**

32. What do verses 2-3 tell us about Aquila and Priscilla?

33. What do verses 3-4 reveal about how Paul spent his time in Corinth?

These verses introduce us to Aquila and Priscilla (formal name, Prisca) a godly couple who became vital ministry partners with Paul. Several versions of the Bible (KJV, ASV, RSV) translate verse 2 as “he found a certain Jew named Aquila...and he went to see them” implying Paul sought them. Aquila was a Jew, who had recently come from Italy because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Apparently Aquila and Priscilla were already believers and they made a living making tents. They invited Paul into their home where he made tents during the week to support himself, and reasoned in the synagogues on the Sabbath days trying to persuade the Jews and Greeks.

Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned several times in the New Testament, indicating they are very involved in the ministry of the Gospel. For more information on this godly couple, see Acts 18:26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19 and 2 Timothy 4:19. This is a godly couple, who have dedicated their home to the Lord and are committed to doing whatever they can to spread the Gospel.

#### **Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5**

1. What can we learn from this passage regarding Paul’s preaching in Corinth? What does he say his preaching did not have?
2. What did he resolve would be the emphasis of his preaching and for what reason (vv. 2, 5)?

3. What does verse 4 tell us accompanied his preaching?
4. What can we learn about Paul's emotions when he came to Corinth (v.3)? What might have been the cause?

Paul did not come to the Corinthians trying to wow them with eloquence or superior wisdom. He did not come with wise and persuasive words, but with a simple declaration of the Gospel. He was "determined to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" so their faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. The simple Gospel message, accompanied with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, was obviously at work in and through Paul as others became believers.

Interestingly, Paul did not come in great boldness. He came in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. Considering the reaction of the Jews in the places he had recently visited and the fact that he came alone, it's not surprising that he felt weak and fearful. I would have been weak-kneed as well.

**Read Acts 18:5-8**

5. How did Paul's activities change after Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia? How might Philippians 4:15-16 help to explain this change? (Remember Philippi was a Macedonian city.)
6. What actions did Paul take after the Jews opposed him and became abusive?
7. In what ways had Paul fulfilled his responsibility to the Jews?
8. What can we learn from this passage about our responsibility to the lost people around us? See Ezekiel 3:17-21 and Ephesians 4:15.
9. How can we determine when we need to give up on an individual and move on to share with others who might be more receptive?
10. Where did Paul go after he left the synagogue and what do you think he did there?
11. What does verse 8 tell us about the results of Paul's ministry in Corinth?
12. In light of the abusive opposition from Jews to anyone associated with Paul, what would it be like for Crispus and his household to convert and be baptized?

When Paul shook out his clothes in protest, it was a sign of their rejection of his message, his giving up on them, and a symbol that he was shaking their guilt off of himself. His responsibility was to share and after sharing with them, he was clear of his responsibility. It was their choice to accept or to reject Jesus. We also have a responsibility to share with others and will be held accountable for not speaking the truth to them. When people become abusive at what we are sharing, we need to move on and share with others. This will be a pattern of action for the Apostle Paul. First he brings the truth to the Jews, and as long as they will listen he continues to share, but when they become abusive or blasphemous of the Gospel, he moves on.

Paul leaves the synagogue and goes next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God, who had accepted the truths of the Gospel. I'm firmly convinced that Paul preached daily to anyone and everyone who would listen. As a result Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord along with many others. Most likely it cost Crispus his position. Verse 17 describes Sosthenes as the synagogue ruler.

**Read Acts 18:9-11**

13. List the ways God encouraged the Apostle Paul.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

14. Considering what Paul had experienced from zealous Jews in other locations, why might this vision from the Lord have been especially encouraging for him?

**Read Acts 18:12-17**

15. What method did the Jews use in trying to stop the spread of Christianity in Corinth?

16. How did Gallio handle the matter and what was his reasoning?

17. What action did the Jews take after Gallio's decision and how did Gallio react to this?

18. What do these verses reveal about the nature of anger?

19. What can we learn about Sosthenes from verse 17 and from 1 Corinthians 1:1?

20. What effect might the conversions of Crispus (v. 8) and Sosthenes, his successor, have had on the Jewish community in Corinth?

Notice how anger is often directed sideways. These men were angry at Paul, but because Gallio threw their case out of court, they turned on Sosthenes. If we can't express the anger we feel at the focus of our anger, we will often direct it at someone else or inwardly toward ourselves.

Sosthenes was the synagogue ruler, but we see he also became a believer. It appears he traveled with Paul as the first letter to the Corinthian Church was from Paul and your brother, Sosthenes. Seeing these respected synagogue leaders following Christ probably had a positive impact on those who had open minds. Those who were in opposition likely became more violent in their opposition.

### **Read Acts 18:18-22**

21. Where did Paul go after leaving Corinth and who went with him?

22. What did Paul do in Ephesus and why do you think he left Aquila and Priscilla there?

When Paul left Corinth he sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. This is most likely a Nazarite vow as described in Numbers 6:1-21. It is interesting that although Paul fought for Gentile freedom from the Jewish Law, he continued to follow it himself, perhaps so he could better minister to the Jews. He would continue to follow Jewish Law, not to gain salvation, but to worship.

In Ephesus, he went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. He left Priscilla and Aquila there because the Ephesians were open to receive. They asked him to spend more time with them. He promised to come back if it were God's will and Chapter 19 reveals Ephesus as his first lengthy stop on his third missionary journey. Paul set sail from Ephesus, landed at Caesarea, and went up and greeted the church (most likely the Jerusalem church) and then went down to Antioch. This marks the end of Paul's second missionary journey.

From this study, we can see God used Paul very effectively when he felt the least confident in himself. In time Paul learned that God's power is perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). We don't have to be strong for God to use us because He loves to display His power when we are at our weakest.

We can also see that God in His sovereignty can use unbelievers to accomplish His purposes. Aquila and Priscilla were "guided" to Corinth by Claudius, a heather ruler who kicked Jews out of Rome. Christianity was protected for a time by Gallio, a ruler who didn't like Jews, didn't believe in Christ, or care about Paul. God's means of protecting Paul from the harm that would have been done to him by cruel, unbelieving men (Jews) was by means of using other often cruel, unbelieving men (Roman Soldiers). We will see further evidence of this as we continue our study in Acts.

### **Applications**

23. In what ways has God encouraged you when you felt like quitting?

24. How have other believers helped strengthen you when you felt weak or discouraged?

25. How can you be like Aquila and Priscilla in coming alongside an individual who needs encouragement?

26. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

**The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**  
**Lesson Twenty-Six—Acts 18:23-19:12**

As the Apostle Paul was winding down his second missionary journey, he made a brief stop in Ephesus where he left Aquila and Priscilla. The Ephesians urged him to stay longer, but he seemed to be in a hurry to move on, but promised he would try to return. In his absence, we see the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila begins to develop and to flourish. God will use this devout couple to bring light to an on-fire preacher who doesn't yet know the full truth of the Gospel. This study will introduce us to Apollos, who will take an important role in the spread of the Gospel when Paul is in prison.

Chapter Eighteen shows Paul ending his second missionary journey and starting on his third. Luke briefly shares that Paul had returned to Antioch, reported to the church, and that he left again (Acts 18:22-23). We can see that his heart is intimately connected to those he has led to the Lord. Paul knows new believers need to be mentored and he uses several methods to encourage them in their new-found faith. He will visit some. He will send one of his helpers to minister to others, and he will keep in touch with other new believers by writing letters of encouragement, instruction, and correction.

As you study this lesson, ask God to show you how you can apply the lessons from this passage to your life.

**Read Acts 18:23-26**

1. Where does verse 23 tell us that Paul went as he began his third journey and what did he accomplish on his trip?
2. What can we learn about Apollos from verses 24-26?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
  - f.
  - g.
3. What spiritual gifts did he have? How did he put them to good use?
4. What did he lack in spite of his natural spiritual gifts?
5. Verse 25 tells us that Apollos taught accurately, though he knew only the “baptism of John”. What do the following verses tell us about John the Baptist’s ministry?

- a. Mark 1:4-8
- b. Matthew 3:1-6, 11-12
- c. John 1:23
- d. Acts 19:4

6. What did John's baptism represent? Explain what you think that means.

7. In what way did Priscilla and Aquila help Apollos?

8. What can we learn from their example?

When John the Baptist preached, he identified himself as the voice in the wilderness calling, "Make straight the way for the Lord". John's ministry was a fulfillment of the Prophecy of Isaiah 40:3. The phrase "the way of the Lord" is an Old Testament term and is used in the New Testament only when it is a quotation of an Old Testament Scripture. John was the last of the Old Testament prophets, but Apollos was basically preaching John's message.

Apollos was a skilled communicator who knew the Scriptures and taught with great intensity. This was a preacher who would grab your attention and keep it. He was accurate in what he knew to be true, but it appears he didn't yet understand about the death and resurrection of Jesus. He was acquainted with the teachings of John the Baptist who urged people to repent in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. It is likely Apollos, who lived in Alexandria, had heard and received John's baptism of repentance and was still looking for the Messiah. He knew what the Scriptures taught about the coming Messiah and was accurately preaching them; he just didn't know the rest of the story.

Priscilla and Aquila recognized God had prepared this gifted preacher to receive the truths of the Gospel and they invited him into their home where they shared the good news of the Gospel with him. When Priscilla and Aquila instructed him more fully "in the way of God" they were telling him how God had fulfilled the Old Testament promises that Apollos was preaching. The Messiah he was looking for was indeed Jesus who had been crucified to pay the penalty for our sins, had been raised from the dead, and had sent His Holy Spirit to empower His people.

This skilled communicator will play an important role in the spread of the Gospel. Like Apollos, there are people around us who don't understand what we have available to us in and through Christ. Priscilla and Aquila are role models for us as they invited Apollos into their home and shared more fully the

truths of the Gospel with him. They used their home as a place of ministry to help one who, much like the Apostle Paul, will go on to powerfully proclaim the truths of the Gospel to others.

**Read Acts 18:27-28**

9. Where did Apollos want to go and how did others encourage him?
10. What approach did Apollos use in defending the Christian faith? Compare the method Apollos used to the way the Apostle Paul preached (Acts 9:20-22).

In Chapter 19, we learn that Paul has returned to Ephesus as he promised (Acts 18:21). As he travels into Ephesus, he comes across a group of 12 men who Luke describes as *disciples*. As we read these verses, we will see that these men, like Apollos, are probably disciples of John. As Priscilla and Aquilla had shared the good news of Jesus with Apollos, now Paul will share “the rest of the story” with these men.

**Read Acts 19:1-6**

11. What question did Paul ask these men in verse 2 and what do you think caused him to ask?
12. What does their response show?
13. What question did Paul ask in verse 3 and how did they respond?
14. How did Paul explain John’s baptism?
15. Apollos was from Egypt (18:24) and these disciples were about 800 miles from Jerusalem. What does the fact that they were both followers of John the Baptist tell you about the extent of his influence?
16. How would their awareness of John help prepare them to hear the gospel (See John 1:19-34)?
17. What happened after Paul explained the way more accurately to them?
18. Since Paul had to teach these people about Jesus, what does this passage reveal about the relationship between faith in Jesus and receiving the Spirit? (See also Acts 2:38, 10:43-44)



John preached that he was not the Messiah—he was not even worthy to untie the sandals of the Messiah. John preached a baptism of repentance, urging people to repent of their sin in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. John’s baptism with water was to show repentance, but John pointed them to the Messiah who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Even John did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah until Jesus came to him for baptism (John 1:32-34). It is very possible that these twelve and Apollos were John’s disciples prior to the baptism of Christ.

Since these disciples had not received the Holy Spirit, Paul recognized they really needed Jesus. Only Jesus can bring the fullness of the Spirit and without it we are indeed powerless!

### **Read Acts 19:8-12**

19. What does verse 8 tell us about Paul’s ministry in Ephesus?
20. What caused Paul to cease ministry in the synagogue? What can we learn from his example?
21. What do verses 9-12 tell us about his ministry after leaving the synagogue?
22. How long did he continue this ministry and what were the results?

As usual, Paul began his ministry in the synagogue and apparently was able to minister there for three months before opposition arose. When they became obstinate, refused to believe, and publicly maligned the Gospel, it was obvious that they had hardened their hearts and he moved to a more fertile field. Rather than fight the opposition he moved the ministry to another location. He was able to continue ministry in Ephesus for two years and all the Jews and Greeks who lived in that province heard the word of the Lord. They didn’t all accept what they heard, but they were all given the opportunity to hear. We will see more of the impact of his ministry in our next study.

### **Applications**

23. In this passage, God used Aquila and Priscilla to explain the way of the Lord to Apollos. Then He used Paul to better explain the ways of God to the Ephesians. Will you ask God to show you if there are people that you could be instrumental in helping to understand the truths about Jesus and His Spirit?
24. What helps you to better understand the ways of God? If God is revealing new truths to you, will you respond in obedience to His revelations?
25. Ask God to reveal to you anything that might be limiting the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. Will you respond to what He shows you?
26. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

# **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

## **Lesson Twenty-Seven—Acts 19:11-41**

*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given. (Ephesians 1:18-21 NIV)*

True to his promise to the Ephesians (Acts 18:21) Paul returned to minister there. In our last lesson, we learned that Paul had spent three months teaching in the synagogue, but when part of the crowd became obstinate and publicly maligned Christianity, Paul moved his daily discussion to a lecture hall. For two full years Paul was in Ephesus ministering and God was moving in extraordinary, supernatural ways. It is not surprising that all the powers of Satan would try to imitate what the Holy Spirit of God was doing in and through Paul. As you study this lesson, ask God to show you what He wants you to learn regarding how to more effectively identify what is of God and what is from the enemy.

### **Read Acts 19:11-16**

1. How do verses 11-12 describe the way that God was working through Paul?
2. What does verse 13 tell us about what some Jews were doing?
3. By what power do you think they had been able to drive out evil spirits?
4. What position did Sceva hold and how did his seven sons attempt to imitate the power of God that they saw at work in Paul? (v.14)
5. What do verses 15-16 indicate was the result of their attempt?
6. What lessons can you learn about battling Satan from this short passage?

These guys were charlatans—phonies who were making money off of the misery of others. By contrast, Paul worked to support himself, ministered freely, and the power of God was miraculously at work in and through him. The sons of Sceva had refused to accept Jesus as Messiah, but weren't reluctant to use his name to cast out demons. What they attempted didn't work because they didn't know Jesus the way Paul did. As they tried to use the names of Jesus and Paul, the demon was unimpressed and savagely attacked them. It was like they were trying to use a stolen credit card and got caught.

Interestingly, this episode served the cause of Christ by contrasting the power of God to the counterfeit ministry of these fakes. As you read the next passage, you will see how God in His sovereignty used this incident to further the Gospel.

**Read Acts 19:17-20**

7. List the results of this incident from verses 17-20. Give reasons why you think each of these may have happened.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
8. Why was it important for those who practiced magic to confess their sins and burn their books?
9. What are some items that people allow into their homes that could give Satan a foothold in their families?
10. What are some heart attitudes that could give Satan a foothold in a life? (See Ephesians 4:26-27.)

The sons of Sceva were likely using some type of witchcraft to drive out demons. When their power failed so dramatically, the believers recognized the witchcraft as being anti-Christian, evil, and worthless. The burning of the expensive scrolls was a public testimony of their repentance and obedience to a much higher power—the power of a risen Lord.

**Read Acts 19:21-22**

11. What do verses 21-22 reveal about Paul's plans for the future?
12. Why might he have sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him?

These two verses give us a preview of the rest of the book of Acts. God has impressed upon Paul a call to go to Jerusalem, and although he will receive numerous warnings against going, nothing will dissuade him. He is determined to obey God, even if it cost him his freedom or his life.

The trip to Jerusalem and his subsequent arrest will eventually lead him to Rome, not as a preacher, but as a prisoner. He sends Timothy and Erastus ahead of him, likely to get the people in Macedonia and Achaia ready to give an offering which he will carry to Jerusalem to help the poverty-stricken believers in Judea. (See Acts 24:17 and Romans 15:25-28)

### **Read Acts 19:23-41**

13. What motivated Demetrius to call this meeting and what can we learn about human nature from his actions? (vv.23-25)
  
14. What do his words tell us about the impact of Paul's ministry in Ephesus? What had Paul been saying that caused Demetrius to be so angry? (vv. 26-27)
  
15. What do verses 28 - 29 tell us about the impact of Demetrius' words?
  
16. Why do you think Paul wanted to appear before the crowd and why wouldn't the disciples let him? (vv. 30-31)
  
17. What do verses 32-34 reveal about mob mentality?
  
18. How did the city clerk quiet the crowd?

When religion begins to impact the pocketbook, you can expect opposition. The owners of the slave girl in Acts 16:17-19 were enraged when their money-making scheme was thwarted. Demetrius and the silversmiths had been making a good living by crafting and selling shrines of Artemis. When Christianity caused so many people to turn away from idolatry, their ability to make money was greatly decreased. Christianity was threatening their livelihood, their trade, and their civic pride as Ephesus was the center of Artemis worship. They saw it as an economic disaster and were determined to do what they could to put a stop to it. That included inciting a riot, and as God had used Gallio in Corinth (Acts 18), He once again used a government official, the city clerk, to protect Paul.

This story is a dramatic indication that the church was impacting the culture. People were changing as they became believers. The power of the living Lord made a difference in their lives and people noticed. In addition to turning away from idolatry, the Ephesian believers had burned those expensive scrolls with their link to sorcery and magic. They didn't want that link to satanic rituals and practices to be available to anyone else. They chose not to sell them, but to burn them!

May God empower us to be a people whose lives make a noticeable difference in a dark culture! The power that raised Christ from the dead is available to us as believers.

### **Applications**

19. What is one practical way you can oppose Satan's efforts among the people you know?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
20. Are there things in your home that shouldn't be there? Are there attitudes in your heart that open the door to satanic influence? If yes, will you determine to confess them to have a clean heart and home?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
21. Review the weapons of God from Ephesians 6:10-18. Which of the weapons of the armor of God do you need to begin to use more effectively?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
22. What can you do this week to strengthen it?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
23. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Twenty-Eight—Acts 20**

1. What encourages you most when you are discouraged?

2. What is your favorite way to encourage others?

This lesson will see Paul's third missionary journey winding down as God's Spirit compels him toward Jerusalem. Yet even as he sets his face and his heart toward Jerusalem, he still takes advantage of every opportunity to teach and encourage those he has led to Christ. He is always seeking a way to be an encourager. As you study this lesson, ask God to show you what He wants you to learn from His word.

#### **Read Acts 20:1-6 – From Ephesus to Troas**

3. How does verse 1 describe Paul's actions before he left Ephesus?

4. What does verse 2 tell us that Paul did as he traveled throughout that area?

5. List all Paul's traveling companions and then tell where each was from. (v.4)

6. Why do you think he traveled with so many different people? (See 2 Cor. 8:16-23, 1 Cor. 16:1-4)

7. Try to describe the impact that traveling with the Apostle Paul may have had on these individuals.

8. What does verse 6 tell us about when they left Philippi? What time of year would that have been?

It was his intention to stay in Ephesus until after Pentecost, and then travel to Macedonia and finally on to Corinth, where he intended to spend the winter. Paul's schedule was changed, however, for the uprising at Ephesus, brought about by Demetrius and his colleagues forced him to move up his departure date. Paul's primary purpose for going first to Macedonia and Greece, and then to Jerusalem appears to have been for the collection of money which he was taking to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

#### **Read Acts 20:7-12 – Paul's ministry in Troas**

9. What does verse 7 tell us about when this church was meeting and what they did at their meeting?

10. Describe what you think is meant by breaking bread.

11. What made it so hard for Eutychus to stay awake? How wide awake do you think you would have been during this meeting?
12. How can sleepiness impact your spiritual growth?
13. What can we learn from the church in Troas and about Paul from this lengthy meeting?
14. On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), how eager are you for spiritual growth? What are you willing to give up in order to have more time to grow?

In our text, we are told of a young man named Eutychus, who fell asleep during Paul's lengthy sermon, and then fell three stories down to his death. As you know, this young man was raised to life, so the story is a happy one in the end. Little emphasis was put on this miracle. Paul's priority was on teaching these saints, so much so that when the boy was raised to life, he quickly went back upstairs to observe communion and to teach more, for the rest of the night. He knew his departure was on the following day and he had only a little time, but much to say. Because of this he extended his teaching until midnight.

*A.T. Robertson makes this comment about Paul's extended sermon:*

*"Paul's purpose to leave early the next morning seemed to justify the long discourse. Preachers usually have some excuse for the long sermon which is not always clear to the exhausted audience."*

**Read Acts 20:13-21 – From Troas to Miletus, then Paul's ministry to the Ephesian elders**

15. On a Bible map, trace Paul's travel as recorded in this chapter.
16. Why did he decide to sail past Ephesus? What did he do instead of visiting Ephesus (vv. 16-17)?
17. What actions and attitudes characterized Paul's ministry in Ephesus (vv. 18-21)?
18. Which of those attitudes and actions would you like to see increase in your life? What steps can you take to help them grow?
19. How does verse 21 summarize the truths of the Gospel?

Paul begins his exhortation by pointing to his practice while with the Ephesians for those three years among them. It is evident that he had an intimate association with them, and that his life had a transparency to it, so they could know him well. Over this time period they could see Paul's consistency in lifestyle. He was putting on no show for them. He served the Lord among them, with humility, with great love and concern, and with much opposition from the Jews. Paul evangelized, proclaiming the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike, always calling men to repent of their sins and to have faith in the Lord Jesus as their Savior. In addition to his ministry of evangelism, he taught those who believed, both in public and in private. He did not shrink back from telling men what they needed to hear.

**Read Acts 20:22-38**

20. Paul describes his reason for going to Jerusalem as being *compelled by the Spirit*. What does that mean to you?
21. Can you remember a time when you felt compelled by the Spirit to do something specific? If yes, please share what you felt, how you reacted, and the results.
22. What hardships did Paul know he would be facing and what was his response to the warnings he received?
23. What are some hardships that people today endure to remain true to God's calling? How does the fear of hardships impact the Christian walk of many people in today's culture?
24. What motivated Paul to move ahead in spite of the knowledge that he would face hardship and prison? (See also Philippians 3:7-8.)
25. What enabled Paul to confidently declare he was innocent of the blood of all men? (See vv. 21-22, 26-27 and Acts 18:5-6.)
26. What warnings and encouragements does Paul give these church elders in verses 28-31?
27. How do these apply to us today?
28. Describe in your own words what Paul was doing in verse 32. Give reasons why he took that action.
29. What do verses 33-35 tell us about Paul's activities while he was in Ephesus? What do these verses imply that Paul did with the funds he earned?



30. Verses 36-38 show a very touching farewell. As you read those verses, put yourself into the shoes of the Ephesian believers. What are you feeling and why would you feel that way?

Paul was pressing on toward Jerusalem, in a hurry to get there as soon as he could. And yet what lay ahead of him in Jerusalem was far from pleasant. He was “bound in spirit” and informed by the Holy Spirit concerning his plans. He didn’t know the details, but was informed that wherever he went that bonds and afflictions await him in Jerusalem. Saving his life was not the goal however, but spending his life in fulfilling his calling – the proclamation of the gospel.

Paul’s goal was to “finish his course” to accomplish that which God had given him to do. So far as Ephesus and Asia were concerned, Paul was content that he had fulfilled his mission there; he had not held back from proclaiming the gospel. There was still work to be done elsewhere, and thus he must press on, even though suffering awaited him.

At the end of Paul’s exhortation, he knelt in prayer with the men. From the beginning of Acts there was nothing more important than the ministry of the Word and prayer. Paul had ministered the word to these men, and now they must pray. Once again, Paul’s dependence and that of these elders was upon God. The parting was painful, with many tears shed. Not only was Paul leaving them, but so far as they knew it was for the last time. We see the heart of the apostle toward these saints, and their deep love and affection for him.

### **Applications**

31. In light of Paul’s warnings to Christian leaders, how can we better pray for them?
32. How would you complete this sentence: “The one thing I must accomplish at any cost is \_\_\_\_\_?”
33. How does your answer relate to Paul’s goal in verse 24? Is that a goal only for him or does it also apply to you?
34. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Twenty-Nine—Acts 21**

*And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city, the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. Acts 20:22-24*

As Paul winds down his third and final missionary journey, he receives multiple warnings and he receives advice. The warnings tell him that he will face persecution and imprisonment if he goes to Jerusalem. He recognizes the warnings are painting an accurate picture of what will happen to him. His friends and his traveling companions strongly urge and advise him not to go. They recognize the danger, but they have not experienced Paul’s call which steadily compels him to go to Jerusalem, knowing what awaits him there. He ignores their advice, listening only to God whose calling compels him.

Paul receives two pieces of advice in Chapter 21. One he ignores and one he takes. On first reading, it would appear that he chose wrong in both cases. Ignoring the first advice does indeed put him in chains. The second piece of advice, which he takes, ends up being the impetus which facilitates his arrest.

How can we know what’s good advice and what is bad advice? How can we gain discernment when it seems God is telling us one thing and those who love and care for us are telling us another? When should we take the advice of others and when should we ignore it? As we study this lesson, we will look for principles to help us as we make difficult decisions. As you study this passage, ask God to show you areas where you need to follow Him completely in spite of difficulties or challenges.

#### **Read Acts 21:1-6**

1. After Paul and his team had “torn” themselves away from the Ephesian elders, they travel by ship to a number of different places. Verses 3-4 indicate a stopover as the ship unloads its cargo. What is the first thing Paul did after arriving in Tyre? What does that tell you about Paul and his companions?
2. What advice do the believers in Tyre give to Paul and what do you think was their motivation?
3. How did Paul respond to their advice?
4. What do you find meaningful about the departure scene at Tyre (vv.5-6)?

#### **Read Acts 21:7-16**

5. What does verse 7 indicate Paul and his companions did on their one-day stop at Ptolemais? How does this show a pattern for Paul and his team? What can we learn from their example?
6. Where did Paul and his companions stay in Caesarea and what can we learn from these verses about the role of women in the church (vv. 8-9)?

7. How does Agabus the prophet give a visual demonstration of the difficulty awaiting Paul in Jerusalem? (vv.10-11)

Although Paul and his team are in the home of Philip whose four daughters are described as prophetesses, God uses Agabus to deliver this revelation to those present. Agabus is the same prophet who foretold the severe famine which took place during the reign of Claudius (Acts 11:27-29). That prophesy had led to taking collections to send to the poverty-stricken saints in Jerusalem. Agabus delivers this prophesy in dramatic fashion, using Paul's belt as a visual demonstration. It's important to note that Agabus demonstrates what will happen to Paul, but does not tell him to change his plans.

8. Who are the individuals giving Paul advice from verse 12 and what advice do they give?
9. Compare verse 13 to Acts 20:22-24. How do these verses give light to Paul's seemingly stubborn refusal to heed their advice?
10. Put yourself into the shoes of Paul's traveling companions. How do you feel about Paul's decisions to keep traveling toward Jerusalem? Do you admire his courage or think him foolish? Why?
11. What does verse 14 reveal about the thoughts of his companions?

These revelations were given in a public setting and may have been for the benefit of others. These people love Paul and are giving their advice in the hope of keeping him safe. After hearing these warnings, there is a sense of urgency in Paul as he preaches and a sense of urgency in those listening as they realize it is likely the last time to hear him. Paul has received a strong calling from the Lord and, against the advice of his friends and ministry partners, nothing will deter him from going to Jerusalem.

The repeated revelations will prepare those who love him and look up to him as their teacher. They will know that his suffering is not a result of sin in his life. He will face difficulties and imprisonment, but that's not new for the Apostle Paul. Paul has been a target of persecution from the very start of his walk with Jesus (Acts 9:22-25, 29). He was told in beginning that he would suffer for the cause of Christ and he is very willing to do so. His friends are not so willing to let him suffer.

God will continue to use Paul in incredible ways. God will use the imprisonment in Jerusalem as the beginning point of Paul's journey to Rome under the protection of the Roman government.

### **Read Acts 21:17-26**

12. How did the Jerusalem brothers greet them and what did Paul do when they met together? What was their response to his report?

13. What does verse 20 tell us about the Jews of that day?

14. What lies had been told about Paul?

15. What advice did the church elders give as a way to overcome these lies and how did Paul respond to their suggestion?

**Read Acts 21:27-36**

16. Paul had spent more time in Ephesus than anywhere else in his travels (19:8-10). Why might Ephesian Jews be especially upset when they saw Paul in the temple?

17. What charges did the mob bring against Paul and how did they come to their conclusions?

18. What happened as a result of their loud accusations (vv.30-31)?

19. List the ways the Roman authorities intervened to save Paul from this murderous crowd.

**Read Acts 21:37-40**

20. What request did Paul make of the commander?

21. Why do you think Paul thought it was important to speak to this hostile mob?

22. How might Jewish-Christian relationships have been impacted if the charges in verses 21 and 28 were not addressed?

How can we compare these two pieces of advice that Paul received? Paul's well-meaning friends were basing their immediate response on emotion. They were encouraging him to avoid suffering and to look out for himself. They attempted to turn him away from the course of action that Paul believed was God's will for him. Following their advice would have hindered and limited the spread of the Gospel and

showed a lack of faith that God could continue to work through Paul in spite of imprisonment and suffering.

The elders were addressing a problem that had gone on for a long time and they advised him to do what was right in a way that would benefit others. They urged him to do what God had already placed on Paul's heart. Their goal was to promote the gospel and they had faith in the sovereignty of God to cause Paul's ministry to expand.

What were the results of following the advice of the elders? Paul was arrested, but his arrest will give him opportunity "to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel." (Acts 9:15) His arrest will take him to Rome where Paul has longed to go (Acts 19:21). His arrest will result in his writing letters that are still bringing hope and encouragement to believers today. (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon)

What can we learn in regard to advice given to us? You must decide God's will for your life based on God's Word and His calling to you. You might need to reject the advice of well-intentioned people who believe God has revealed His will for your life to them. Ultimately, we are responsible to make our own decisions, although godly counsel will often help us make wise choices.

### **Applications**

23. What kinds of advice are you most tempted to give to a loved one?
  
24. What helps you decide when to give advice and when to keep silent?
  
25. Are you willing to follow God 100% even if it might involve pain or suffering?
  
26. If you are facing some difficult choices, are you choosing the option that will bring the most glory to God or are you choosing that which will bring you the most comfort?
  
27. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Thirty—Acts 22:1-29**

*Then he said, “The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. Acts 22:14-15*

When the Apostle Paul accepted Jesus as his Savior and Lord, he was given a commission. He was told that he would be a witness to all men of the salvation that is available in and through Jesus. Chapters 13 through 21 have given us many details of Paul’s three missionary journeys where he proclaimed the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles.

Compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, Paul obeyed in spite of numerous revelations that he was facing imprisonment when he arrived. Lies told about him have created such an uproar, that a murderous mob attempts to kill him. But God is not yet finished with Paul and he uses a group of Roman soldiers to keep Paul safe. In Chapter 22, we see Paul attempting to talk to this angry mob—to share with them why he came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. As you read his words, ask God to show you how you could share your story with others who might be impacted by your testimony.

Although Chapter 9 records the story of Paul’s conversion, Chapter 22 retells the story in Paul’s words as he relates what happened to him. This is Paul’s story in Paul’s words.

#### **Read Acts 22:1-5—start with 21:40**

1. What impact did Paul’s speaking in Aramaic have on the crowd and why do you think it had that impact?

Notice when Paul speaks to the commander, he speaks in Greek, the language spoken by the Romans. As he begins to address the crowd, he speaks to them in Aramaic, which was very similar to Hebrew, but with phrases that were borrowed from other cultures and languages. This was the language most likely spoken by the Jewish community in Jerusalem. Paul’s usage of the Aramaic/Hebrew language shows he is addressing his comments to his Jewish brothers. In spite of the persecution from the Jews, Paul has a deep longing for them to come to the realization that Jesus is the Messiah. (See Paul’s heart for Jews expressed in Romans 9:1-5.) Paul is quick to take advantage of this opportunity to share his story with this Jewish mob, even though they want to kill him.

2. How does Paul describe himself in verse 3?
3. What do we know about Gamaliel from Acts 5:33-40?
4. From verses 1-5, list the similarities Paul mentions between himself and the crowd?
5. What do you think Paul was trying to accomplish by mentioning these similarities?

6. How does Paul describe his activities before he met Christ (vv. 4-5)?
7. How would you describe your life before you committed your life to Christ?

As Paul describes his life prior to giving himself wholeheartedly to Jesus, he is identifying with his audience. Like them, he is a Jew who speaks their language, brought up in Jerusalem, trained under Gamaliel, one of the most influential Jewish leaders of that day. He was also zealous for the law even to persecuting the followers of Jesus to their death and throwing men and women into jail. He understands where they are coming from because that is what he was, but he wants them to know how Jesus met him on the road and turned his life around.

**Read Acts 22:6-16**

8. What question did the Lord ask Paul (verse 7)? What does that reveal about Jesus and His people?  
(*See also Ephesians 1:22-23*)
9. What question did Paul ask (verse 10) and what is the significance of that question?
10. How did the Lord respond to Paul's question and what can we learn from his response?
11. How does Paul describe Ananias in verse 12 and what is significant about his description to this crowd?
12. From verses 14-15, list the different ways Ananias told Paul that God would use him. How might each of those apply to your life today?
13. What question did Ananias ask Paul in verse 16? What does that imply?
14. What did Ananias urge Paul to do and why do you think he was so persistent?
15. Why is immediate obedience so important to the believer?

When Paul asked Jesus what he should do, he was given only one instruction, "Get up and go into Damascus, there you will be told all you have been assigned to do." Usually, God asks us to follow Him one step at a time. If at any time, we fail to take the step God has outlined for us, we miss the best that

God has designed for us. We must follow Him step by step, one step at a time, one day at a time to achieve God's best for us.

Ananias was not super subtle when he asked Paul, "What are you waiting for?" The obedience that pleases God the most is the obedience that is prompt and without argument or delay of any kind. "Get up, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (v.16). Delay is deadly to the believer. We need to be obedient in everything that God asks. The longer we delay the more apt we are to not obey at all. Delayed obedience is really disobedience.

16. Paul used a personal testimony in addressing this group. Why are personal testimonies so effective?

17. When do you find your story most effective and helpful to others?

18. Paul's life experienced dramatic changes after this experience. What kind of changes has Christ made in your life?

### **Read Acts 22:17-21**

19. How did Jesus communicate with Paul after his return to Jerusalem following his salvation?

20. What did the Lord urge Paul to do at this point and what was the reason?

21. What did these Jews know about Paul's past behavior (vv. 19-20)? Why do you think Paul mentioned this behavior when talking to God?

22. How did the Lord respond to Paul's argument?

23. Does it seem strange to you that the Lord at one time had urged Paul to leave Jerusalem and now has drawn him irresistibly back? What do you think has made the difference?

Although Chapter 22 retells the story of Paul's conversion, this is the first time we are told of this conversation between Paul and Jesus. When Jesus urged Paul to leave Jerusalem, he knew they would not accept his testimony. God knows who will and who will not accept Him. (Romans 8:29). Jesus knew they would not accept Him and Paul would be wasting his time, and energy trying to convince them. God wanted to send him to people who would accept Jesus as Savior, Lord, and Messiah.

Why did God irresistibly draw Paul back to Jerusalem? We're not called to understand God's ways or His timing. We do know God used this trip to Jerusalem to eventually lead Paul to Rome and that God continued to use Him in ministry even though he was in chains.



**Read Acts 22:22-29**

24. What caused the crowd to turn violent at this point? What does that tell you regarding the real issue?
25. What does the reaction in verses 22-23 tell you about the intensity of this crowd's hatred?

Once again we see the mob becoming murderous! "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" What caused such a violent reaction? The command of Jesus to go to the Gentiles was linked to a parallel command to forsake the Jerusalem Jews who would reject the message of the Gospel. Their rejection in just a few years will lead to disaster. Paul's trial in Jerusalem was around 57AD. In 70AD, the Romans literally destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. Time is running out for the Jews in that area and Paul is desperately trying to share Jesus with them.

26. Read the following passages which describe Jesus' love and concern for Jerusalem. What do these verses reveal about Jesus' love for Jerusalem and how do they point to a future destruction?
- a. Matthew 23:37-38
  - b. Luke 19:41-44

27. Compare Acts 22:25-29 with 16:37-38. How was Paul's status as a Roman citizen an asset to his ministry?

**Applications**

28. How might Jesus' heartbreak for Jerusalem relate to America today?
29. In verse 10, Paul asked Jesus, "What shall I do Lord?" How willing are you to surrender your will to God in this manner?
30. If God has impressed you with something that you need to do, *what are you waiting for?*
31. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Thirty One—Acts 22:30-23:35**

*The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." Acts 23:11*

Could you use some encouragement? 2020 has been an incredibly challenging year and most of us could use encouraging? The Apostle Paul also needed an encouraging word and God delivered! In spite of numerous warnings of imprisonment, he had been irresistibly drawn by God to Jerusalem. Paul had such a heart for the Jewish people--his people. After arriving in Jerusalem, false accusations were made against him, inciting a murderous mob who wants to kill him. Rescued by a group of Roman soldiers, he asks permission to address the mob.

This angry mob actually quiets down as Paul shares with them his incredible story of how he met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul shares how he, like them, had done everything possible to fight against the cause of Christ and the spread of the Gospel. I believe he hoped that his testimony would touch their hearts. We see no evidence that any lives were changed and again the mob turns ugly and calls for his death! But God has a plan for Paul and **man cannot thwart God's plan and purpose**. God uses a Roman centurion by the name of Claudius Lysias to protect Paul from the hands of those who desperately want to kill him.

As we study Acts Chapter 23, Claudius Lysias still doesn't know why Paul is causing such riots in Jerusalem. Hoping to gain an understanding he brings Paul before the Sanhedrin and another near riot occurs. Does Paul need encouragement? I believe he does. The people he had hoped would receive the Gospel want him dead!

As we study this lesson, I pray that God will use the truths from His Word to bring hope and encouragement to you!

#### **Read Acts 22:30-23:5**

1. How does Paul describe his relationship with God in 23:1?
2. Why do you think he was able to say that?

From the time the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to Paul, Paul had been totally 100% committed to following Him and obeying everything that the Lord had asked him to do. Paul was claiming a clean conscience that anyone trying to keep the law could not claim. He had a clear conscience because his sins had been forgiven. This forgiveness and release from guilt is available to any and all who put their trust in Jesus for forgiveness of sin. He became sin that we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21)

3. How did the high priest, Ananias, react to Paul's statement? How might the accusations against Paul in 21:21,28, help explain Ananias' reaction?
4. Describe Paul's response to Ananias' attack. (See also John 18:19-23)

5. How does Paul show his respect and zeal for the Jewish law in verses 1-5? Why do you think he made such a point of doing so?

When Paul spoke so harshly to Ananias, he was acting in ignorance. Having been away from Jerusalem for a number of years, he likely did not know that Ananias was the high priest. Upon learning of his position, Paul acknowledged that he had done wrong by speaking evil against the Jewish leader.

According to the historian Josephus, Ananias was a violent-tempered man who made himself wealthy on the ill-gotten gains of his office. He condemned to death by stoning James, the brother of Jesus and pastor of the Jerusalem church with other Christians, plus innumerable other wicked deeds. He was a hypocrite who used the services of assassins. When Paul exclaimed that God would strike this "white-washed wall" he was actually speaking prophetically as Ananias was violently killed a few years later.

**Read Acts 23:6-10**

6. Why did Paul change the focus of attention from whether he has kept the law to his hope in the resurrection?
7. What effect does the split in opinion have on Paul's case?
8. What was the result according to verse 10?
9. How does this remind you of the American political scene?.
10. What do the following verses teach about human nature and the power of division?
  - a. Matthew 12:25-26
  - b. Mark 3:24-26
  - c. Luke 11:17

**Read Acts 23:11**

11. How did the Lord encourage Paul at this time? Look carefully at the words in the Lord's encouragement. Why might they have been especially comforting to Paul at this time?

Truths we can learn from the Lord's encouragement to Paul

- a. Even the most faithful servants of God can suffer discouragement and despair.
- b. Encouragement ultimately comes from the Lord, although He may use people.
- c. Encouragement may be given by reminding us of something we already know, but have either forgotten or doubted.
- d. Encouragement is not based on one's success, but on one's faithfulness and obedience to the task God has given.
- e. There is encouragement in the fact that God has a task for us to fulfill and that we are to be used in fulfilling His purposes.

*The above was adapted from Paul's Trial Before the Sanhedrin by Bob Deffinbaugh on Bible.org*

**Read Acts 23:12-24**

12. How do you explain the fierce determination of these men to kill Paul?
13. How does Romans 10:1-4 help explain their zeal?
14. In what way is their action an extreme example of people making a stupid promise or taking a destructive oath?
15. Describe the different steps God takes to provide protection for Paul.
16. What can we learn from verses 12-24 about the Sovereignty of God and His protection upon His servants?
17. What was God's plan for Paul and how does that fit in with the protection that he is now receiving?

The way God works through this story is rather incredible. The nephew finds out about the plot and he is allowed to visit Paul. Paul calls for a centurion who takes the nephew to the commander. The commander listens to the nephew and believes him, then tells him not to tell anyone that he has shared this news. Then the commander provides 2 centurions, 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, 200 spearmen to protect Paul against 40 men (possibly unarmed). He also provides a horse for Paul so that he is riding out in the midst of this detachment of 472 men. They leave at 9 p.m. while the 40 guys are planning their plot for the next day. If God's plan for you is to be in Rome (or anywhere else), He will protect you, provide for you and make sure you get there! Our part is to trust Him and His timing and allow Him to do it His way.

### **Read Acts 23:25-35**

18. What does verse 27 reveal about why the commander felt the need to protect Paul?
19. Compare verse 29 with Luke 23:4, Mark 15:12-15, and Matthew 27:22-26. In what ways are the commander's words regarding Paul similar to Pilate's words regarding Jesus?
20. Describe God's further protection of Paul in verses 31-35.
21. How does this relate to the promise of God in Romans 8:28?

This chapter underscores the sovereign control of God over history in such a way as to allow men freedom of choice and yet to insure that God's program will be carried out exactly as purposed by Him. The Gospel has been preached in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and will go to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). It is not always God's faithful servants who propel it onward. It is often the opposition, but God's plan will be accomplished.

### **Applications**

22. Compare your life to Paul's statement in verse 1. In what ways have you fulfilled your duty to God in all good conscience?
23. In what areas are you still a *work in progress* in fulfilling your duty to God? What can you do this week to make progress?
24. God had a plan for Paul and that plan was for him to also testify in Rome. God's hand of protection was upon Paul until God's purpose for him was completed. How can that be an encouragement to you this week?
25. In light of the severe consequences of division in any type of organization, what can you do to help our church to unite through the days ahead?
26. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Thirty Two—Acts 24:1-27**

*Today, if you hear my voice, do not harden your hearts. Hebrews 3:7, 15; 4:7*

God speaks to individuals in many ways—through His Word, through people, through miracles and sometimes directly. When we respond to God's voice, our hearts become softened and we can enter into an intimate relationship with Him. When we fail to respond to the voice of God, our hearts become hardened to the point that we are no longer moved by His call to us. Hard hearts reject truth.

In Chapter 23, we learned of a group of Jewish leaders whose hearts had become hardened to the truths about Jesus. They were so determined to silence the Gospel that they set out on a suicide pact to destroy the Apostle Paul, its primary spokesman. In spite of their determination, Jesus personally appeared to Paul to encourage him and then God provided a military escort of 472 men to protect him. Paul has shared the message in Jerusalem and it is God's plan that he also share in Rome and man cannot thwart the plan and purpose of God.

The rest of the book of Acts will find Paul being held as a prisoner, but still in the center of God's will. Paul is on his way to Rome, just as God had revealed to him. Although he is a prisoner, Paul is under the protection of God and the Roman government. Had he been set free, the Jews who are bent on murdering him most likely would have succeeded. Chapter 24 covers the first of several appearances that Paul will make before various authorities who will sit in judgment of him. After Paul had first encountered Jesus on the Road to Damascus the Lord had describe Paul as "my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel." (Acts 9:15) We will see one of his appearances before Gentile authorities in this lesson.

Ask God to show you what He wants you to learn and apply from this passage.

#### **Read Acts 24:1-9—Accusations against Paul**

1. Whom did the Ananias, the high priest, take with him when he went to Caesarea to present his case? Why do you think he took those individuals?
2. What is Tertullus attempting to do in verses 2-3? How does that compare with lawyers' tactics today?
3. List the charges made against Paul in verses 5-6.
4. How does Tertullus refer to believers in verse 5? What does that reveal about their view of Christianity?

Tertullus is doing a lot of stretching the truth as he makes his accusations. Like many lawyers, he is more concerned about winning the case, than about presenting the truth. He accuses Paul of being a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world, being a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and one who had tried to desecrate the temple. Conviction of defiling the temple would have provided the Jews adequate ground for legal execution. Some early manuscripts add verse 7-8 indicating they had seized Paul and wanted to judge him according to Jewish law which would have allowed them to stone him. That was their plan, but not God's. The Roman commander, Lysias, came and rescued him

and ordered them to bring their accusations to Felix. Tertullus brings his summation by assuring Felix that he will find these things true and all the Jews with him heartily agree.

**Read Acts 24:10-21 – Paul’s response**

5. What does verse 10 reveal about Felix?
6. How does Paul answer their charges against him in verses 10-13?
7. List Paul’s affirmations of his faith from verses 14-15.
8. What affect did his beliefs have upon the way he lived (v.16)?
9. What differences does your faith make in the way you live?
10. What does verse 17 reveal about one of the purposes of Paul’s return to Jerusalem?
11. How does Paul address their charges against him in verses 18-21?
12. How strong of a case do you think these people had against Paul? Give reasons for your answer.

Paul urged Felix to check out the facts, as they were verifiable. His accusers had not found him arguing with anyone at the temple or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues. They could not prove the charges they were making against him. They didn’t even have the witnesses as it was the Jews from Asia who had accused him.

Paul did not hesitate to declare his personal faith, “I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way; I believe everything that agrees with the Law and is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.” He stated he was ceremonially clean when they found him in the temple courts presenting his offerings. There was no crowd with him and he was not involved in any disturbance. He challenged them to state what crime he had committed when standing before the Sanhedrin other than he had shouted, “It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.” This charge, which was the only one they could prove, would not be of any concern to the Roman officials.

**Read Acts 24:22-23**

13. What does verse 22 tell us about Felix?

14. What is the difference between being “well acquainted with the Way” as Felix was and being a “follower of the Way” as Paul was?
15. Do you think people today get confused over the same issue? Why or why not?
16. What does verse 23 reveal about Paul’s freedom at this time? What benefit to God’s kingdom might this have brought about?

Felix was well acquainted with the Way, but he was also a politician. He hesitated to give a judgment and chose to postpone the hearings until Lysias, the commander, came. Scripture does not tell us if Lysias ever came and if Felix ever had another court session regarding the charges made against Paul.

While Felix knew a lot about the Way, we see no evidence that he ever became a follower of Jesus. You can know a lot about God without being a true follower of God; you can know a lot about Jesus without being a follower of Jesus. The difference is commitment. As was true in the First Century, the same is true today. People may erroneously think they are right with God because they believe, when there is zero commitment to follow Him and they refuse to allow Him to be the Lord of their lives.

Paul was kept under guard, but was given freedom and his friends were permitted to take care of his needs. This kept Paul alive when there were a lot of people who were determined to kill him.

**Read Acts 24:24-27**

17. Who accompanied Felix the next time he talked with Paul and what can we learn about her?
18. Why do you think Felix sent for Paul on this occasion?
19. What does verse 25 tell us that Paul talked about when meeting with Felix?
20. What emotional reaction did Felix have to Paul’s talk and what do you think caused it?
21. What actions did Felix take in response to the emotions he was feeling?
22. What is the danger of procrastinating in regard to this kind of decision?
23. What motives did Felix have in calling for Paul?



24. How does verse 27 give us a clue as to Felix's spiritual condition after two years of listening to the Gospel?
25. Why do you think Felix rejected Christ even though he showed interest in Paul's preaching?

When Paul spoke to Felix about Jesus Christ, about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became afraid, because he knew he was not ready for the final judgment to come. He was the judge in this situation, but there would come a time when he would face God. There is a healthy fear and an unhealthy fear; Felix was experiencing a healthy fear. We need to recognize we will all face the judgment seat of God. Christ paid the penalty for our sin, but unless we accept Him as Savior and Lord, fear is an appropriate response. Every time we say, "No" to God, it becomes easier to do so. Hearts become hardened when we refuse God's call. Repeatedly, Scripture warns, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." Hebrews 3:7, 12, 15, 4:7—Ps.95:7-8

Felix wanted to know more, but he had also hoped for a bribe, which although it was illegal, was widely practiced and was consistent with the character of Felix. After two years of listening to Paul, Felix's heart hadn't been changed. He was more interested in pleasing people than he was in pleasing God. He hardened his heart until the Word of God no longer moved him.

During this two years, Paul was kept in prison and while he has been protected from those who want to kill him, this "divine confinement" must have been difficult for him. What can we learn during those difficult times of waiting? 2020 has been a year of confinement, isolation, and quarantines. I hope you will find the following insights helpful as you face times of waiting and confinement.

- a) If you are a Christian, God has purposed divine confinement for your good, for your spiritual growth, and for the blessing of others.
- b) You should not necessarily assume that your confinement is a punishment for wrongs done, or for failures on your part.
- c) Times of confinement are often the opportunity to minister to others. Paul had numerous opportunities to share with Felix.
- d) Times of confinement are sometimes preparation for future ministry. God may have been preparing Paul for the hard days to come as he made his way to Rome.
- e) It may be that we never know (in this life) what God's purposes were for our confinement. (e.g. As far as we know, Job never knew what God's purpose was for him in his confinement and suffering, but he grew in his understanding of God and in his faith.)

*The above was adapted from Divine Confinement by Bob Deffinbaugh on Bible.org*

### **Applications**

26. Paul is still in prison two years after the Lord encouraged him that he would share the Gospel in Rome. What can you do to make waiting for God's timing easier for you?
27. The Holy Spirit was obviously convicting Felix of a need for a Savior, yet he procrastinated until the feeling passed. If God is telling you to do something, will you respond today?
28. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Thirty Three—Acts 25**

*But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. Luke 21:12-13*

Have you ever been falsely accused? Have you asked God, "Where are you? Why is this happening to me?" Has life seemed overwhelming? God seldom works the way we had hoped or imagined, but God does work and often in ways that surprise us. The Apostle Paul had been falsely accused, the people God had called him to preach to want him dead, and he had been in prison for two years. Had I been Paul, I likely would have asked God, "Where are you and why is this happening to me?" But God is still at work behind the scenes, orchestrating what is happening. He is protecting Paul and in Chapter 25, we will see that our sovereign God is arranging a gathering where many prominent leaders will hear the Gospel. God's grace, which is sustaining Paul, will give these individuals an opportunity to accept or to reject the truths they hear.

In Chapter 24, we saw the Jewish authorities presenting their flimsy case against Paul before the Roman governor, Felix. Although Felix was under great conviction by Paul's words, it appears he rejected the Gospel and chose to leave Paul in prison as a favor to the Jewish Sanhedrin. In Chapter 25, Paul will again be on trial, but God will use this trial to allow influential leaders to hear the Gospel. A sovereign God will not waste our struggles and our trials. He wants us to lean into Him for His sustaining grace and trust Him to continue to work in and through our lives.

#### **Read Acts 25:1-12**

1. Felix had left Paul in prison as a **favor** to the Jews. What do they request of Festus as a **favor**?
2. What is their motivation in making this request? How is this similar to the plot in 23:12-15?
3. Why was opposition to Paul by the Jewish leaders still strong even though Paul had been under house arrest for two years?
4. How might the contrast between Paul in Acts 9:1-2 and what Paul had become account in part for their animosity.
5. What does verse 7 tell us about the charges made against Paul?
6. From 24:27 and 25:9 how is Paul being used as a pawn by these Roman officials? How might this account for his decision to appeal to Caesar?

7. These Jewish leaders had been trying to kill Paul for two years. Why do people tend to hold on to past grievances and grudges? (Quote to consider: Carrying grudges is like carrying your garbage with you and hugging it.)
8. What should we do with old grudges and how can we do it?
9. Why was Paul able to be confident in his appeal to a higher court? How did Paul's innocence help him in this situation?

Paul's appeal to Caesar accomplished several things

- a. It immediately suspended the trial before Festus.
- b. It took the matter out of the hands of Festus and out of the grasp of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem.
- c. It assured Paul of Roman custody and protection and a safe arrival to Rome.

There is a strange irony here. Paul, who could not be persuaded to turn back from going to Jerusalem, cannot now be persuaded to return. Paul had accomplished what God had asked him to do in Jerusalem. He had shared the Gospel and the Jerusalem Jews had rejected the message and the messenger. Paul now has more confidence in receiving justice from a heathen Roman judge than from the highest Jewish court in the land.

**Read Acts 25:13-22**

10. What motivated Festus to bring up Paul's case to King Agrippa?
11. Why would Agrippa's insight and advice be helpful to Festus?
12. What does verse 16 reveal about why Festus refused to hand Paul over to the Jews? How does this relate to Jewish law (John 7:50-51)?
13. What do verses 17-19 reveal about the case the Jews brought and Festus' opinion of their accusations?
14. In reviewing the case with Agrippa, what did Festus say was the main charge against Paul?

15. How might the fact that Festus was new on the job have affected his handling of this case (v.20)?

16. This Agrippa is the son of the Herod in Acts 12:1-23. Priscilla (24:24) and Bernice (v.25) are his sisters. Why might King Agrippa be especially interested in what Paul has to say?

**Read Acts 25:23-27**

17. How fair is Festus in describing the case? How much does he seem to know about Judaism? About Christianity?

18. What does verse 24 reveal about the intensity of the opposition against Paul?

19. Describe the audience that Paul was facing at this time. How would you have felt defending yourself before that group?

20. How was this meeting a fulfillment of Jesus' prophetic words in Luke 21:12-15?

21. How did Festus express his opinion (v.25)?

22. What did Festus need to do before sending Paul to Caesar and how did he seek help (vv. 26-27)?

23. What can we learn from Festus about how to handle a new job when you are facing complex problems?

24. How did God use Paul's arrest and imprisonment?

25. In what ways did Paul's arrest help him spread the Gospel?

Nothing that has happened has hindered the fulfillment of God's purposes. Everything that has happened has been used to fulfill God's plan. God's sovereignty is nowhere more evident than in the midst of human opposition and failure. What is new is the ever growing group of people who will hear Paul's story.

While we see the hand of God orchestrating the fulfillment of His promises, we also see the gracious way in which God has confronted those in positions of authority with the Gospel. The Sanhedrin has heard the Gospel from Peter and John, Stephen, and Paul. Felix and Festus, the Roman governors have likewise heard the Gospel. King Agrippa, Bernice, and a large group of dignitaries will have heard Paul's story of his encounter with the risen Lord. God involves Agrippa who came for a social visit, in this case in such a way that he will hear a very clear presentation of the Gospel from the Apostle Paul. This is the grace of God.

### **Applications**

26. Ask God to reveal resources you can use when you're facing a dilemma you don't know how to resolve.

27. In what difficult situation do you need to remember that God is sovereign and He is in control?

28. Why is it important to pray for your political leaders?

29. How can you support a minister of the Gospel who is in trying circumstances?

30. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit

### Lesson Thirty Four—Acts 26

*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*  
*Romans 1:16-17*

Two years have passed since the Apostle Paul, compelled by the Holy Spirit, arrived in Jerusalem. Despite many warnings that he would be imprisoned if he went to Jerusalem, the call of God was too strong to resist. Let's recap what has happened during those two years:

- Paul is falsely accused of bringing Gentiles into the temple and attacked by a mob of Jews intent upon murdering him.
- He's rescued by Roman soldiers, who break up a riot and take him into custody.
- **Paul presents the Gospel to his Jewish brothers** explaining how the Lord had appeared to him and had commissioned him to preach to the Jews and Gentiles, inciting another riot.
- Paul is again provided protection by the Roman government as he is taken into the barracks. The Commander plans to interrogate him by scourging.
- Paul informs them that he is a Roman citizen, is spared a beating and the Roman military take special care to protect him.
- Paul is brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Knowing he will not get a fair trial, he creates a division in the group by declaring he believes in the resurrection of the dead.
- Some of the Pharisees seem to side with Paul, but the Sadducees don't and another near riot occurs. Paul is rescued a third time by the Roman military.
- Forty men form a suicide pact to neither eat nor drink until they have killed Paul.
- The plot is discovered and the Roman commander puts together a small army which safely escorts Paul to Caesarea under the protection of Rome.
- The case is brought before the Roman governor Felix. He hears the case, but does not make any ruling and Paul is left in protective custody for two years.
- Felix sends for Paul often and is confronted with the Gospel message. **Paul shares about faith in Christ, righteousness, self control, and the judgment to come.**
- Paul's message frightens Felix and he sends Paul away. God is moving on the heart of Felix, but he postpones any decision for Christ.
- When Felix leaves office, as a favor to the Jews, Paul is kept in custody and the case is placed in the hands of his successor, Porcius Festus.
- The Jews still intent on murdering Paul appeal to Festus to have him brought to Jerusalem.
- Paul understands the risk of going to Jerusalem and appeals to be sent to Caesar.
- Once he appeals to Caesar, the outcome is taken out of the hands of Festus. He must send him to Caesar, but he can't send him without written charges. What does he write to Caesar?

Festus faces a dilemma, but God has a purpose. As we study Chapter 26, you will see more people who will hear a clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus. Paul definitely believes in the power of the gospel and boldly proclaims the truth at every opportunity. This chapter contains the third account of Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Road to Damascus, but includes details that were not told in Chapter 9 or Chapter 22. As we delve into Chapter 26, we will see Paul is again sharing the gospel, and this time he is sharing with kings, governors, and important officials.

#### **Read Acts 26:1-11**

1. Why did Paul express appreciation at being able to speak to King Agrippa (vv.2-3)?

2. What did Paul say about his early years in Judaism (vv. 4-5)?
3. What does Paul identify as his reason for being on trial (vv.6-8)?
4. How does he describe his obsession against Christianity before his conversion (vv.8-11)? Which of these is not mentioned in other parts of the book of Acts?

When invited to speak on his own behalf, Paul proclaims the gospel. This is not only because Paul desires for them to come to faith in Jesus; it is also because the gospel is the reason why the Jews want Paul dead. The gospel is the answer to their unanswered question, and the answer to their need of a Savior. It was not “the entire Jewish populace” who wanted Paul dead; it was Paul’s former colleagues. His opponents were likely some of the Jewish men Paul had grown up with. These may have been Paul’s classmates when they were all trained under Gamaliel. These were the men who shared Paul’s zeal for persecuting and killing Christians. They looked on him as a defector and traitor.

**Read Acts 26:12-23 and compare with Acts 9:3-9; 22:3-16**

5. What new details of Paul’s conversion experience are revealed in verses 12-15?
6. What do you think is meant by *kicking against the goads*? How can that apply to us?

As Paul tells his story to Agrippa and the rest of those gathered to hear his defense, he reveals the Lord’s statement “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” Goads were sharp pieces of iron stuck into a stick and used to prod animals into obedience to their handlers. Some especially rebellious animals, instead of submitting would kick the goad causing their own pain and injury. This was apparently a common saying in that day and it implied one who was injuring himself, by constant rebellion. Anytime we walk in disobedience to God, we are hurting ourselves. To keep rebelling, will only mean greater pain. Paul also reveals the commission and the promise that he received from Jesus.

7. Verses 16-18 contain new information about the Lord’s commission of Paul. List the different ways Jesus revealed that He would use Paul.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
8. What promise did Jesus make to Paul in verse 17? How has our study shown the faithfulness of God in keeping this promise?
9. How does v. 18 describe the purpose and the result of Paul’s ministry?

10. List the ways that Paul was obedient to the commission of Jesus (vv. 19-20).
  - a.
  - b.
11. How had Paul been able to obey this challenging commission (v.22) and what was the result?
12. What had Paul preached and why is his message significant (v.20-23)?
13. Compare 26:20 with 20:21. How do these two verses describe what it means to be a Christian?

Paul preached the need for repentance (v.20). To repent is to change one's mind, and one's course—to turn around. In particular, Paul called upon his audience to change their minds about Jesus, just as he had done. Jesus is alive and He is the promised Messiah. He is God's only provision for man's salvation—for the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of eternity in heaven. Like our Lord, Paul wanted it to be clear that trusting Jesus puts one on a very different path. It is turning from a path of darkness to a path of light. It is turning from a path leading to death to a path leading to life. It is changing from a path which was under Satan's control to a path of submission and service to God.

The gospel involves a call to repentance. This explains the Jewish opposition to Paul and to his preaching. Paul's adversaries were satisfied with their interpretation and application of the Law of Moses. The problem is that the Law was not given to provide lost sinners a way to attain righteousness on their own; the Law was given to show people how sinful we are, and that we need the righteousness which only comes through faith in the Messiah. (Romans 3:20-23)

It is not the keeping the Law of Moses nor the ritualistic observance of Jewish ceremonies, that saves. These point to Jesus and His sacrificial death in the sinner's place. It is His resurrection from the dead. It is faith in Him that saves. The gospel Paul preached required self-righteous Jews to forsake their works and to cling to the work of Jesus at Calvary. This was what Paul's preaching required, and this is why his Jewish opponents wanted him dead.

#### **Read Acts 26:24-32**

14. How does Paul tie the life and death of Jesus to Old Testament Scripture (vv.22-23)?
15. What difference does it make to you that Jesus really arose from the dead? What would be different about your faith if that were not the case?
16. When confronted with the Gospel, how did Festus react?
17. How did Agrippa respond to Paul's questions regarding his personal faith and why do you think he reacted that way?



18. What can we learn from Paul's response to Agrippa?
19. What difference does it make that the events around the life of Jesus were public knowledge, things, "not done in a corner"?
20. How did Festus, Agrippa and Bernice regard Paul's guilt or innocence?
21. How did God use Paul's appeal to Caesar to accomplish His plan for Paul?
22. Would you describe Paul's speech as a defense or as a personal testimony? How are the two related?
23. Do you think Paul's primary goal in the speech is to convince Agrippa of his innocence or to convince Agrippa of the truths of Christianity? Why?

Agrippa, Bernice, Festus and this room full of dignitaries have now heard the gospel. Festus can't stand it and loudly accuses Paul of insanity. Agrippa was confronted with the gospel, but seemingly rejected it. Paul's responsibility was to share the gospel which has the power to save those who believe (Romans 1:16). It is the choice of those who hear whether they will accept or reject it.

Paul's closing statement is actually a prayer that all of them will come to the faith that he has. We cannot argue anyone into believing; that is the role of the Holy Spirit. However, we are responsible to respectfully share our faith and to pray.

### **Applications**

24. The Lord pointed out to Paul that he was hurting himself as he resisted Jesus (v.14). If there is an area in your life where you are resisting Jesus, will you choose to surrender that area to Him?
25. How has Christ brought light into your life? How can you pass that light onto someone else this week?
26. With God's help, Paul testified to the *small and great alike*. Will you ask God's help in giving you opportunities and boldness to share with others regardless of how the world sees them?
27. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

**The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**  
**Lesson Thirty Five—Acts 27:1-44**

*“Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me.” Acts 27:23-25*

Life is full of storms and many of them are frightening! 2020 has been a year of storms, a Covid 19 Storm that is still raging, social unrest and injustice that has rocked our nation, an ugly election that has further divided the nation. Unfortunately 2021 has started with an assault on our congress and a grim forecast of more severe storms to come.

Some storms are a result of our own choosing, and may come as a result of bad decisions we made in haste. Some are the result of bad decisions made by others and we are caught in the resulting storm. What do you do in the middle of the storm? Do you panic—do what you can to protect yourself without regard to what happens to others? Do you seek God? Do you try to find ways to help others?

After over two years in prison in Caesarea, Paul is on his way to Rome, just as God had promised. Luke and Aristarchus join Paul on this trip. Luke had traveled to Jerusalem with Paul, and Aristarchus had been one of his previous traveling companions. However, as you will see from today’s passage, this trip is no piece of cake. Decisions made by the majority will put Paul and his traveling companions in a frightening storm. As you study this passage, let God speak to you in regard to what you can learn and apply to your life.

**Read Acts 27:1-12**

1. From verses 1-3, what can we learn about the centurion in charge?
2. Why do you think he showed such concern for Paul? What might this imply about how Paul had spent his time while in prison in Caesarea?
3. What do verses 4-6 tell us about the difficulties they were experiencing on this voyage?
4. What warning did Paul give and why did he give it? If you had been the ship’s pilot, how would you have reacted to Paul’s warning?
5. Would you have responded any differently than Julius, the centurion, did to Paul’s concern? Why?
6. What was the advice of the experts in this situation? What was the advice of the majority?
7. Why did they choose to sail on?

It appears likely that the centurion, Julius, had been in close touch with Paul during his time in Caesarea. He appears to trust him and in kindness he allows Paul to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs.

Paul warned that the voyage was going to be disastrous and bring great loss of ship, cargo, lives. Much time had been lost and sailing had become dangerous. This was already after the Fast for the Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur which is in late September or early October. Shipping was usually shut down from November through February because of the danger of storms. We are not told that this warning came as a direct revelation of God. Paul had spent a lot of time at sea in his missionary journeys and may have recognized the danger. Paul had already been through three shipwrecks and had spent a night and a day adrift in the open sea. He wasn't eager to repeat that experience. (2 Cor. 11:25)

At this point Julius could have taken the prisoners and wintered at Fair Havens and waited for another ship even though this ship was going on. Not surprisingly, the centurion followed the advice of the pilot and the owner of the ship who were eager to get the ship to a safe harbor.

**Read Acts 27:13-26**

8. How did circumstances seem to favor the decision made by the experts and the majority (v.13)?
9. List all the phrases from verses 14-20 that describe the intensity of the storm.
10. List phrases from verses 14-19 that describe the steps the sailors took to try to save the ship.
11. How does Luke describe the emotional state of the men in verse 20?
12. Why do you think the men went so long without food (v.21)?
13. How did Paul encourage them at this point? How does his encouragement of them relate to his words to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4?
14. Even though they ignored his warning and went against his advice, Paul now encourages them. How can we encourage those who might ignore our warning and make a mess of their lives?
15. How did Paul point them to the true God in the midst of this frightening crisis?
16. How do the angel's words of encouragement to Paul in verse 24 relate to the promise he had received from God in 23:11? Why might Paul have needed to hear this promise again?

The gentle wind was deceptive, but soon a wind of hurricane force, swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm. The pilot was no longer in control; the storm was driving them along.

They took a violent battering from the storm and because they navigated by the sun and stars, they weren't even sure where they were. The sailors did all they could to lighten the load and to keep the ship afloat, but when the storm continued to rage, they gave up all hope of being saved. Interestingly, Luke uses the personal pronoun, "we" gave up all hope. These heroes of the faith were all struggling with loss of hope. God sends an angel to encourage Paul and then Paul uses his experience to encourage others.

Even as Paul is sharing encouragement with these men, he points them to the source of his encouragement—an angel of "the God whose I am and whom I serve". In this description, he is affirming that he belongs to God (Ephesians 1:13-14). Paul is God's treasured possession and nothing will happen to him that God has not allowed. Because he belongs wholeheartedly to God, he chooses to serve him.

### **Read Acts 27:27-44**

17. What does verse 27 reveal about the length of time that they were stuck in this storm? How might the length of this storm have impacted those on the ship?
18. How did the sailors know they were approaching land? Why was that so frightening for them?
19. What did the sailors plan to do to protect their own skin and how was their plan thwarted?
20. Compare verses 31-32 with the centurion's actions in verse 11. How has it changed and what do you think made the difference?

Somehow these experienced sailors sensed they were approaching land and their soundings confirmed it, but they were still being driven by the storm and in the middle of the night, they can't see. The sailors feared they would be dashed against the rocks and decide to abandon ship and its passengers. They reason the more flat-bottomed life boat is less likely to get busted up on the rocks than the deep-hulled ship. They pretend they are going to lower anchors from the bow, but Paul knows their deception and warns the centurion and the soldiers. The sailors are the only ones who actually know how to guide this crippled ship toward shore.

This time, the centurion is paying attention. He knows that ignoring Paul's warning before got them into a heap of trouble. It appears he learned from his past mistake—God wants to redeem the messes we make out of our lives and wants us to learn from those mistakes so we don't repeat them.

21. In what ways does Paul encourage those on board in verses 33-36?

While Paul was indeed a spiritual man, he was also a very practical man. When all hope was lost, Paul could have called for a prayer meeting or conducted an evangelistic service. Instead, he urged them all to eat so they would have physical strength for what was ahead. There had been much physical exertion in trying to make the ship secure and they hadn't eaten. They needed food and he provided them an example and this encouraged the others to eat as well.

22. What does verse 42 indicate the soldiers planned to do and why did they think that was necessary?

23. Why did the centurion stop their plan and what can we learn from his actions?

24. What do verses 41-44 tell us about the outcome of this terrible shipwreck?

The story of the deliverance of Paul and his shipmates is a wonderful illustration of the salvation which God offers to all who will receive it. The majority of those on board ship trusted in themselves, in their captain, and in their ship to get them safely to port in Phoenix. The gentle south winds at Fair Havens proved deceptive. They were not as safe as they thought nor were they going to reach their desired destination (Phoenix). At first they supposed they would be able to weather the storm, but in time, they lost all hope. They could do nothing to save themselves. There was one man on board ship who promised salvation if they would do as he said – Paul. In so doing, all were saved from disaster and brought safely to shore.

Men and women today think they will somehow reach heaven on their own. Their prosperity or good health may give them confidence that they can make it on their own, and so they reject the warnings of Scripture, just as those on board ship initially rejected Paul's warnings. Then the storms of life overwhelm us, and we realize that we are hopeless and helpless. There is only one person who can save us, and His name is Jesus. He died for sinners, and God raised Him from the dead. He offers salvation to all those who will trust in Him. Those who seek to abandon Christ for some lifeboat will only perish. Those who trust in Him will be delivered safely through the storms of this life to heaven. As those on board that ship had to entrust themselves to Paul, so we must entrust ourselves to Jesus Christ. He is our only means of deliverance.

While it is a pleasure to see Paul's practical gifts, wisdom, and value to others, let us not end by putting the spotlight on Paul. Let us end by reminding ourselves that the Book of Acts is about God, about *His* faithfulness, about *His* sovereignty, about the fact that *He* sovereignly orchestrates all things so that *His* purposes and *His* promises are fulfilled. Paul was spared, along with the entire passenger manifest, not primarily because of Paul's greatness, but because Paul served a great God. God would not allow Jewish assassins or weak-willed Gentile rulers to keep Paul from the mission for which he had been saved and to which he had been called. In the final analysis, it is not about great men, but about a great God, the one true God, who has purposed to use mere men to proclaim the gospel and thus to bring glory to Himself.

*The preceding three paragraphs were taken from Shipwreck by Bob Deffinbaugh on Bible.org*

### **Applications**

25. What are you most apt to do when you are caught in a storm? Do you feel like sneaking away in a lifeboat? What steps can you take to encourage others who are going through the same storm?

26. What kind of storm are you currently facing in your life?

27. How can you encourage others who are feeling tossed by the storm our nation is currently facing?

28. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.

## **The Acts of the Apostles—Empowered by the Spirit**

### **Lesson Thirty Six—Acts 28**

*“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. . . But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:4-5,8*

This study in the book of Acts has been quite a journey as we have studied the way God sovereignly worked in and through the apostles to accomplish His purpose. Let’s review some of the key events as recorded by Luke.

120 believers **wait** in **Jerusalem** and **pray** as Jesus commanded. The Holy Spirit descends in power, Peter preaches, and 3000 people become believers. After a lame man is healed, Peter preaches again and the group of believers grows to 5,000 men. This leads to opposition from the Sanhedrin as Peter and John are jailed and ordered to cease preaching.

Seven godly men are chosen to help the apostles and the church continues to grow. Stephen is martyred after preaching to the Sanhedrin and a great persecution leads to scattering of the church. Those who are scattered share the gospel and it spreads to **Judea and Samaria**.

Peter is sovereignly led to **Caesarea** to the home of the Gentile Cornelius and as he shares about Jesus, the Holy Spirit descends upon these Gentiles. Then Peter deals with criticism by explaining his actions to a group of believers who are astonished that God could save “even the Gentiles”.

Saul, the persecutor meets Jesus and becomes the one who will lead the Gospel effort into much of the civilized world. He is convinced that Jesus is the Christ and will proclaim it until the day he dies.

Believers in **Antioch** share the gospel with Gentiles and many believe. Church leaders send Barnabas who finds Saul and brings him into the ministry. The Antioch Church sends Paul and Barnabas off on a missionary journey and they travel to numerous **cities and nations** where they share the Gospel.

Jews come to Antioch and teach that Gentiles must be circumcised which leads to the Jerusalem Council. Church leaders send a letter clarifying that Gentile believers do not need to become Jews.

Paul and Barnabas prepare for a second journey, but have a sharp disagreement. This results in **two missionary teams** instead of one. Barnabas sails to Cyprus with Mark, and Paul takes Silas and they travel by land in a different direction. (15:36-41)

Paul takes a third missionary journey, but does not return to Antioch. During that trip he begins to feel drawn to Jerusalem, although he knows prison awaits him there. Paul is falsely accused, a riot ensues and a murderous mob is intent on killing him. He is rescued by Roman guards. **Paul preaches to the Jewish leadership** in Jerusalem and another near riot occurs. When a murderous plot is discovered, Paul is safely escorted to **Caesarea** where he will share the gospel with **Felix, Festus, Agrippa and a host of dignitaries**. Knowing that he would never get a fair trial in Jerusalem, Paul appeals to be heard in front of Caesar. God assures him that he will get him safely to Rome.

Paul is on his way to Rome, but as we learned in Chapter 27, it was a storm-tossed trip. Chapter 28 will show Paul arriving in Rome, but first we see him ministering on a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean. **The Gospel has spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the civilized earth!**

#### **Read Acts 28:1-10**

1. How did the Islanders treat Paul and the others? What specific actions did they take to welcome them?

2. What does the fact that Paul was gathering wood imply about him? How might this task of collecting wood been crucial to the well-being of the prisoners coming out of the water, but still in the storm?
3. What did the islanders assume about Paul when they saw the viper hanging from his hand? What is the danger in assuming that people who face trials are being punished because of sin in their lives?
4. What changed their minds and what can we learn about human nature from this story?
5. What was Publius' title and how did he show unusual kindness to Paul and the others?
6. How did Paul's ministry to Publius' father open the door for greater ministry opportunities?
7. How did the islanders continue to show kindness when the shipwrecked passengers were ready to depart?
8. In light of the fact that God wanted Paul in Rome, why do you think he allowed this shipwreck to happen? How might this relate to God's plan as Jesus revealed to his disciples in Acts 1:8?
9. How has God used difficulties in your life to open doors of ministry? What can we learn from this?

Paul always believed in the value of work and never felt himself above working to help out in a situation. (See 2 Thess. 3:6-13.) When Paul began to gather wood, this may have actually been a life-saving effort. The weather was cold, these passengers were soaked, and hypothermia was certainly a possibility. They needed the warmth of a fire and Paul set out to do what he could to help.

The warmth of the fire also brought a poisonous viper out of hibernation and Paul was the recipient of its venom. Immediately, the islanders assumed he must have been a vicious criminal and expected him to swell up and instantly fall dead. When he shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects, they changed their minds and thought he must be a god. People are incredibly fickle and mob psychology is powerful.

The fact that these people thought Paul must be a god points to their pagan state. There were people on this island who needed to know the one True God, and God provided a witness. He gave Paul a powerful voice when the viper bite was harmless and again when God used him as an agent of healing for the father of Publius and for many of the islanders. God used Paul to bless others. He used him to encourage the passengers on the ship, Publius and his household, and now the people of Malta.

Although Scripture doesn't tell us if any of the islanders became disciples, I am certain that they heard the message of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. God validated his message by working through Paul

to bring healing to many islanders. This provided them with a witness and the opportunity to know of Jesus and to receive salvation. The shipwreck on Malta is part of God's continuing unfolding plan to send the gospel to the uttermost ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

**Read Acts 28:11-16**

After the drama of the storm and shipwreck described in Chapter 27, the remainder of Acts seems a bit tame by comparison. They boarded another ship which sailed to Syracuse, Rhegium, Puteoli, and then they traveled by foot to Rome.

10. What did they find in Puteoli and how might that have been an encouragement to Paul?
11. What did the Christians in Rome do to welcome Paul?
12. What does verse 15 tell us about Paul's reaction to their welcome? Why do you think this would have been an encouragement to Paul?
13. What does verse 16 reveal about Paul's living conditions once he got to Rome? Why do you think he was treated this way?

As they approached Rome, the believers went to meet him—this implies an official welcoming party. The Forum of Appius was 43 miles from Rome and the Three Taverns was about 10 miles closer. These were stopping places along the Appian Way, with inns where people could lodge. And the word, tavern, often referred to an inn, not a place to get booze. It still does in places like Australia. Paul thanked God and was encouraged. This has been a long, hard journey and now to see people who are so eager to see him that they would walk 43 miles to give him a welcome touched his heart. What they did was a sacrifice of time and energy, and he was blessed.

When they reached Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. This is more like house arrest than being imprisoned. I think it was obvious to Julius that this man was no danger to anyone. This is real minimum security confinement, possibly being chained at the wrist to the soldier.

Not surprisingly, soon after arriving in Rome, Paul reaches out to the Jewish community. Just as in all of his missionary travels, he reaches out first to his own people—the Jews.

**Read Acts 28:17-31**

14. How does Paul express his innocence in verses 17-19 and why do you think Paul felt that was important?
15. What does Paul describe as his reason for being in chains? How does this explanation compare with the reason he gave to Agrippa and company in Acts 26:6-7? Explain what you think he means by that phrase?



16. In light of all that Paul had been through, how do you think he felt when he heard the Jews' response in verses 21-22? How would you have felt had you been in his shoes?

17. How is their attitude different from that of the Jews in Jerusalem? How did they show a more open attitude than the Jerusalem Jews (vv. 22-24)? What do you think accounts for the difference?

I can imagine Paul was overjoyed that the Jewish leaders were open enough to hear what Paul had to say and that they had not already pre-judged him. The Roman Jews are far more open than the Jerusalem Jews who had already made up their minds. Those in Jerusalem had pushed for the crucifixion of Christ and their hearts were hardened. By contrast, the Jewish leaders in Rome wanted to hear his views. Although they knew "this sect" had been talked against, they were still open to listen to Paul. They arranged to meet him and must have invited others because they came back in even larger numbers.

18. What did Paul attempt to explain to them and what method did he use to try to convince them?

19. What were the results of this all day meeting? What can we learn and apply from those results?

20. In verses 26-27, Paul quotes from the Prophet Isaiah. How does verse 27 explain what has happened in verse 26?

21. What does it mean to have a calloused heart? Ears that hear, but don't understand? Eyes that see, but don't perceive? How are all of these related to the heart issue?

22. How does the last half of verse 27 reveal what God wants to do in the hearts and lives of these people?

Paul explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law and from the Prophets. He used the Scriptures that they were familiar with to minister to them. Some were convinced and others **would not** believe—belief is a choice. Some will receive Christ if we share and others will not. Our job is to share the truth in love, but we must leave the results up to the Holy Spirit.

A callous will turn a tender part of the body tough so that it is no longer impacted by rubbing. It is helpful to tender hands or tender feet when the callous toughens that part of the body and prevents blisters. However, when the heart is calloused, it is no longer touched by the truths of God. A person can hear, but no longer be impacted or understand. A person can see, but it doesn't impact the life. A calloused heart is not a good thing. It is God's desire to have them see, hear, understand, and **turn** so that he could heal. That is always God's desire for people.

23. What reason does Paul give in verse 28 for God sending salvation to the Gentiles? What can we learn from this verse regarding God's heart for people?

24. What do verses 30-31 reveal about the next two years that Paul spent in Rome?

Most biblical scholars feel that Paul was released after this two years, and traveled for about three more years before he was again imprisoned and eventually executed around 64AD. It is likely that Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were written during this time in Rome.

I want to end this study, by repeating this paragraph from last week's lesson. It is very applicable to the entire study in the book of Acts. It's all about the Sovereignty of God.

While it is a pleasure to see Paul's practical gifts, wisdom, and value to others, let us not end by putting the spotlight on Paul. Let us end by reminding ourselves that the Book of Acts is about God, about *His* faithfulness, about *His* sovereignty, about the fact that *He* sovereignly orchestrates all things so that *His* purposes and *His* promises are fulfilled. Paul was spared, along with the entire passenger manifest, not primarily because of Paul's greatness, but because Paul served a great God. God would not allow Jewish assassins or weak-willed Gentile rulers to keep Paul from the mission for which he had been saved and to which he had been called. In the final analysis, it is not about great men, but about a great God, the one true God, who has purposed to use mere men to proclaim the gospel and thus to bring glory to Himself. *The preceding paragraph was taken from [Shipwreck](#) by Bob Deffinbaugh on Bible.org*

### **Applications**

25. The Islanders showed unusual kindness to the shipwreck victims. To whom can you show unusual kindness this week?

26. What steps can you take to make certain your heart does not become calloused?

27. Look back at the key verse in the book of Acts—Acts 1:8. How did the Lord fulfill His promise to the apostles as described in this book? What part of that promise does He want to fulfill through you?

28. What does God want to say to you from this passage? Write it down.