# ACTS

Acts
Key Verse:

## INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

Luke wrote two books to Theophilus ("lover of God"). In the Gospel of Luke he told about the things that Jesus did and taught until he ascended into heaven. In Acts, Luke wrote about the continuing work of the ascended Jesus through the Holy Spirit in the church. Luke was the only Gentile writer of the New Testament. He shows how God himself transformed a narrow, exclusive community of believers, bound by their own culture and traditions, into a universal, world-wide church--a church free to cross all human barriers to bring the gospel to all men everywhere.

Acts is organized around Acts 1:8: "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." These are the words of the Risen Christ. This is not an ordinary command. It is an imperative. It is related to the very existence of the church. The church is a body of believers who are sent into the world to witness to the Risen Christ. Chapters 1-12 focus on Peter, and chapters 13-27, on Paul.

God's mission for his church is not a new idea. When God called Abraham, he promised, "Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed." Jesus' saving work on the cross and his glorious resurrection is the blessing to all people who believe. But the good news of forgiveness of sins and eternal life must be carried to all nations by the church--the body of Christ, the people of God.

## OUTLINE OF ACTS

1. To Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria

a. 1:1-7:60--The Witness in Jerusalem

(Climaxed by Stephen's martyrdom)

b. 8:1-12:25--To Judea and Samaria

(Peter's ministry; Paul's conversion)

2. To the Ends of the Earth

a. 13:1-15:35--Paul's 1st Journey

(With Barnabas--Jerusalem Council)

b. 15:36-21:15--2nd and 3rd Journeys

(2nd--To Europe; 3rd--In Ephesus)

c. 21:16-28:31--God's heart for the world

(To Jerusalem and to Rome in chains)

(One-to-one Bible study in a rented house)

THE MINISTRY OF THE RISEN CHRIST

Acts 1:1-5

Key Verse: 1:3

1. Proofs that he is alive (1-3a)

After his death and resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days with his disciples. During that time he planted in them resurrection faith and hope in the kingdom of God. The foundation of the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus. This is the good news. When God raised Jesus from the dead, he accepted his sacrifice for the sins of the world. He proved him to be the Son of God and Christ the Savior (Ro 1:4; 4:25).

2. The kingdom of God (3b-5)

Jesus began his ministry on earth preaching about the kingdom of God (Mk 1:15). It was the theme of his parables; he taught his disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come." The kingdom of God was the main theme of the teaching of the risen Jesus. Jesus' people must put their hope in the kingdom of God, not in the things of the world. He told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. God's kingdom must rule our hearts and his power fill our lives before we can go out to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Prayer: Lord, dwell with me in all your risen power. Use me in your kingdom's work.

One Word: Jesus is risen; my hope is in him

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Acts 1:6-11

Key Verse 1:8

1. You will be my witnesses (6-8)

The disciples dreamed of an earthly, restored kingdom of Israel. They thought that Jesus' resurrection meant that the time had come. But God's kingdom is spiritual; it includes people of every nation, race and language. It would come at God's appointed time, and they must participate in its coming until Jesus' return. When the gospel is preached and accepted, God's kingdom comes into the hearts of people. So disciples must be apostles, i.e., missionaries. They must witness to the risen Christ in Jerusalem (where Jesus was crucified), in Judea and Samaria (among their friends and neighbors), and to the ends of the earth (even Rome)--until the end of the age (Mt 28:18-20).

2. The ascension (9-11)

The ascension of Jesus into heaven is the water-shed of Jesus' ministry. From this time, he would work from heaven through his disciples and the Holy Spirit. He will come again in clouds of glory to bring in the end of the age.

Prayer: Lord, help me to witness to your gospel until you come again.

One Word: Go. Be Jesus' witnesses

THE PRAYER MEETING

Acts 1:12-26

Key Verse: 1:14a

1. They all joined together in prayer (12-14)

Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift the Father promised--the Holy Spirit. So, after receiving his world mission command, they went back to Jerusalem. About 120 disciples--including the Eleven and Jesus' mother and brothers--gathered together to pray. They must have praised God who raised Jesus, and asked his power to do his work.

2. Judas' place filled (15-26)

Judas' betrayal was an unsolved problem in their hearts. As they prayed, God moved Peter to expose this problem and solve it. The broken vessel of the Spirit should be mended. The 12 apostles were to the church like the 12 tribes were to Israel. They were unique witnesses to Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The New Testament would come from them. Peter left no room for human sympathy. He sought and found God's direction in scripture, and the Lord showed them who he had chosen.

Prayer: Lord, help us to unite in prayer until you send your Spirit.

One Word: Pray together

PENTECOST

Acts 2:1-13

Key Verse: 2:11b

1. The Holy Spirit comes (1-4)

About 10 days after Jesus' ascension and 50 days after Passover, on the Day of Pentecost, the believers were praying together when a sound like a violent windstorm filled the room. What seemed to be tongues of fire rested on each of them and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was the gift promised by the Father. His coming marked the beginning of a new era. The Christian church was born. The Holy Spirit enabled them to speak in other tongues. He was sent to give power, the love of God, joy and new life, and to equip fearful, directionless disciples for the task of world mission.

2. From every nation under heaven (5-13)

Jews from everywhere had gathered in Jerusalem. They were a microcosm of the world. They marveled to hear uneducated Galileans praising God in all kinds of languages. God was showing his people that the good news of the gospel is for all people. He was sending his disciples to the ends of the earth to witness to Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, send your Spirit today to fill and equip us to do your work

One Word: The promised gift of the Father

YOUR YOUNG MEN WILL SEE VISIONS

Acts 2:14-21

Key Verse: 2:17

1. God has poured out his Spirit (14-18)

The disciples, filled with the Spirit of God, were so full of joy and praise that they acted like drunk men. Peter, standing with the Eleven, used this opportunity to proclaim the gospel to the people of Jerusalem. These men were not drunk--they were filled with God's Spirit. God had done what he had promised. The last days had begun; the Spirit of God was poured out on the earth. Despairing young men, who only lived for the weekends, became men of vision. Old men, who only looked forward to the nursing home and the grave, began to dream great dreams.

2. Everyone who calls on the Lord (19-21)

Another great day is coming. It is the day of final judgment. But before this, people everywhere must hear the gospel. It is good news for all people, for "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Prayer: Lord, send your Spirit to fill the young men of our times with vision and make them Bible teachers of the world.

One Word: Come, Holy Spirit

BUT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD

Acts 2:22-24

Key Verse: 2:24a

1. Jesus' impeccable credentials (22)

Peter was speaking about Jesus to the people who had crucified him. No one could deny that God had put his seal on Jesus' beautiful life and work by the signs and miracles which he had granted him.

2. You put him to death (23)

Putting Jesus to death was a senseless act; it revealed the depth of corruption in the human heart. But God's sovereign hand was in these events. God himself allowed the sinfulness of man to run its full course. He sent his pure and harmless and lovely Son into a world like this, knowing what would happen to him. And he did it to solve once and for all man's sin problem.

3. God raised him from the dead (24)

This is the good news of salvation to all who believe in him. This is God's victory over death. Death could not keep its hold on him.

Prayer: Lord, my sins nailed Jesus to the cross. I believe that his death and resurrection were for my forgiveness.

One Word: God raised him from the dead

DAVID'S RESURRECTION FAITH

Acts 2:25-36

Key Verse: 2:36

1. Your Holy One will not see decay (25-32)

In Psalm 16 David wrote words that could only be applied to the risen Christ. He wrote with prophetic insight because he knew the living God personally. He found his joy and strength in God. His hope was not in worldly success or possessions or people. His hope was in the living

God. God fulfilled David's prophetic words when he raised Jesus to life. The apostles were the first witnesses to the fact that God raised Jesus to life (32).

2. He is exalted to the right hand of God (33-36)

The risen Christ ascended into heaven to be enthroned at the right hand of God. David also spoke about this in Psalm 110. Furthermore, from his place of power and glory, Christ poured out the promised Holy Spirit on all who believe the gospel, to empower us to be his witnesses. When the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead is working in our lives, God's enemy Satan is defeated.

Prayer: Praise God who made Jesus, whom we crucified, both Lord and Christ. Come Holy Spirit. Fill us today. Equip us to be witnesses to the living Christ.

One Word: God has made him Lord and Christ

BROTHERS, WHAT SHALL WE DO?

Acts 2:37-47

Key Verse: 2:38

1. Repent and be baptized (37-41)

Everyone who has disobeyed God's laws or rebelled against him has shared in the crucifixion of Jesus. What shall we do? We must see the ugliness of our sins and the pain we have caused God and be cut to the heart. Then, we must repent and personally accept Jesus' death for the forgiveness of sins; we must be baptized with the Holy Spirit. This is the only way to be saved from this corrupt generation. Baptism with water is an outward sign of God's work within. It is a declaration to the world that I am a Christian, a part of the Body of Christ. When Peter preached, 3,000 people accepted his message.

2. Growing in the Christian life (42-47)

Christians must keep on growing. The early Christians show us how. They studied the Bible; they met together every day to praise God, to pray and to encourage one another. They gave sacrificially and shared what they had. They ate together with joyful hearts. They were a good influence in society.

Prayer: Lord, cut our hearts with your word until we repent and believe and are filled with your Spirit.

One Word: Repent and believe the gospel

PETER HEALS A CRIPPLED BEGGAR

Acts 3:1-10

Key Verse: 3:6

1. A crippled beggar by the Beautiful gate (1-3)

The crippled beggar represents all whose spirits and/or bodies are crippled by sin. Those who sit in self-pity and burden others are like this beggar. Those who beg for love but have none to give; who want to be helped, but cannot help anyone else; who want to be served, but don't know how to serve others are relatives of the crippled beggar.

2. What I have I give you (4-10)

As Peter and John were going into the temple for the afternoon prayer meeting, the crippled beggar called to them. Peter looked straight at him and said, "Look at us." Peter did not give him money. He gave him something better. He gave him Jesus, and Jesus gave him new life. His useless legs became strong, and he jumped and danced. Lips that had only complained and begged began to praise God. He had only sought people's pity before the temple gate; now he went in to pray and thank God.

Prayer: Lord, show me how to give Jesus to the crippled beggars of my time.

One Word: In the name of Jesus

IN THE NAME OF JESUS

Acts 3:11-16

Key Verse: 3:16

1. The God of our fathers glorified Jesus (11-15)

When the crippled beggar began to jump and dance and praise God, all the people were astonished and a huge crowd soon assembled in Solomon's Colonnade. Peter told them why this man was walking. It was because of the name of Jesus. He preached the gospel to the crowd. He began by announcing that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had glorified Jesus, whom they had handed over to be crucified--God raised Jesus from the dead! Peter rebuked them for killing the Author of life and releasing a murderer. He called them to repent.

2. By faith in the name of Jesus (16)

Then he pointed to the former cripple, now jumping and dancing with joy. This man was a living testimony to the resurrection power of Jesus' name. A changed life is the best evidence of the resurrection.

Prayer: Lord, work in me until my life becomes evidence that Jesus is alive. Give me courage to testify to the power of Jesus' name.

One Word: By faith in his name

GOD'S GREATEST BLESSING

Acts 3:17-26

Key Verse: 3:19

1. Repent (17-20)

How can there be hope for sinners who killed the Author of life? There is hope, for as he promised, God sent Christ to suffer for the sake of sinners. He did not send a mighty warrior to save his people; he sent a suffering servant. If any sinner repents and accepts Christ, God will wipe out his sins and give him a refreshing new life. The Spirit of Christ indwells forgiven sinners; Jesus will come in glory at the end of the age to restore all things.

2. God's promises are sure (21-26)

God spoke through his holy prophets about the Christ. Moses said that God would raise up a prophet who would speak with the absolute authority of God. All of the prophets spoke about the coming Christ. But at the root of all the prophecies is God's covenant with Abraham: "Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed." Forgiveness of sin is the best blessing.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for making me an heir of your best blessing.

One Word: Repentance & times of refreshing

SALVATION IS FOUND IN NO ONE ELSE

Acts 4:1-12

Key Verse: 4:12

1. Peter and John put in jail (1-4)

Peter and John preached the resurrection of Jesus to the very people who had killed Jesus. They were arrested and put in jail. But the gospel could not be stopped by a jail cell. More people than ever believed in Jesus, because the apostles lived fearlessly, by resurrection faith.

2. By what name? (5-12)

Peter and John were questioned by the high priests who condemned Jesus to death. When they were asked about the cripple who had been healed, they boldly proclaimed that the man was

healed by the power of the name of Jesus--the same Jesus whom they had crucified, and whom God had raised from the dead. Jesus is the rejected stone about whom Isaiah wrote. The builders rejected him, but God raised him up and made him the capstone of his redemptive history. Salvation is through the name of Jesus alone.

Prayer: Praise the name of Jesus. Lord, help me to live by faith in his name, and share in proclaiming him to the nations.

One Word: Salvation in Jesus' name alone

SHALL WE OBEY MEN RATHER THAN GOD?

Acts 4:13-22

Key Verse: 4:19

1. These men have been with Jesus (13)

Peter and John were country boys without much formal education. They were ordinary men. But their courage was extraordinary. The Jewish leaders were astounded by them. What made them special? It was not the way they dressed or spoke. It was the fact that they had been with Jesus. The religious leaders took note of this.

2. They decided to obey God (14-22)

The Sanhedrin didn't know what to do. A crippled man had been healed, everyone was praising God, and the gospel of Jesus was spreading. They had to put a stop to it. They commanded Peter and John to stop speaking in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John could not stop. They couldn't help talking about what they had seen and heard. They asked these religious leaders a counter question: "Is it right in God's sight to obey you or God?"

Prayer: Lord, help me to spend time with Jesus every day so that I can obey you and boldly speak and teach your word of truth.

One Word: They had been with Jesus

THE BELIEVERS' PRAYER

Acts 4:23-31

Key Verse: 4:29

1. God is sovereign (23-28)

When Peter and John were threatened and released from prison, they went back to the believers and had a prayer meeting. They began their prayer by acknowledging the sovereignty of the

Creator God. They quoted Psalm 118:22, and marveled at how Herod and Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles and Jewish rulers had conspired together against the Messiah, and thus had fulfilled the prophecies of the Psalm. They accepted persecution as a part of God's sovereignty, and they rejoiced in God who rules over all.

2. Enable us to speak with boldness (29-31)

They had just two prayer requests: (i) Lord, consider their threats and enable us to speak your word with boldness; (ii) Lord, stretch out your hand to heal through the name of Jesus. They did not try to save themselves; they only asked to extend God's mercy and love into the lives of sinsick and suffering people.

Prayer: Lord, grant me boldness to speak your word.

One Word: God is sovereign

BARNABAS, SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Acts 4:32-37

Key Verse: 4:32

1. One in heart and mind (32-33)

The fellowship of believers was not an end in itself. It was a fellowship that testified in word and deed to the presence of the Risen Jesus. When Jesus is Lord of every heart, then selfishness disappears. We ourselves and all our possessions belong to the Lord. This is the secret of being one in heart and mind. In the early church, this oneness was expressed in a primitive form of communism. It was beautiful, for there was no dissension and no needy person. Love and grace abounded.

2. The encourager (34-37)

A man named Joseph sold a field and brought the proceeds to the apostles. His action encouraged the believers very much, so he was called Barnabas, Son of Encouragement. Later, he encouraged Paul; then, John Mark (9:27; 11:22-26; 15:37-39). Encouragers are always needed in the fellowship of believers.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be an encourager of believers by my life, and help me to share Jesus with the world.

One Word: One in heart and mind

NO ONE ELSE DARED JOIN THEM

Acts 5:1-16

Key Verse: 5:13,14

1. Ananias and Sapphira (1-11)

Ananias and his wife Sapphira wanted to be recognized as spiritual leaders. They misunderstood Barnabas' sacrificial act; they decided to sell a piece of property and bring all the proceeds to the apostles. But then they had second thoughts. It seemed like too much to give away, so they agreed together to keep part for themselves. Peter saw their action from God's point of view and said, "Satan has so filled your heart that you lied to the Holy Spirit." Such unbelief and material greed could turn the body of Christ into a godless human fellowship. This was spiritual cancer, and God performed surgery (5-10).

2. Numbers increased (12-16)

Fear of God filled the city. Becoming a believer was something which no one could do lightly. No one dared join them, but still people were added to their number. Jesus' love for those in need continued to abound.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to live in your sight and hold your truth in my heart.

One Word: Live before God, not before men

GO, TELL THE FULL MESSAGE

Acts 5:17-42

Key Verse: 5:20

1. We must obey God rather than men (17-29)

When the numbers of believers increased, the high priests became jealous and had the apostles arrested. That night, God sent his angel to open the prison doors. He did not tell them to hide in a safe place--he sent them back to the front line (20). So the apostles went back to the temple and taught the Bible. When they were discovered, they were arrested again. The high priest said, "We told you not to preach about Jesus. You are making us guilty of his blood!"

2. Rejoicing in suffering (30-42)

They answered, "We must obey God... God raised Jesus...whom you had killed... He exalted him as Prince and Savior to give repentance and forgiveness to Israel. We are witnesses..." The Sanhedrin wanted to kill the apostles. But Gamaliel's advice silenced their fury, so they flogged the apostles and let them go. The apostles rejoiced that they could suffer for Jesus' sake, and continued teaching the Bible and proclaiming that Jesus is Christ. They had overcome fear.

Prayer: Lord, help me to overcome fear with faith, and rejoice in suffering.

One Word: We must obey God rather than men

THE APOSTLES' PRIORITIES

Acts 6:1-7

Key Verse: 6:4

1. Tension because of material things (1-4)

The Grecian Jews had been born and raised in other parts of the Empire. The natives of Jerusalem were Hebraic Jews. The common life, in which they shared material things and cared for the needy, gave rise to some problems. The Grecian Jews complained that their widows were being neglected. The Twelve made this problem an opportunity to turn responsibility for material oversight over to others, so that they could give their attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.

2. Seven stewards (5-7)

The men they chose were from among the Hellenistic Jews--those who had complained. But they were chosen because of their spiritual qualifications; the handling of material things must be a spiritual matter. The apostles prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. Even many priests--men who had studied the Bible--believed in Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, help us to make our problems an opportunity for spiritual growth, so that we may grow and your word may spread.

One Word: Keep spiritual priorities

STEPHEN, A MAN FULL OF THE SPIRIT

Acts 6:8-15

Key Verse: 6:15

1. A man full of God's grace and power (8-10)

One of those chosen to serve was Stephen. He was an administrator, but he was also a powerful Bible teacher. He had an effective ministry among fellow Grecian Jews because his life backed up his words. Some sophisticated Jews who did not believe in Jesus, strongly opposed Stephen. But when they debated with him, they couldn't win, for he stood on the side of truth and was full of wisdom and God's Spirit.

2. A secret plot (11-15)

These men began to spread false accusations about Stephen. They accused him of blasphemy against the Bible and against God. So he was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses who twisted his words and inflamed the religious leaders--the men who had crucified Jesus. The devil is a liar, and he uses false witness to attack the work of God. When Stephen stood before them, he was not afraid. He looked like an angel. He was ready to testify to Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, fill me with your grace and power so that I can witness to Jesus.

One Word: Be full of God's grace and power

TEACHING THE BIBLE UNDER PRESSURE

Acts 7:1-16

Key Verse: 7:5

1. The God of glory appeared to Abraham (1-8)

When Stephen spoke, he gave his accusers the gospel--in the context of history. He started with Abraham. Abraham's faith is characterized by obedience to God's word and belief in God's promises. He believed that his descendants would possess the promised land, even though he owned no land and had no children. He accepted God's plan to train his descendants in Egypt for 400 years, and sealed God's covenant with circumcision.

2. God was with Joseph (9-16)

Because of their jealousy, the patriarchs (Joseph's brothers) sold Joseph as a slave into Egypt. But God was with Joseph. He gave him wisdom and turned his adversity into victory. Through Joseph, God accomplished the first part of his plan, and brought Abraham's descendants to Egypt, so that they might grow into a great multitude. During that time, they held on to God's promise to give them the land (16).

Prayer: Lord, help me to obey your word, believe your promises, and trust you in times of adversity.

One Word: God keeps his promises

GOD SENT MOSES

Acts 7:17-38

Key Verse: 7:34

1. As the time drew near (17-29)

God used cruel oppression to give the slave people a longing to leave Egypt. Then God prepared a man. Because of his parents' faith, the infant Moses survived the holocaust, and by God's grace, received a palace education. But his people did not accept his leadership; he needed humanity training. Because of one incident, he was forced to live in exile for 40 years. He lived a family-centered life in Midian; God waited for him to grow as a shepherd.

2. God called Moses (30-38)

When Moses heard God's voice speaking to him from the burning bush, he trembled with fear. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob met him on holy ground and gave him a mission to go back to Egypt and be the ruler and deliverer of the people who had rejected him. He led them out of Egypt, cared for them in the desert for 40 years, taught them the Bible, and pointed them to Christ.

Prayer: Lord, raise up shepherds and Bible teachers for our times.

One Word: God trains and uses men

GOD'S WORD REJECTED

Acts 7:39-50

Key Verse: 7:39

1. God gave them over (39-43)

The idolatry that eventually led God's people into Babylonian captivity started in the desert when they made the golden calf (Ex 32). They did not obey Moses, who had received God's living word; in their hearts they turned back to Egypt and to the fatalistic, spiritual-struggle-free slave life.

2. God does not live in houses made by men (44-50)

The tabernacle in the desert was made by Moses according to God's pattern. It was brought into the promised land by Joshua. The great King David did not build the temple--his son Solomon did. Solomon knew that God is not confined to any house. Heaven is his throne and earth his footstool. He is the Creator. Stephen had been accused of speaking against the temple and the law (6:13). He taught them the Bible: God cannot be confined in a building. He pointed out that they were the law-breakers. They had rejected the Bible by not obeying it.

Prayer: Lord, help me to hold your word in my heart, and not yield to the seduction of any idol.

One Word: Worship God in God's way

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

Acts 7:51-60

Key Verse: 7:56

1. Stiff necks and uncircumcised hearts (51-53)

Stiff necks belong to proud people who do not bow humbly before the living God; uncircumcised hearts are hearts with no love for God and no repentance. Those who resist the word of God and the Holy Spirit's gentle leading are capable of crucifying even the righteous Son of God. Stephen exposed their lawlessness. He was not afraid of them, even though they stood there with stones in their hands.

2. I see heaven open (54-60)

When they gnashed their teeth at him with murder in their hearts, Stephen looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at his right hand. When they dragged him out of the city and began stoning him, he prayed for them, as Jesus on the cross had prayed (Lk 23:34,46). The seed of gospel faith was planted in a young man named Saul.

Prayer: Lord, circumcise my heart so that I may be a faithful witness to Jesus, and let me die with the vision of Jesus before me.

One Word: One glorious life and death

THE GOSPEL SEED SCATTERED

Acts 8:1-8

Key Verse: 8:4

1. A great persecution arose (1-3)

Stephen's death marked the beginning of a great persecution of the church by anti-Christians. The most rabid persecutor was Saul, a young man who had participated in Stephen's stoning. Saul went about systematically to destroy the church. It seemed that Stephen's death had kindled a great fire in him. Because of persecution, Christians were scattered all over the empire.

2. Those who scattered preached the word (4-8)

Wherever Christians went, they preached the word. When Philip went into non-Jewish territory, Samaria, and preached the gospel, people paid close attention to his message, repented and believed the gospel. God confirmed his ministry by acts of healing. The gospel brought great joy to that city. God turned the time of tragedy and persecution into a great missionary thrust.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the joy that your word brings to those who receive it. Help me to share the gospel with those around me.

One Word: Scatter the gospel seed

THE MAN WHO TRIED TO BUY GOD'S GIFT

Acts 8:9-25

Key Verse: 8:22

1. Simon's conversion (9-13)

Simon was a sorcerer. He enjoyed power and popularity. He thought he was someone great. Then Philip came and preached the good news. God granted him powerful miracles, and many people, including Simon, believed and were baptized. Simon was a good sheep; he followed Philip around everywhere to learn from him.

2. Peter and John's visit (14-25)

Peter and John were sent to Samaria to encourage and strengthen the great work of God there. They laid their hands on the new believers and prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit worked and people were changed. Simon revealed his crooked mind when he tried to buy the power of the Apostles. He had found a way to defeat Philip! Peter rebuked him. God's gift is for those who repent and pray. God's Spirit honors Jesus and equips us to do God's work. He is not for sale.

Prayer: Lord, give me your Spirit so that I can be a fruitful witness to Jesus' grace.

One Word: A gift that money can't buy

PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Acts 8:26-40

Key Verse: 8:30b,31

1. Philip obeys the Spirit (26)

Philip left a fruitful and growing ministry in the city and went south on a desert road in obedience to God's Spirit. God cared about one thirsty man who was waiting for a Bible teacher.

2. The Ethiopian eunuch (27-40)

The man Philip met was riding in his chariot on his way home from Jerusalem. He was a Gentile from Ethiopia who had a high position in his government, but he had no hope of having a family because he was a eunuch. He had gone to Jerusalem seeking the God of the Jews, but he was not satisfied, so he was pouring over the Bible. The words of Isaiah 53 spoke to his heart, for here was a man who suffered, and who, like himself, was humiliated and had no descendants (33).

Through 1:1 Bible study, Philip introduced him to Jesus who bore all his sins and sorrows. He was baptized and went on his way rejoicing.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be a one-to-one Bible teacher whenever you give me the opportunity. Lead me to one thirsty person.

One Word: Be a one-to-one Bible teacher

SAUL MEETS JESUS

Acts 9:1-9

Key Verse: 9:4b

1. Saul's journey to Damascus (1-2)

Saul was bent on destroying the "dangerous" sect of the Nazarene. He thought he was serving God. His zeal had increased since his participation in the stoning of Stephen. Perhaps it was an outward display of an inner struggle (Ac 26:14). Not satisfied with crushing and scattering the church in Jerusalem, he decided to go to Damascus to arrest Christians there.

2. Who are you, Lord? (3-9)

A light from heaven flashed around him; he fell to the ground. Then the Risen Jesus spoke: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul was overwhelmed. He said, "Who are you, Lord?" Jesus answered, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting....Get up and go into the city...." This event completely turned Saul's life around. It was God's great grace to him. From this time on he belonged to Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for coming to me when I was living in ignorance and sin. Undergird my life with your grace.

One Word: Meet the Risen Jesus

THE LORD'S CHOSEN INSTRUMENT

Acts 9:10-19a

Key Verse: 9:15,16

1. A man named Ananias (10-14)

Saul was an infamous enemy of the gospel. The believers in Damascus were steeling themselves for his coming. They did not know that he had met the Risen Jesus, that he was blind and helpless and needed a shepherd. So when God called Ananias to go and help him, Ananias hesitated.

2. My chosen instrument (15-16)

God told Ananias that he had chosen Saul and wanted to use him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles as well as to the people of Israel. Saul would suffer for Jesus' sake. The zealous Pharisee was not a likely person to become an evangelist to the Gentiles. God sometimes chooses unlikely people, and gives them jobs they don't seem to fit.

3. An obedient shepherd (17-19a)

Ananias overcame his fear and feelings, obeyed God and went. He called Saul, "Brother." He prayed for him and fed him. Saul's sight was restored and he was baptized into the Christian fellowship.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be obedient to your word, so that you can use me as your instrument.

One Word: God's chosen instrument

SAUL'S BOLD WITNESS

Acts 9:19b-31

Key Verse: 9:20

1. Escape from Damascus (19b-25)

Saul went into the synagogue and preached that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The man who had raised havoc among Christians in Jerusalem, and who had come to Damascus to destroy the church had become a bold witness to Jesus. His testimony was so powerful that the Jews decided to kill him. He escaped when the Christians lowered him in a basket through a hole in the city wall. Only Jesus could bring about such a change.

2. Paul's shepherd, Barnabas (26-31)

In Jerusalem, the Christians feared him. They could not accept him. But Barnabas trusted God and helped Saul. He had faith to believe that God could change a man, and eyes to see God's work. Paul's fearless witness to Jesus again put his own life, as well as the lives of others, at risk. So the brothers sent him to Tarsus, his home. There was peace in the church and a new work of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the work of your Spirit, who changes even men like Saul--and people like me.

One Word: Meet the Risen Jesus

GOD BLESSES PETER'S MINISTRY

Acts 9:32-43

Key Verse: 9:40a

1. Jesus Christ heals you (32-35)

Peter the good shepherd traveled around taking care of Jesus' flock. Peter spoke to a bedridden man named Aeneas in the name of Jesus. The man was healed by Jesus; he immediately got up. Those who saw Aeneas' changed life turned to the Lord. They did not turn to Peter and make him a popular cult leader--they turned to Jesus and put their faith in him.

2. Dorcas restored to life (36-43)

The faith of the Christians of Joppa was amazing--they didn't give up, even in the face of death; so when Dorcas, who had cared for so many of them died, they sent for Peter, and expected a miracle. Even though her body was prepared for burial, they believed that if Peter prayed for her, God would raise her from the dead. Peter got down on his knees and prayed. Then he spoke to the dead woman. She opened her eyes and sat up. Again, the people put their faith in the Lord--not in Peter.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to pray so that you can bring new life to dying people. Let Jesus only be glorified by my life.

One Word: Peter knelt down and prayed

A CENTURION NAMED CORNELIUS

Acts 10:1-8

Key Verse: 10:4,5

1. A devout and God-fearing man (1-2)

Cornelius was a Roman soldier, a member of the elite Italian Regiment. He was a part of the army of occupation, but he was not a cruel oppressor. He was a man with a learning mind and a spiritual thirst. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing. He gave to those in need, and prayed to God. We might think that such a man would have no need for Jesus. But his good deeds did not solve his sin problem, nor did his faithful life quench his thirst.

2. Send for Peter (3-8)

God heard Cornelius' prayers and sent an angel to visit him. The angel told him that God was pleased with his prayers and gifts and wanted to bless him. He was to send for the man who could introduce him to Jesus, Simon Peter. Cornelius shared his vision with two trusted servants and a devout soldier, and sent them to Joppa to find Peter.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for showing me that all people need Jesus. Help me to share Jesus with anyone, anytime, and not to be fooled by appearances.

One Word: Everybody needs Jesus

PETER'S VISION

Acts 10:9-23a

Key Verse: 10:13

1. Get up, Peter. Kill and eat! (9-16)

Peter was visiting Simon the tanner in Joppa. One day while waiting for lunch, he was praying on the roof. He fell into a kind of trance, and dreamed about a large sheet full of unclean animals, the kind he had been trained from his youth never to eat. When a voice from heaven said, "Get up Peter. Kill and eat," he objected. God rebuked him. He should not call unclean that which God has cleansed. God was breaking his Jewish pride and legalism.

2. Three men from Cornelius (17-23a)

While Peter was thinking about the vision, the men Cornelius had sent arrived. They were Gentiles, and they had been sent to Peter by God, for God was personally opening a door into his kingdom for the Gentile world. Peter was obedient to God's Spirit. He ignored Jewish tradition, welcomed the Gentiles into his home as his guests, and ate with them.

Prayer: Lord, make my conscience a slave to your word, not a slave to my own feelings and ideas. Help me to obey your Spirit.

One Word: Follow God's word, not feelings

PETER AT CORNELIUS' HOUSE

Acts 10:23b-33

Key Verse: 10:33b

1. Cornelius welcomes Peter (23b-29)

Cornelius fell at Peter's feet in reverence. Peter made it clear that he was not a god; he was a man, and a servant of the living God. Peter openly confessed that his being there was a violation of Jewish law, but God had shown him that he should not hold on to his old prejudices. All men are created in God's image. So, when Peter was sent for, he came without objection.

2. Cornelius' prepared heart (30-33)

Cornelius knew that Jews did not enter Gentile homes. He told Peter how God's messenger had visited him while he was praying, and said that God had heard his prayers and seen his generosity in giving to the poor. Cornelius thanked Peter for coming. He and those with him were gathered there in the presence of God, ready to hear everything God had given Peter to say.

Prayer: Lord, cleanse me of pride and prejudice and help me to listen to your word with a prepared heart and mind.

One Word: A heart prepared to hear God's word

THE GOOD NEWS OF PEACE

Acts 10:34-48

Key Verse: 10:36

1. Jesus Christ is Lord of all (34-36)

The Jews thought that God loved only them. But God taught Peter that he does not show favoritism. He accepts any person who fears him and does what is right--regardless of that person's human condition. The Good News of peace through Jesus is for everyone who accepts Jesus Christ as Lord.

2. What happened in Judea (37-48)

The gospel is rooted in fact. Peter reviewed the basic facts: John preached repentance; then, Jesus, anointed by the Holy Spirit, went around doing good and healing. He challenged the devil and set men free. Then, they killed him by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead on the third day. The Risen Jesus was seen by witnesses. He commanded his disciples to testify about God's sure judgment, and about forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus. Cornelius and his friends believed, and the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Prayer: Praise Jesus, who is Lord of all and Savior of all who come to him. Thank you for the peace that Jesus gives through the gospel.

One Word: Believe in Jesus and be forgiven

EVEN THE GENTILES

Acts 11:1-18

Key Verse: 11:18

1. Peter answers criticism (1-16)

The Jewish believers in Jerusalem criticized Peter for going to the home of Gentiles and eating with them. He told the apostles and brothers about his vision, and how God had led him to Cornelius' house. There, he had found a gathering of Gentiles. They were waiting to hear the message of salvation. When he preached Jesus to these Gentiles, the Holy Spirit came on them just as he had come at Pentecost. God blessed the faith of these Gentiles. He baptized them with the Holy Spirit and accepted them into his church. He did not require them to become Jews first.

2. Could I oppose God? (17-18)

Peter concluded: "I remembered Jesus' words and saw that God gave the Gentiles the same gift as he had given us at Pentecost. How could I oppose God?" So the brothers praised God. They recognized this major turning point in God's redemptive history--"God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember your words and follow you, not my own feelings, prejudices or logic.

One Word: Jesus' gospel is for everybody

A MISSIONARY CHURCH

Acts 11:19-30

Key Verse: 11:20

1. Seeds scattered by persecution (19-21)

After Stephen's death, persecution of Christians intensified. They scattered, preaching the gospel wherever they went. God pushed them to obey his world mission command. Some who went to Antioch in Syria found prepared Gentile hearts. They preached the good news, and a great number of people believed.

2. The ministry of Barnabas (22-29)

Barnabas was a man with the heart of Jesus. He had eyes to see God's work in Antioch, and he encouraged the Gentile believers. He knew that they needed Bible study, so he went to Tarsus and got Saul. He could share a fruitful ministry with someone more able than himself. Together, he and Saul taught the Bible to them for a year, and God blessed their ministry. Perhaps it was Barnabas who taught them responsible stewardship and sacrificial giving (4:36-37), and planted in them (and in Paul) a sense of missionary responsibility. There the Christian church broke out of Judaism.

Prayer: Lord, help our church to be like the church in Antioch. Raise up men of encouragement and Bible teachers like Barnabas.

One Word: Marks of a missionary church

## A PRAYING CHURCH

Acts 12:1-11

Key Verse 12:5

1. The church prayed (1-5)

Christians in Jerusalem were persecuted by Herod. He had the Apostle James put to death. He saw that this pleased the Jews, so he arrested Peter. Everyone feared the worst. Peter was the spiritual leader and shepherd of the church, and they needed his leadership. But what could they do? They were helpless. So they prayed. Their prayers seemed but a feeble gesture in the face of the power of an evil king who was backed by the ruthless Roman Empire.

2. The Lord sent an angel (6-11)

Peter was sleeping, chained between two guards. He calmly awaited certain death the next day. But God heard the prayers of his people and sent his angel to rescue Peter. Peter was not expecting an angel. But the angel came and broke the chains and opened the prison door. Peter finally realized that God was rescuing him, and he walked right out of prison.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to pray and not give up, even when it seems impossible.

One Word: The church prayed earnestly

## THE WORD OF GOD CONTINUED TO SPREAD

Acts 12:12-24

Key Verse 12:24

1. Astonished that God answers prayer (12-17)

Peter realized that he had been rescued from prison and death. He went to the home of Mary, where the church had gathered to pray for him. When he knocked and called, the servant girl recognized his voice, but she was so astonished that she forgot to open the door. They finally let him in and he told them how the Lord had rescued him. Then he went into hiding for a time. God answers prayer.

2. Herod's death (18-25)

Herod had the guards executed. He thought he could destroy the church of God, but he himself died a miserable death. He exercised the power of life and death over the people of a certain province by controlling their food supply. He enjoyed their flattery when they called him a god. Immediately, an angel of God struck him down; he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to increase and spread.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to love and fear you--and to believe that you answer prayer.

One Word: The devil can't win when we pray

BARNABAS AND SAUL SENT AS MISSIONARIES

Acts 12:25-13:12

Key Verse: 13:2

1. An obedient church (12:25-13:3)

Barnabas and Saul finished their mission (11:30) and returned to Antioch. They took Barnabas' cousin, John Mark, with them. Then, while the godly leaders in Antioch were worshiping God and praying, the Holy Spirit directed them to send out missionaries. So, they commissioned and sent out Barnabas and Saul, their best Bible teachers, to challenge the stronghold of Satan on the front line of world mission.

2. To Cyprus (4-12)

Barnabas and Saul sailed to Cyprus, taking John Mark as their assistant. Barnabas was the team leader. They traveled throughout the island, preaching in synagogues, until they arrived in Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer named Elymas. He worked for Sergius Paulus, the proconsul. The proconsul wanted to hear the word of God, so he sent for them. When Elymas tried to block their Bible study, Saul rebuked him strongly. The Lord struck Elymas blind. That was enough for the proconsul--he became a believer. Saul became Paul.

Prayer: Lord, give me faith and courage to challenge even the strongholds of Satan.

One Word: God's word is powerful

THE JOURNEY TO PISIDIAN ANTIOCH

Acts 13:13-15

Key Verse: 13:15b

1. John Mark goes home (13)

The journey was more than young Mark had anticipated. Paul had now clearly taken over the leadership, and Paul was quite different from gentle Cousin Barnabas. Perhaps Mark had been shocked by the encounter with Elymas the sorcerer, and especially by Paul's strong language and uncompromising spirit. At any rate, when they left Cyprus and sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, Mark left them and went back to his mom in Jerusalem (12:12).

2. The first Sabbath in Antioch (14-15)

Paul and his companions traveled on to Antioch in Pisidia. Following his custom, Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. They sat down and listened to the reading of the Scriptures. When invited to speak words of encouragement to the brothers, Paul stood up and delivered a gospel message to the men of Israel and the Gentiles who worshiped God.

Prayer: Lord, help us to overcome hardships, and go through whatever doors you open for us to serve you as missionaries.

One Word: First to the Jews...

PAUL'S SERMON IN ANTIOCH (I)

(From Israel's Birth to John the Baptist)

Acts 13:16-25

Key Verse: 13:22b

1. God chose Israel (16-20a)

God called Israel to be his own possession. He wanted them to be a kingdom of priests through whom he might bless all people (Ex 19:6). He multiplied their numbers in Egypt, and by his almighty power, he led them out of Egypt. He was patient with them during their 40 years of desert training. Then he gave them victory over the Canaanite nations and established them in the promised land.

2. A man after God's own heart (20b-25)

After the moral confusion of the time of the judges, and the failure of the first king Saul, God made David their king. He was a man after God's own heart because he did everything God wanted him to do. God promised that from David's descendants he would bring to Israel the Savior. God kept that promise by sending Jesus. John the Baptist was the witness; he preached repentance, then he introduced Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, give me a sense of history so that I may know your heart. Help me to do what pleases you, and use me in your redemptive history.

One Word: Do what God wants you to do

PAUL'S SERMON IN ANTIOCH (II)

(The Message of Salvation)

Acts 13:26-31

Key Verse: 13:30

1. The words of the prophets fulfilled (26-29)

The message of salvation starts with what seemed to be a tragic mistake. The people of Jerusalem did not recognize the Messiah whom God had sent to them. They condemned Jesus to death. They had no power to kill him legally, so they asked Pilate, the Roman governor, to execute him. In condemning Jesus, the Jews unwittingly fulfilled the prophecies of Scripture. God's sovereign hand was in these events, and God doesn't make mistakes. He had sent his Son to die for sinners.

2. God raised him from the dead (30-31)

So Jesus was crucified. His body was taken down from the cross and put in a tomb. Then, an amazing thing happened, an event that revealed God's redemptive hand working in history. God raised Jesus from the dead. He accepted him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Many witnesses saw the risen Jesus. This is the gospel--the good news.

Prayer: I praise you, Lord, the Sovereign God, for you are working to carry out your redemptive purpose.

One Word: Jesus died and rose from death

THE GOOD NEWS

Acts 13:32-41

Key Verse: 13:38

1. God fulfilled his promise (32-37)

The resurrection of Jesus is attested by Scripture. God keeps his promises. Psalm 2 looks forward to the victory of the Son of God. In this Psalm, the Anointed King is proclaimed Son of God. By his resurrection, Jesus was proclaimed with power to be the Son of God (Ro 1:4). David longed for resurrection, and God promised him, "You will not let your Holy One see decay." David served his own generation, died and was buried. However, God did not forget his promise. He raised Jesus, David's descendant, from the dead. By his resurrection, Jesus conquered death and decay.

2. Forgiveness of sins through Jesus (38-41)

The resurrection of Jesus confirms him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). Through faith in Jesus' shed blood, we have forgiveness of sins. We must believe and not scoff at the amazing thing that God has done, for by faith in the risen Jesus we are justified--made right with God. Scoffers will wonder and perish.

Prayer: Lord, help me to serve my times with resurrection faith, as David did.

One Word: Good news of the resurrection

A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES

Acts 13:42-52

Key Verse: 13:46b,47

1. God's blessing and jealous men (42-45)

Many Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism received the message of the gospel gladly and wanted to hear more. When the apostles spoke the next Sabbath, almost the whole city turned out to hear them. How thirsty they were for God! But the Jewish leaders were filled with jealousy and began to talk abusively against Paul and what he was saying. Paul was sorry that these jealous Jews did not consider themselves worthy of eternal life. They lost the opportunity. God's history must pass them by.

2. Now we turn to the Gentiles (46-52)

Paul was not daunted by the Jewish rejection; he saw a wider door. He turned to the Gentiles. Isaiah's prophecy about Jesus was fulfilled: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:6). The Gentiles were glad, and they honored the word of God. Jewish persecution became more severe, and Paul and Barnabas had to leave, but the word of God spread.

Prayer: Lord, let the light of Jesus shine through me to the ends of the earth. Help me not be discouraged by rejection, but to see your broader purpose.

One Word: A light for the Gentiles

THEY CONTINUED TO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS

Acts 14:1-7

Key Verse: 14:7

1. The powerful message of God's grace (1-4)

Paul and Barnabas had been persecuted in Antioch. They shook the dust from their feet and went to Iconium, where they continued to speak boldly for the Lord. God blessed their ministry there. A division arose between believers and non-believers. The Jews who refused to believe tried to poison the minds of the Gentiles against the apostles. But God worked mightily, confirming the message of his grace, and many people believed.

2. They continued to preach (5-7)

Paul's gospel preaching left no room for people to be neutral. People either accepted the gospel and were changed, or they violently opposed it. When God's servants challenge the strongholds of sin, the gospel does not bring peace, but a sword. The apostles discovered a plot against their lives, so they fled to Lystra, and on to Derbe--but they continued to preach the good news.

Prayer: Lord, give me courage to speak your word boldly, even when there is opposition. Teach me uncompromising faith.

One Word: Preach the good news

TURN TO THE LIVING GOD

Acts 14:8-20

Key Verse: 14:15b

1. A lame man healed (8-13)

The people of Lystra lived in the darkness of superstition. They lived by their feelings. But as Paul preached the gospel to the inattentive crowd, he saw one man who was listening. He was a man crippled from birth. Paul saw that he had faith, and he healed him. His suddenly transformed life turned the crowd's indifference into intense excitement. Emotional excitement is not faith. They should have repented and believed the gospel, but they didn't. They called Paul and Barnabas Greek gods and tried to worship them.

2. Creation faith; resurrection faith (14-20)

The apostles refused their worship, tore their clothes in protest, and challenged the people to turn from worthless things and worship the Creator God. They tried to teach them Genesis. But the crowd, incited by some Jews, suddenly turned on Paul, stoned him, and left him for dead. By resurrection faith he got up and went back into the city.

Prayer: Lord, help me to preach Jesus and honor him only in every circumstance.

One Word: Worship the Creator God

WE MUST GO THROUGH MANY HARDSHIPS

Acts 14:21-28

Key Verse: 14:22

1. Encouraging the new believers (21-23)

The apostles won a large number of disciples in Derbe. Even though their lives had been threatened in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (Pisidia), they went back to these places to encourage

the new disciples. They encouraged them to have a positive attitude toward suffering, to put their hope in the kingdom of God, and to be true to the faith. They appointed elders (shepherds) and prayed for them with fasting prayer, committing them to the Lord.

2. Reporting to their prayer supporters (24-28)

After preaching in Perga, they took the most direct route back to Antioch (Syria), where they reported to the church. They reported about the great work of God through them, and about how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. This was the beginning of a new history. The church of Jesus Christ had become international and cross-cultural.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see your open door, and give me faith to go through it.

One Word: An open door and the work of God

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

Acts 15:1-11

Key Verse: 15:11

1. What is necessary for salvation? (1-5)

The answer to this question would either widen the missionary outreach of the church or put it in the small box of Judaism. Some Jews were teaching that the Gentile converts needed to be circumcised and become Jews in order to be saved. God, however, was doing his own work among the uncircumcised Gentiles (3). There are still people who teach that Jesus + something else (baptism, tongues, good works, etc.) is needed for salvation. What did the church decide?

2. By grace alone, through faith alone (6-11)

After much discussion, Peter gave his testimony. He told them how God had sent him to preach Jesus to the Roman centurion; Cornelius and his family had believed the gospel, and God himself had accepted them by giving them the Holy Spirit. He purified their hearts by faith--not by works. It was a Gentile Pentecost. Peter agreed with Paul. We are saved by God's grace when we put our trust in Jesus alone.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the all-sufficient gospel of Jesus, and for the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who put their faith in Jesus.

One Word: Saved by God's grace alone

GOD'S WORLD MISSION PURPOSE

Acts 15:12-21

Key Verse 15:14

1. God's purpose revealed in Scripture (12-18)

Barnabas and Paul testified to the assembly about the wonderful work of God among the Gentiles. James (the brother of Jesus and moderator of the Council) made a decision based on Scripture, not just on experience. The prophets looked forward to the time when the Descendant of David, the Messiah, would rebuild David's fallen tent, a time when all the Gentiles who bear the name of the Lord would come into that tent and be God's people. God chose the Jews and blessed them so that they could be a kingdom of priests to bring all the world back to God.

2. Don't make it hard for new believers (19-21)

So James concluded that God's people should welcome Gentile believers and not make it difficult for them to come to God. Only faith in Jesus is necessary for salvation. There are some things, however, which are offensive to God. Those who love God should know this and try to please him.

Prayer: Lord, help me to keep your scriptures and your world mission purpose in my heart, so that I can discern your will.

One Word: God wants us to be missionaries

ENCOURAGING NEW BELIEVERS

Acts 15:22-35

Key Verse: 15:31

1. A letter of encouragement and advice (22-29)

The letter assured Gentile Christians that they did not have to submit to the regulations of Judaism in order to be Christians. Two things are offensive to God in any age and in any culture: sexual immorality and idolatry. Both are expressions of unfaithfulness. All believers should abstain from these things. The advice to abstain from blood came from Ge 9:4 and Lev 17:11-12. It was an ancient law given by God to teach the preciousness of life, and to set the stage for the atonement. We should not forget that life is precious and that Jesus' blood atones for our sins.

2. Men of encouragement (30-35)

Judas and Silas were chosen to go with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch to deliver the letter from the Council. They not only made the decision of the Council clear, but they also taught the Bible and greatly encouraged the believers. After they left, Paul and Barnabas and many others continued a Bible teaching ministry.

Prayer: Lord, help me to build up your people with your word.

One Word: Encourage others with God's word

PAUL AND BARNABAS DISAGREE

Acts 15:36-41

Key Verse: 15:40,41

1. Let's go back and visit the brothers (36)

Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch as Bible teachers. There were many others there who also taught the Bible. Paul couldn't get the new converts in distant places off his mind. So he suggested to Barnabas that they make another trip to see how their sheep were doing.

2. Two servants of God part company (37-41)

Barnabas wanted to take John Mark in order to give his young cousin another chance. Paul did not think this wise, because Mark had deserted them on the previous journey. Barnabas' way was to encourage others and to bear with their weaknesses. Paul was adamant about not compromising. Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of God. Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus, his home territory. Both Paul's refusal to compromise and Barnabas' forgiving spirit helped Mark become a useful servant of God (2Ti 4:11).

Prayer: Lord, help me to be both forgiving and uncompromising--so that others may be built up in faith.

One Word: The Sovereign God trains men

PAUL CHOOSES TIMOTHY

Acts 16:1-5

Key Verse: 16:1

1. Paul decides to take Timothy (1-3)

Paul was looking for a young man whom he could train as a disciple and missionary. He had hoped to train Mark, but Mark could not endure the hardships of missionary life. When Paul returned to Lystra, where he had been stoned and left for dead, he met the small group of courageous believers. Among them were Timothy and his mother. Timothy had not been circumcised because his father was Greek. Paul had just won the battle about circumcision, and was visiting the churches with the good news that it was not necessary. But he circumcised Timothy anyway, because of the Jews. Perhaps he was training Timothy to be all things to all men.

2. Strengthened in the faith (4-5)

The believers were strengthened when they saw Paul's and Timothy's faith and, especially, when they learned that all they needed in order to be God's people was obedient faith.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be a good disciple of Jesus and a disciple-maker.

One Word: Be a disciple-maker

PAUL'S VISION

Acts 16:6-10

Key Verse: 16:9

1. God closes doors (6,7)

Paul thought about going into the populous and more advanced region of Asia Minor. Perhaps he had his eye on Ephesus. But he was kept by the Holy Spirit from going to Asia. He turned north and tried to enter Bithynia, but again, Jesus' Spirit stopped him. So, he went to Troas. When God closes one door, he opens another.

2. The man from Macedonia (8-10)

In Troas, Luke evidently joined the journey team, because he begins to say "we" (10). Troas was the last stop before entering Europe. Perhaps Paul had not really planned to cross the Aegean Sea and enter Europe, but that night he had a vision of a man from Macedonia begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." He accepted this as God's direction and went through the open door. This decision changed the course of Western history.

Prayer: Lord, help me not to worry about closed doors, but to look for your leading and follow it. Give me courage to go through the doors you open.

One Word: "Come over and help us."

LYDIA'S CONVERSION

Acts 16:11-15

Key Verse: 16:14

1. Philippi--European soil (11-12)

Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke left Asia Minor and entered Europe. It was a momentous event which would change the course of world history. They crossed the Aegean Sea, touched the island of Samothrace, then landed at Neapolis, the port city of Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. There was no Jewish synagogue in Philippi. On the

Sabbath, Paul and his companions went down to the riverside to look for a place of prayer. They found some women gathered there, so they spoke to them about Jesus.

2. Lydia, the open door to Europe (13-15)

Lydia was a Gentile business woman. She was spiritually thirsty, and she worshiped a God whom she did not know. When she heard the gospel from Paul, the Lord opened her heart. She accepted Jesus, and she and her household were baptized, making a clear commitment to Jesus and a proclamation before the world that she and her family were Christians. Her home became a house church.

Prayer: Lord, raise up a Lydia of faith and prayer in every country of the world.

One Word: The Lord opened her heart

INTERFERING IN BUSINESS TO SAVE A SOUL

Acts 16:16-24

Key Verse: 16:18

1. A captive girl set free (16-18)

On the way to the place of prayer, Paul was harassed by a slave girl with a spirit which made her clairvoyant. She earned a lot of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She kept on following Paul's party around, announcing that they were servants of the Most High God who taught the way to be saved. Paul was troubled. This girl seemed to be asking for help. So in the name of Jesus, Paul cast out the demon.

2. Angry businessmen (19-24)

The owners of the slave girl realized that they could no longer use her to make money. They were furious, and had Paul and Silas arrested and dragged before the authorities. The crowd joined in and God's servants were beaten and put in prison. Those who challenge a materialistic world with the gospel will surely get into trouble.

Prayer: Lord, help me to have a value system that puts people before money. Help me to challenge this materialistic society with the gospel.

One Word: Love people, not money

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

Acts 16:25-40

Key Verse: 16:31

1. Singing in prison (25-26)

Although Paul and Silas had been severely beaten and unjustly thrown into prison for helping a helpless girl, they did not become bitter or sorrowful. They spent the night praying and singing hymns to God. Then, suddenly, there was a violent earthquake and the prison doors flew open. Everyone's chains fell off.

2. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (27-40)

The open prison was an invitation to Paul and Silas to escape; it was also an opportunity to share the gospel. The jailor thought that the prisoners had escaped. He was responsible, so he tried to commit suicide. When he realized that Paul and Silas had not escaped, he fell trembling before them and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul shared the gospel with him and told him that he and his family could be saved by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. They believed and were baptized and were filled with joy.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to trust you and sing and pray in the worst of times.

One Word: Believe in Jesus and be saved

TROUBLE-MAKERS FOR JESUS

Acts 17:1-9

Key Verse: 17:6b

1. Teaching the Bible in the synagogue (1-4)

There was a synagogue in Thessalonica, and Paul went there on the Sabbath, as was his custom. For three weeks he taught them from the Bible that the Christ must suffer and rise from the dead, and he proclaimed, "Jesus is the Christ." A few Jews and many God-fearing Greeks-- along with some prominent women accepted Jesus.

2. Jason suffers for his faith (5-9)

The Jews were jealous. Perhaps they were upset by the prominent women who defected to Jesus, leaving their synagogue. They rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot. Jason had welcomed the missionaries into his house, so he became their target. They attacked his home and dragged him out. The missionaries had become infamous; they were branded as people who "caused trouble all over the world." Opposition to God's work starts with small things--like the jealousy of a few people.

Prayer: Lord, help me not to be surprised when Bible teaching gets me into trouble.

One Word: Making trouble for the devil

## THE NOBLE BEREANS

Acts 17:10-15

Key Verse: 17:11

1. Examining the Scriptures (10-12)

Paul and Silas slipped out of Thessalonica at night and went to Berea. In Berea also they went first to the Jewish synagogue and began to teach the Bible. The Bereans were eager Bible students. They did not just listen to Paul's preaching; they searched the Scriptures for themselves to see if what Paul and Silas said was true. As a result, many Jews, as well as some prominent Greek women and some Greek men, believed in Jesus. If we read the Bible with a humble and truth-seeking heart, we can meet Jesus.

2. More trouble (13-15)

The Jews in Thessalonica were determined to stop the fruitful work in Berea, so they came to stir up the crowds against the apostles. The brothers sent Paul to the coast, then on to Athens, while Silas and Timothy stayed a few days longer in Berea. They left behind a handful of believers. Opposition and persecution cannot stop the gospel.

Prayer: Lord, help me to study your word with a prayerful, truth-seeking heart.

One Word: Truth-seekers are noble people

## PAUL'S DISTRESS IN ATHENS

Acts 17:16-21

Key Verse: 17:16

1. Paul's distress (16)

Paul was alone in Athens, waiting for his co-workers to join him. Athens was the center of Greek culture and learning, but Paul did not go sight-seeing. He was not impressed by the magnificent Greek art and architecture. He was not moved by the world-famous Greek philosophers. He was distressed by the idols in the city. He saw Athens from God's point of view.

2. Paul preaches Jesus (17-21)

Paul went to the synagogue and market-place and taught the Bible to whoever would listen. When he preached the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers disputed with him. The Epicureans taught that man's chief end was happiness; the Stoics taught that people should suppress their desires and be self-sufficient. The Athenians

liked to hear interesting messages, but they only listened to be entertained. No one wanted to make a commitment to follow the truth.

Prayer: Lord, help me to testify to Jesus even in a sophisticated environment.

One Word: Preach Jesus anywhere, to anyone

PAUL'S MESSAGE TO THE ATHENIANS

Acts 17:22-34

Key Verse: 17:30,31

1. The unknown God made known (22-29)

Among the idols in the city was one altar inscribed "to an unknown God." People long for God but do not know him. So Paul began to teach Genesis. He proclaimed to them God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who made all nations of people from one man. He is the one who controls nature and history. God wants all men everywhere to seek him and love him for we are his offspring. We should not think that God is an image made of gold or stone by man's design, nor is he a vague “Force.”

2. People everywhere must repent (30-34)

God overlooked the ignorance of men in the past, but now he calls on people everywhere to repent. God has set a day when the world will be judged with justice. He has appointed Jesus as judge, and given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. Some sneered when Paul mentioned the resurrection, but a few wanted to hear more.

Prayer: Lord, I come to you with a repentant heart. Remove all idols from my heart.

One Word: Repent; worship the Creator God

A TENTMAKER IN CORINTH

Acts 18:1-8

Key Verse: 18:3

1. A tentmaker missionary (1-3)

Paul was a missionary who supported himself with his tent-making skill. In Corinth he met Aquila and Priscilla, immigrant Jewish refugees from Rome. They were also tentmakers by trade. They accepted Jesus and became Paul's co-workers. Paul made tents with them and pioneered the church in Corinth.

2. First to the Jews (4-8)

Timothy and Silas came from Berea to join Paul, and he devoted himself to preaching to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. When God worked in people's hearts and the numbers of believers grew, the unbelieving Jews opposed him and even became abusive. Paul did not back down, or try to compromise with them. He announced, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. ...I will go to the Gentiles." He left the synagogue and began meeting in the house next door. Many went with him, believed and were baptized.

Prayer: Lord, help me to depend on you and not be discouraged by so-called Christians who have no sense of mission.

One Word: Preach the gospel to everyone

KEEP ON SPEAKING; DON'T BE AFRAID

Acts 18:9-17

Key Verse 18:9

1. "I have many people in this city" (9-11)

After Paul boldly left the synagogue and turned the house next door into a Bible House, many Corinthians believed in Jesus and were baptized. The unbelieving Jews aggressively opposed him. Fear came into Paul's heart. Then the Lord visited him and said, "Don't be afraid... Keep on speaking." The Lord promised to be with him. So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching the Bible. There were many people with prepared hearts, waiting to hear the gospel.

2. A united attack defused (12-17)

God protected Paul, just as he had promised. The Jews again tried to make trouble. They even had Paul arrested and brought to court. They charged him with being a cult leader. Paul prepared to defend himself, but it was unnecessary, because Gallio, the proconsul, had them all ejected from the court. The Jews were so angry that they beat Sosthenes in order to get the attention of the proconsul.

Prayer: Lord, surely you have many people in this city. Help us to overcome opposition, and teach the Bible until your people come to know Jesus.

One Word: Don't be afraid; preach Christ

A HOUSE CHURCH ON THE MISSION FIELD

Acts 18:18-28

Key Verse: 18:26

1. Paul's third journey begins (18-23)

When Paul sailed from Corinth to complete his second journey, he took Priscilla and Aquila with him. He made a vow in Cenchrea, then visited Ephesus briefly. He left this missionary couple there to begin pioneer work, and sailed for home--Syrian Antioch-- via Jerusalem. After spending some time in Antioch he set out overland on his third journey. He visited and encouraged disciples in the churches he had previously pioneered. His destination was Ephesus.

2. Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos (24-28)

In the meantime, an able preacher named Apollos had come to Ephesus. He was a Bible scholar. He knew Jesus intellectually, but he did not know him personally. Priscilla and Aquila invited him to their home and taught him the Bible. They led him to Jesus, and the Holy Spirit worked in his heart. He became an effective Bible teacher, and a help to the believers in Ephesus, and later, in Corinth.

Prayer: Lord, raise up house churches where your word is taught throughout the world.

One Word: A house church ministry

DISCIPLE-MAKING IN THE HALL OF TYRANNUS

Acts 19:1-10

Key Verse: 19:9

1. 12 disciples who needed the Holy Spirit (1-7)

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he met some disciples who knew they were sinners and knew about repentance, but they did not have assurance of forgiveness. They had not tasted the new life that only comes with a personal relationship with Jesus. Paul told them to believe in Jesus; then, he placed his hands on them and prayed for them. The Holy Spirit began his transforming work and they were born again into God's family. Newborn Christians have to grow.

2. 12 disciples who needed training (8-10)

Paul continued teaching the Bible in the synagogue for awhile. He boldly taught about the kingdom of God. When unbelievers aroused opposition in the synagogue, he took the new disciples and moved to the hall of Tyrannus. He concentrated on teaching these few men, and on preaching the gospel to all who came. As a result, God's word spread throughout Asia. Paul learned a principle of missionary strategy.

Prayer: Lord, help me to teach your word boldly and to pray for a few faithful men and women. Help me to be a disciple-maker.

One Word: Disciples need training

"I MUST VISIT ROME ALSO"

Acts 19:11-22

Key Verse: 19:21

1. The power of God's word (11-20)

In Ephesus, God worked mightily through Paul. Others, seeking their own glory, tried to imitate him, but were only shamed. After the seven sons of Sceva were humiliated because of their self-glory seeking, the people of Ephesus were seized with fear of God; Jesus' name was held in high honor. Many people believed, confessed their sins and repented. The fruit of their repentance was very evident. God's work is not done by special methods, but through special men who love God, believe his word absolutely, and seek his glory alone.

2. Paul's decision (21-22)

When Paul concentrated his efforts on disciple-making in Ephesus, God worked throughout all Asia Minor. Now, Paul decided to visit Rome, the center of the Gentile world. But first, he had to make a dangerous visit to Jerusalem with an offering from the Gentile churches. God's church must learn a giving spirit, a sense of history and missionary vision (Ro 15:23-33).

Prayer: Lord, help me to love you, to obey your word, and to seek your glory, not my own.

One Word: "I must see Rome also"--world vision

WHEN THE GOSPEL CHALLENGES CULTURE

Acts 19:23-41

Key Verse: 19:23

1. A threat to business causes a riot (23-34)

When God works mightily, the devil works too. Demetrius' business was making silver shrines for the worship of the goddess Artemis. His business suffered because of Paul. Many people believed in Jesus and got rid of their idols. So Demetrius called a meeting of fellow craftsmen. His motives were economic, but he cleverly played on people's religious feelings and civic pride. He started a riot to drive Paul out of town. Godless people are moved to action when their pocketbooks are threatened.

2. The riot is quelled (35-41)

Paul's companions were seized and taken to the theater (29). Paul wanted to address the crowd, but friends and fellow believers restrained him (30-31). For two hours the rioters milled around in confusion, shouting praise to Artemis. Most didn't know why they were there. Then the city

clerk rebuked the mob and the explosive situation was defused. The door in Ephesus was closing.

Prayer: Lord, help us not to be surprised at opposition or persecution when we challenge a materialistic and immoral culture with the gospel.

One Word: The gospel challenges culture

AN IMPORTANT JOURNEY

Acts 20:1-6

Key Verse: 20:1

1. Encouraging the disciples (1-3)

The believers in Ephesus knew that making a commitment to Christ was dangerous, for when they followed Jesus, they challenged the materialism and hedonism of the Ephesian culture. Though his life was in danger, Paul was not discouraged. He encouraged the believers in Ephesus, then in Macedonia to give generously to help the poor believers in Jerusalem (1Co 8; Ro 15). He arrived in Corinth (Greece) and stayed there three months. He probably wrote Romans while he was there.

2. The trip to Syria begins (4-6)

When Paul started to sail from Corinth to Syria, he learned of a Jewish plot to kill him. He decided to take the inland route and sail from Philippi. This enabled him to help the Macedonian believers complete the pledges they had promised. He would then go to Jerusalem to deliver the offering, taking with him representatives from the Gentile churches in Europe and Asia Minor.

Prayer: Lord, give me eyes to see how you used adverse circumstances to accomplish your own world mission purpose.

One Word: The best encouragement

A SHORT VISIT IN TROAS

Acts 20:7-12

Key Verse: 20:10

1. A long meeting (7-9)

After spending the Passover week--Easter--in Philippi, Paul sailed from the rendezvous point of the journey team--Troas (5,6). The believers in Troas eagerly awaited him. Paul spoke at the

Sunday Worship Service. They planned to have dinner together after his message, but he felt that this was his final visit with them, so he kept on talking until midnight.

2. He is alive! (10-12)

The upstairs room was hot and the lamps made it hotter. Eutychus was sitting in the window, and as Paul talked on and on, he sank into a deep sleep and fell out of the 3rd story window to the ground. Paul put his arms around him and said, "Don't be alarmed! He's alive!" Then they ate dinner together, and Paul continued talking until dawn. They were encouraged by the word of God and by the demonstration of his life-giving power.

Prayer: Lord, help me to learn Paul's zeal and patience to plant God's word.

One Word: The word of God gives life

TEACHING REPENTANCE AND FAITH

Acts 20:13-21

Key Verse: 20:21

1. A farewell meeting in Miletus (13-17)

Paul was going to Jerusalem, where danger and possibly death awaited him. He met the elders of the Ephesian church in Miletus, for what might be the last time. He had important final words to say to his flock in Ephesus. He wanted to encourage and warn them, and give them direction for the future.

2. Teach repentance and faith (18-21)

Paul had worked among them with great humility and tears, but his ministry was not people-centered. He served the Lord. The Jews, the "good" religious people, became enemies of God and tools of Satan. But Paul did not fight them with political weapons. He depended on God, endured everything, and taught the gospel--repentance toward God and faith in Jesus. He was a diligent shepherd who taught his people the Bible both publicly and one-to-one; he said what needed to be said.

Prayer: Lord, help me to teach your word clearly and humbly, and help others to repent before you and have faith in Jesus.

One Word: Teach repentance and faith

IF ONLY I MAY COMPLETE THE TASK

Acts 20:22-27

Key Verse: 20:24

1. Prison and hardships await me (22-24)

We can learn from Paul not only the contents of gospel preaching, but also the gospel way of life. Paul knew that he was risking his life to go to Jerusalem, but he obeyed the Spirit's leading and went. He did not worry about his life; his one prayer topic was that he might finish the mission the Lord Jesus had given him. What was that mission? It was the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

2. Proclaim the whole will of God (25-27)

Paul knew that he would not meet his sheep in Ephesus again on earth. He had done his best to proclaim to them the whole will of God. He didn't just tell them the pleasant or easy things. He taught them the Bible and told them to repent of sin. Now, the responsibility for choosing or rejecting Christ and the way of truth was theirs.

Prayer: Lord, help me to live according to the gospel and teach others to do so. Help me to complete the task you gave me.

One Word: Declare the whole will of God

BE SHEPHERDS OF THE CHURCH OF GOD

Acts 20:28-31

Key Verse: 20:28

1. Keep watch over yourselves (28a)

Shepherds and Bible teachers must first keep watch over themselves. We can do this by daily prayer and Bible study, and by coming to Jesus our Shepherd with repentance and faith, seeking forgiveness and help, and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

2. Be shepherds of God's flock (28b-31)

The church belongs to God, for he bought it with his own blood. He calls men to be shepherds of his flock, and equips them with the Holy Spirit. A shepherd must feed the flock; a shepherd must protect God's flock from Satan's attacks, which come through old-wineskin-like people--"savage wolves." He must also protect God's sheep from ambitious people within the church, those who try to split the church and gather a following around themselves. We must be spiritually alert and on guard day and night, as Paul was. We must fight with the sword of the Spirit--the Bible--and with prayer.

Prayer: Lord, help me to walk close to you so that I can be an alert and good shepherd of your flock.

One Word: Take care of God's flock

IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE

Acts 20:32-38

Key Verse: 20:35b

1. I commit you to God and to his word (32)

Paul committed God's flock to God and to his word of grace. God's word builds us up and gives us an inheritance among the saints. God's word makes us holy and clean. God promised us an inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade, kept for us in heaven (1Pe 1:3).

2. The blessed life (33-38)

Paul shared a precious secret with the Ephesian elders before bidding them a tearful good-bye. He gave them Jesus' spiritual secret: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Paul had worked with his hands to supply his own needs and the needs of others. He taught and lived the giving life, in obedience to Jesus. Those who give to others are truly happy. Those who are always trying to get something are always dissatisfied and unhappy.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the inheritance which you have kept for me in heaven. Give me your word of grace, and help me to live a giving life.

One Word: Receive from God; give to others

FOR THE NAME OF JESUS

Acts 21:1-16 (Mon.) December 1

Key Verse: 21:13

1. On the way to Jerusalem (1-11)

Paul was on his way to Jerusalem with an offering from the Gentile churches for the believers there. He wanted to plant world mission vision in the narrow-minded Jewish believers, and a sense of God’s history in the Gentile believers. After a tearful parting with the Ephesian elders, he sailed to Tyre. He stayed with disciples there who urged him not to go to Jerusalem. In Caesarea, he stayed with Philip the evangelist. The prophet Agabus came, took Paul's belt, and demonstrated how the Jews in Jerusalem would bind Paul and hand him over to the Gentiles.

2. Ready to die for the name of Jesus (12-16)

Luke, those with Paul, and disciples in Caesarea begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul would not be dissuaded. He was ready to die for the name of Jesus. His friends gave up and said, “The Lord’s will be done.” Then they got ready and went with him to Jerusalem.

Prayer: Lord, help us to love Jesus and the mission he has given us. Help my faith to grow until I can do anything for the name of Jesus.

One Word: Ready to die for Jesus

PAUL'S ARRIVAL AT JERUSALEM

Acts 21:17-26

Key Verse: 21:19

1. Paul's report (17-19)

Paul brought a generous offering from the Gentile churches. He came with two prayer topics: That he would be protected from unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem, and that the brothers would accept the offering and his Gentile ministry (Ro 15:31). He reported in detail to the elders in Jerusalem what God had done among the Gentiles.

2. A church with no mission vision (20-26)

The elders praised God. But they did not understand the importance of world missions. They told Paul that God was also working among the Jews; his Gentile ministry was misunderstood and criticized by many believing Jews. Instead of praying about the problem, they asked Paul to join 4 men who had made a vow, pay their expenses, and offer sacrifices with them in the temple. This would show the Jews that Paul respected the Law. Paul humbly agreed. He did not let his human pride or his personal feelings separate him from his fellow believers.

Prayer: Lord, give me eyes to see your work and a heart to rejoice wholeheartedly.

One Word: Rejoice humbly to see God's work

PAUL'S ARREST

Acts 21:27-40

Key Verse: 21:27

1. The riot (27-31)

Paul submitted to the elders in Jerusalem and went to the temple to purify himself. When he had almost finished the 7 days of purification, he met some Jews from Asia--probably Ephesus--in the temple. They recognized him and began loudly accusing him of bringing Gentiles into the

temple. This charge was totally false, but it started a riot. There were men in Jerusalem who wanted to kill Paul. They dragged him from the temple and began to beat him.

2. Paul's arrest (32-40)

Roman soldiers came quickly to restore order. The commander saved Paul from the mob by arresting him. He tried to find out what Paul had done to cause a riot, but he could get no information from the crowd. But when Paul spoke in Greek, he gave him permission to address the crowd. Paul had the faith, courage and language to use this as an opportunity to testify about Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, help me to submit to spiritual elders and use every opportunity to testify to Jesus.

One Word: Fear God; testify to Jesus

PAUL'S TESTIMONY

Acts 22:1-21

Key Verse: 22:15,16

1. Paul's zeal to serve God (1-5)

In his zeal to serve God, Paul had lived as a strict Pharisee. He had studied under the most famous teachers, and was trained in the law. But he was convinced that the Jesus movement was a cult, and, in his zeal for God, he was determined to eradicate it.

2. Paul meets Jesus (6-16)

Saul was on his way to Damascus to arrest Jesus' people when the Risen Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light. He said, "Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?" Saul was led, blind, into the city, where a devout man named Ananias came and prayed for him; his sight was restored; he was baptized as a Christian and given God's instructions to be a witness to the Risen Jesus.

3. A special mission from God (17-21)

Jesus himself met Saul in Jerusalem and sent him as a missionary to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The word "Gentiles" triggered the mob.

Prayer: Lord, you alone can change murderers into life-giving servants of God.

One Word: Jesus says, "Go!"

PAUL THE ROMAN CITIZEN

Acts 22:22-29

Key Verse: 22:28

1. Rid the earth of him! (22-24)

When Paul told the crowd that Jesus had sent him to be a missionary to the Gentiles, they began to throw dust in the air and shout, "Rid the earth of him!" The Jews had been chosen by God to be a nation of priests, to bring the knowledge of God to the whole world. But they rejected the Messiah and they rejected their mission. They became Satan's tools, and screamed for the death of God's servant.

2. A Roman citizen (25-29)

No one could explain to this Roman soldier that the real problem was the Jewish rejection of their mission to the Gentiles. Paul was stretched out to be flogged. He did not cringe or become fearful. He challenged the officer's authority to flog a Roman citizen. God protected him. Paul's Roman citizenship would eventually take him to Rome.

Prayer: Lord, even though Satan doesn't like missionaries, help me to serve you as a missionary throughout my lifetime.

One Word: Don't be intimidated by Satan

"YOU WILL TESTIFY IN ROME"

Acts 22:30-23:11

Key Verse: 23:11

1. Paul testifies in Jerusalem (22:30-23:10)

Paul gave his personal testimony to a crowd of Jews in Jerusalem. When he mentioned his mission to the Gentiles, they rioted. The Romans had arrested him, but didn't know what to do with him, for he was a Roman citizen. They brought him to the Sanhedrin. He faced the men who were responsible for Jesus' death. He knew the bitter rivalry between the Pharisees and Sadducees. He testified to his hope in the resurrection and threw the council into confusion. For the Jews, the resurrection was a doctrinal dispute. For Paul, it was the practical reality of his life.

3. Take courage! (23:11)

Paul was alone. He was discouraged. His visit to Jerusalem had not brought unity; it had only intensified the division. His own people were enemies of Jesus. But the Risen Jesus visited him that night to give him courage and a promise. As he had testified to the Risen Jesus in Jerusalem, he would also testify in Rome.

Prayer: Lord, give me practical resurrection faith and courage to be your witness.

One Word: Take courage!

A PLOT THWARTED

Acts 23:12-35

Key Verse: 23:27

1. A solemn oath (12-15)

Forty men took a solemn oath not to eat anything until they had killed Paul. They asked the chief priests to petition the Roman commander to send Paul to the Sanhedrin for questioning. They planned to ambush him on the way to the meeting. It looked as if Paul would never leave Jerusalem alive. But God had one more missionary task for Paul. He must testify to Jesus in Rome. Satan hates world missions, so he used jealous, unbelieving Jews in a plot to destroy God's servant.

2. One step nearer Rome (16-35)

Paul's nephew discovered the plot and reported it. The commander quickly and secretly arranged for a military escort and transferred Paul, the Roman citizen, to Caesarea. He sent a letter to Governor Felix explaining what had happened. Satan cannot thwart God's plans. Paul was one step nearer Rome.

Prayer: Lord, hold my life and the lives of your servants in the hollow of your hand until you accomplish your purpose.

One Word: God thwarts Satan's plans

PAUL TESTIFIES BEFORE GOVERNORS

Acts 24:1-16

Key Verses: 24:14-16

1. The charges (1-9)

Paul's accusers arrived in Caesarea. He stood before Governor Felix to be tried. A lawyer named Tertullus brought the charges against Paul. He accused him of being a world-wide troublemaker and a cult leader. Paul's influence was indeed world-wide. He was the theologian and missionary who changed the course of western history.

2. Paul's defense (10-16)

Paul answered the vague charges against him with the facts. He was not guilty of desecrating the temple or of instigating riots. However, he admitted freely that he worshiped the God of

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a follower of the Way. Jesus is the Way; to follow him is to live according to truth. Jesus only is the way to God. Paul's faith was based on the Bible; his hope was in the resurrection of Jesus; he was sure of the final judgment. In view of this he said, "I strive to keep my conscience clear before God and men."

Prayer: Lord, help me to keep a clear conscience before you.

One Word: Follow Jesus' way

PAUL PREACHES TO FELIX

Acts 24:17-27

Key Verse: 24:25

1. Because of the resurrection (17-23)

Paul was innocent of the charges brought against him. He had done one thing that caused a disturbance: He had shouted to the Sanhedrin that he was on trial because of his faith in the resurrection. Felix knew that this was not a crime. He knew about Jesus and wanted to hear more, so he postponed the trial and kept Paul in prison, but gave him some freedom. He permitted his friends to visit him.

2. Don't call me; I'll call you (24-27)

Felix and his Jewish wife listened to Paul speak about faith in Jesus. He liked to hear about Jesus, but he didn't like to hear about righteousness, self-control or the coming judgment. He didn't want to repent, so he was afraid. He told Paul to leave--he would send for him at a more convenient time. He did not accept God's word, so he looked for some small material benefit from Paul. Paul gave him no bribe.

Prayer: Lord, help me to repent before your word each time I hear it.

One Word: Don't put it off--repent!

"I APPEAL TO CAESAR"

Acts 25:1-12

Key Verse: 25:11

1. A new effort to kill Paul (1-5)

After two years, the governorship of Judea passed into the hands of Festus. Paul's situation, however, remained the same. The world seemed to be controlled by politics, not by God. The Jews in Jerusalem made a new attempt to kill Paul. When the new governor visited Jerusalem,

they tried to persuade him to send Paul back to Jerusalem. They planned to ambush and kill him on the way. But Paul's life was in God's hand. Governor Festus insisted on trying Paul in Caesarea.

2. Paul uses his Roman citizenship (6-12)

Festus wanted to do the Jews a favor, so he asked Paul if he would return to Jerusalem and stand trial there. Paul knew that to return to Jerusalem was death. He invoked his Roman citizenship and claimed his right to a trial before Caesar. God was keeping his promise (23:11). He sent Paul to Rome in a most unexpected way--in chains.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for reminding me that you are the Sovereign God, and you control men and history and all things.

One Word: God keeps his promises

BEFORE GOVERNORS AND KINGS

Acts 25:13-27

Key Verse: 25:19

1. A dead man whom Paul claimed was alive (13-22)

Jesus told his apostles that they would stand before governors and kings as witnesses to Jesus (Mk 13:9b). Governor Festus discussed Paul's case with King Agrippa. He was at a loss how to investigate the charges because Paul had not been accused of anything illegal. The Jews were angry because Paul claimed that Jesus was alive. Festus asked King Agrippa's advice. God used this, and Paul testified to Jesus before kings and governors.

2. King Agrippa (23-27)

Festus welcomed King Agrippa and Bernice. Bernice was Agrippa's sister, but they lived together in an incestuous relationship. Agrippa was the great-grandson of Herod the Great. He was acquainted with both Judaism and Christianity. He wanted to hear Paul. Paul was ready to testify to Jesus anywhere, to anyone.

Prayer: Lord, turn adverse circumstances into opportunities to speak for Jesus; give me courage to speak to anyone, anywhere.

One Word: Testify to Jesus before anyone

PAUL'S TESTIMONY BEFORE AGRIPPA

Acts 26:1-18

Key Verse: 26:18

1. Because of my hope in God's promises (1-11)

Paul's credentials as a Jew and strict Pharisee were impeccable. Like all Pharisees, he believed that God could raise the dead and his hope was in the coming Messiah. He had diligently opposed all who believed in Jesus, and had done his best to silence Christians. He had even participated in the stoning of Stephen. Now, because of this hope he was on trial.

2. "Why do you kick against the goads?" (12-18)

The Risen Jesus appeared to Paul in a blinding light as he traveled toward Damascus to arrest Christians. Jesus called him by name, "Saul." He knew that Paul was struggling to reject what he knew in his heart was true. Jesus forgave Paul and commissioned him to preach the gospel of forgiveness to Jews and especially, to the Gentiles. This gospel turns men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. It gives freedom and holiness to all who believe.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for forgiving my sins through the blood of Jesus and setting me free from Satan's grip. Help me to testify to your grace and power.

One Word: Testify boldly to Jesus

OBEDIENT TO THE HEAVENLY VISION

Acts 26:19-32

Key Verse: 26:19

1. All men should repent and turn to God (19-23)

Paul continued his testimony to King Agrippa: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." He preached to Jew and Gentile that men should repent and turn to God. This is why the Jews tried to kill him. They did not want to repent; they did not like Gentiles. Paul discovered that the Bible taught that Christ must suffer and rise from death, and that this gospel must be proclaimed to everyone, including the Gentiles. Paul was not disobedient to the vision God had given him.

2. Except for these chains (24-32)

Festus, who was listening, became uncomfortable when Paul talked about repenting, but Paul knew that to repent and be forgiven through Jesus was God's best blessing--better than being a king. He had a compassionate heart for the poor king who was enslaved by sin. King Agrippa did not repent, but he was moved. He knew that Paul was innocent of any crime--and he knew that he was a sinner.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see all people as sinners in need of Jesus--just like me. Help me to be obedient to the heavenly vision.

One Word: Be obedient to share Jesus with everyone

PAUL SAILS FOR ROME

Acts 27:1-26

Key Verse: 27:23-24

1. Paul's warning (1-12)

Paul was turned over to a centurion named Julius, and they boarded a ship--destination, Rome. Luke was with them. They changed ships at Myra. As they sailed along the coast they encountered high winds. When they finally reached the Isle of Crete, Paul, an experienced traveler, advised them to winter there, for it was too late in the season to go further.

2. The storm (13-26)

A deceptively gentle wind tempted them to ignore Paul's warning, so they set sail. Then a hurricane struck. They were driven out to sea. The storm raged for many days and they could see neither sun nor stars. They gave up all hope of being saved. Paul the prisoner became their captain, for he had hope and direction, and God's vision. He told the terrified men that he would surely testify to Jesus before Caesar, and that because of him, God would spare all of their lives.

Prayer: Lord, give me your word and your vision, so that I may plant hope and courage in despairing people.

One Word: God’s servant in the storm

THE SHIPWRECK

Acts 27:27-44

Key Verse: 27:31

1. Paul takes charge (27-38)

One black night, after two weeks of being buffeted by the sea and driven by the wind, they sensed that land was near. They could be dashed against the rocks, so they dropped 4 anchors and prayed for daylight. Some sailors panicked and tried to desert the ship, but Paul told the soldiers that everyone must stay with the ship, so the soldiers stopped the deserters. Paul told them to eat something; he thanked God and ate some bread. They were greatly encouraged, and they followed him.

2. Everyone reached land safely (39-44)

When daylight came, they saw a sandy beach. When they attempted to run the ship aground on the beach, they hit a sandbar, the ship got stuck and was broken to pieces in the surf. When the soldiers tried to kill the prisoners to prevent their escape, the centurion protected them. Everyone reached the land safely, just as God had promised Paul.

Prayer: Lord, help me to depend on you for direction and help in any crisis.

One Word: Courage and direction from God

ON THE ISLE OF MALTA

Acts 28:1-10

Key Verse: 28:9

1. God's protection (1-6)

The islanders welcomed the shipwrecked refugees. Paul worked hard to help build a big bonfire. When a viper came out of the brushwood and bit him, everyone expected him to get sick and die. When nothing happened, they realized that he was a man of God. A potential tragedy became a sign of God's blessing, and a door was opened for the Apostle to do God's work (Mk 16:18).

2. A ministry of healing (7-10)

Publius, the chief official of the island, welcomed Paul and his party into his home. Paul prayed for his sick father, and God healed him. This triggered a healing ministry that kept Paul busy until they left--about three months later. God blessed the island that welcomed his servant. Dr. Luke was evidently an eyewitness.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for protecting your servants and blessing those who welcome them. Help me to be a blessing wherever I am.

One Word: God blesses the world through his servants

A RENTED HOUSE IN ROME

Acts 28:11-31

Key Verse: 28:30,31

1. Paul arrives in Rome (11-16)

Paul's arrival in Rome changed the course of history. When a few Christian brothers came to meet him, he was encouraged and he thanked God. He was a prisoner, but he was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. He would live there 2 years, preaching the gospel boldly

and without hindrance to all who came to see him (30,31). He also wrote letters which became a part of the New Testament.

2. Because of the hope of Israel (17-31)

Paul met with the Jewish leaders to explain to them why he was there in chains. He had committed no crime and he was not there to accuse the Jews of a crime. He was there because God sent him to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, the hope of Israel. The Jews rejected the gospel. This was a fulfillment of Scripture, and it was an open door to preach salvation to the Gentiles. So God began the conquest of Rome.

Prayer: Lord, continue to work through people who share the gospel with all who come.

One Word: A rented room in Rome