

Acts

An SIM Ethiopia TEE Course



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SIM



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THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Introduction

FIRST DAY

In this T.E.E. book we will be studying the New Testament book of Acts. The book of Acts is the story of the growth of the church after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It could be called the Acts of the Apostles as they spread the Gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts is an example of how Christians are to witness for Christ throughout the world in spite of persecution.

When you are studying this book, read carefully what is written in the study guide. Answer the questions carefully and thoughtfully. It is important to learn how to study God's Word on our own. We do this by learning how to ask questions and observe all that God's Word teaches. Therefore before you go on to the commentary, be sure to answer the questions and spend time thinking about the portion of scripture. You will see some things that the commentary has not talked about. Remember that a commentary is only one person's interpretation of what he has seen in God's Word. Think about the answers and try to apply the teachings that we will be studying into your life. God's Word is not only to be studied, but it is to be obeyed as well. Romans 15:4 says "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

This book is designed not only to be used as a study book, but as a commentary. You can use this book as a reference whenever you study or teach Acts.

Write the answers to the questions in an exercise book. If you do not have a Bible Dictionary try to get one to help you in your studies. If you can also study another commentary on Acts along with this course it will help you. If you have a new translation Bible, read from that as well.

The lessons are divided up into five days to help the student in his study. Try to complete each day's portion at one sitting. Since some of the lessons are longer than others, be sure to leave enough time to complete the whole lesson before the weekly meeting. In the lessons are many cross reference verses. Be sure to look up the ones that say "see." Those that do not say "see" can be studied if you have enough time, or studied at a later date.

Lesson One

Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles

The work of Jesus can be divided into two sections- 1) His time on earth and 2) His continuing work from heaven. The book of Acts begins the account of Jesus' work from heaven. Before he ascended to heaven Jesus gave His final command to His disciples, committing to them the task of continuing His work

on earth. He commanded that they go into all of the world and preach the Gospel about Him. (See Mt. 28:19-20)

In Acts we will see the exciting beginnings of the church in Jerusalem. We will see how the church was strengthened and grew and reached out into the world. There are many lessons in this account for the church today.

Question 1. Read Acts 1:1. To whom was Acts written? Compare this with Luke 1:1-4.
Q. 2. Read Acts 1-8:3 and begin a brief outline of the book. This week we will be reading through and outlining the book of Acts.

THE WRITER OF ACTS

The author of Acts very carefully records selected historic events of the early church. For the Gentiles, the writer's purpose is to show how Christianity started and spread. For the Jews, his purpose is to show that the rise of the church and the witness to the Gentiles are the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. (See Acts 2:16-21 and 3:24-26.)

The name of the writer of Acts is not mentioned in the book of Acts. However, the author begins by saying, "in my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach" which indicates that Acts is a continuation of a previous book. The other book addressed to Theophilus is the Gospel of Luke, which would indicate that the same author also wrote Acts. Church history tells us that the author of the two books is Luke. Luke not only heard the story of the spread of the Gospel from Peter and Paul, but he was part of the story. In some sections of Acts, Luke writes "we" and "us" indicating he was one of Paul's traveling companions. See Acts 16:10-17. (Acts 20:5; 21:18; 27:1; and 28:16)

Q. 3. Read Colossians 4:14. a) What kind of a man was Luke? b) What work did he do?

Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote the letter to the Colossian church. Luke was with him in Rome and perhaps ministered to Paul as a friend and physician. Luke may have written "The Acts of the Apostles" while he was with Paul in Rome.

SECOND DAY

Q. 4. Read Acts 8:4-15:34. Continue the outline you started yesterday by listing the main thoughts from this section of Scripture.

THE DATE ACTS WAS WRITTEN

We do not know the exact date that Luke wrote Acts. The date it was written is not given in the book, but the approximate date of the writing of Acts can be determined by the historical events mentioned in the book.

Q. 5. Read Acts 12:21-23; 11:28; and 18:12. Write the historical event mentioned in each of these verses.

The first time we read about the author of Acts in the book is in Acts 16:10-17 during Paul's second missionary journey. Luke travelled with Paul on part of his second missionary journey and also on his way

to Rome (59-60 A.D.) (Acts 20:13). The Acts account closes about 60 A.D. These dates are determined by recorded historical events mentioned in Acts and by some major events that are not mentioned. For instance, the burning of Rome in 64 A.D. is not mentioned so Acts was probably written before that time. Some of the recorded historical events in Acts which we can accurately date are:

a. The death of Herod Agrippa	44 A.D.	Acts 12:20-23
b. The famine in the time of Claudius	44-48 A.D.	Acts 11:28
c. The expulsion of Jews from Rome	49 A.D.	Acts 18:2
d. The rule of Gallio	52-53 A.D.	Acts 18:12
e. The rule of Felix	52-56 A.D.	Acts 23:26-24:27
f. The time of Festus	57-60 A.D.	Acts 24:27

These dates are historically recorded in other manuscripts outside of the Bible and place the date of the writing of Acts from 60-63 A.D.

THE REASON ACTS WAS WRITTEN

- Q. 6. Read Acts 1:1-4 and write the reason Luke is continuing his second book to Theophilus.
Q. 7. Why do you think Acts is an important book in the New Testament?
Q. 8. Read about Acts in the Bible Dictionary. Summarize what it says about the major purpose Acts was written.

Luke's careful and accurate writing of the details of the beginning of the church and its spread out into the world indicates that he was trying to write the story of Christian beginnings. Luke gathers together the story of Jesus and the story of the early church. His first book told "all that Jesus began to do and to teach" and was about Jesus' earthly life. This second volume deals with all that Jesus continued to do and teach from heaven through his followers. He continues His work through His disciples by the power of the Holy Spirit. The major purposes of the book of Acts are:

- a. To give a historical account of Christian origins, the founding of the church and the spread of the gospel.
- b. To give a Christian defense to Jews seeking to show them that Jesus is the Messiah. (See Acts 4:8-12.) He also gives a defense to the Gentiles showing how they too are now part of God's family. (See Acts 25:8-11.)
- c. To provide a guide for the on-going church by showing the teaching, church practices and spiritual example of the early church.
- d. To show the triumph of Christianity even under severe persecution.
- e. Acts also shows how the early church dealt with pagan thought, the Roman government, and the Greek-Hellenistic society of that time.

THIRD DAY

- Q. 9. Read Acts 15:36-21:16. Continue your outline of the book of Acts by listing the main points in this section.

THE MAJOR TEACHINGS OF ACTS

Acts is a transitional book between the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament was mainly concerning God's people, the Jews and God's relationship with them. In the New Testament God's program for the church involved both Jews and Gentiles. Just like during the times of a new government the laws go through a process of change, Acts also reflects the process of change from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Therefore, some of the things concerning the Holy Spirit, church government, baptism, etc. changed from the early chapters of Acts compared to the end. Teachings in Acts should always be compared with teaching found in the Epistles. Since most of the Epistles were written in the time period towards the end of Acts, they help us to better understand the teachings of the church. Paul wrote his letters to the churches as he travelled and while in prison, toward the end of his life.

Many people base their teachings only on Acts and so their teaching is unbalanced. Many cults arise because they do not examine and compare the teaching of the whole Word of God. In Acts 17:11 it is said of the Bereans: they "were of more noble character...for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

Q. 10. Why is this a good practice to follow to keep ourselves from falling into false teachings?

In our study of the book of Acts we will find four major teachings.

Q. 11. Look up the following verses: Acts 1:14, 24, 2:42, 4:31. List what we can learn about prayer in the life of the early church.

1. PRAYER. The book of Acts demonstrates the key place of prayer in the church. After Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples, along with the mother of Jesus and His brothers were constantly in prayer. (Acts 1:14) They prayed for guidance as they chose the one to replace Judas, who had betrayed Jesus. (Acts 1:24) The early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, fellowship and prayer. (Acts 2:42) After they prayed, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly. (Acts 4:31)

Note: you will find many other times of prayer. As we study the book of Acts make a list in your notebook of the things which happened as the result of prayer.

Q. 12. Why is prayer important to you and to your church? List examples of how God had used your prayers to do great things.

Q. 13. Read Acts 1:8. What statement did Jesus make concerning the work of the church?

2. WITNESS. The last command that Jesus gave the church was to witness to all people concerning him. (Acts 1:8) The early Christians were fearless to witness about the good news of Jesus Christ. The courage of Peter and John astonished the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish Court. (Acts 4:13) Peter and the other apostles, even after being in prison for witnessing said, "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29) Stephen died because of his boldness to witness. (Acts 7:55-59) Paul boldly witnessed in synagogues, before rulers and in prison. We will study more about this as we continue in the book of Acts.

Q. 14. Read the following verses: Acts 4:18-21, 5:17-18, 7:59-60, 12:1-4. Make of list of the people who faced persecution for their faith.

3. PERSECUTION. Throughout the book of Acts we constantly read of the Christians being persecuted. Peter and John were threatened. (Acts 4:18-21) The apostles were put in public jail. (Acts 5:17-18) Stephen was stoned to death. (Acts 7:59-60) Peter was put in prison and James was killed by the sword. (Acts 12:1-4) There are many more occasions when persecution plagued the early church. We can learn much from their willingness to suffer for Christ.

Q. 15. Have you been persecuted for your faith in Christ? Describe it and how you stood firm in your faith.

4. THE HOLY SPIRIT. The coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in the lives of all believers is first recorded in Acts. The power of the Holy Spirit was evident on the Day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-4) It was also seen as 3,000 believed on that day. (Acts 2:41) The apostles were given a new boldness and wisdom by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel message. The Holy Spirit led Philip, Peter, Paul and others, guiding them to people prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive Jesus Christ. Those who were beaten and in prison received the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Q. 16. How is the Holy Spirit working in your life?

FOURTH DAY

THE RELATION OF ACTS TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

Q. 17. Read Acts 21:17-28:31 and continue the outline of the book of Acts.

The Gospels were written by four different writers who were led to write about the life and death of Jesus while He was here on earth. The Gospels were written to the four general groups of people in the first century. Matthew was written for the Jews; Mark, for the Romans; Luke, for the other pagan Gentiles; and John, for the Christians.

In Acts we read how the disciples obeyed the command of Jesus to take the good news of salvation in Christ to all the world. This began a new age in God's plan for men. God no longer depended on the Jews alone to be His witness. He gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to both Jews and Gentiles. This was a completely new thought to the Jews, who believed that they alone were God's people. It was difficult for them to accept the Gentiles on an equal basis. Acts is a record of this transition of growth from a Jewish church to a church for all people. It shows some of the conflict between Jews and Gentiles concerning the place of the Gentiles in God's plan.

During this period of transition and afterward the Epistles of the New Testament were written. For instance, Paul wrote Ephesians and Colossians from prison in Rome. He probably wrote the 1 Corinthian letter from Ephesus, when he was there for two years during his second missionary journey. (See Acts 19:10.) Since these letters were written during the account of Acts, they must be studied with Acts in order to fully understand the principles for the early church.

Q. 18. Do you know some people who base their teachings for the church only on the book of Acts? List them and describe their teachings and why they are imbalanced.

OUTLINE OF ACTS

There are several ways we could outline Acts but this short outline gives the five main sections of the book. Your outline does not need to be exactly like this one, but did you include these main ideas?

1. The foundations of the church in Jerusalem. Acts 1:1-8:3.
2. The transition of the gospel from the Jews to include the Gentiles. Acts 8:4-11:18.
3. The Gentile church in the Roman Empire. Acts 11:19-15:35.
4. The ministry of the Apostle Paul. Acts 15:36-21:16.
5. The imprisonment of Paul. Acts 21:17-28:31.

AIM OF THIS STUDY

1. The aim of this study is to follow the growth of the Christian church from its beginning at Pentecost to its spread into the Gentile world. We will see the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Apostles and early believers to fulfill the commission that Jesus gave in Acts 1:8.
2. You should be able to trace on a map the outreach of the church from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria and out into the Gentile world.
3. You should be able to relate the problems of the early church to the problems in the church today.
4. You should see how the Holy Spirit led in the lives of the early believers giving them boldness, leading in their travels, comforting those in need, and apply it to things in your life today.

Keep these aims in mind as we study the book of Acts. Refer to them frequently.

FIFTH DAY

REVIEW

1. Why was Luke qualified to write the history of the early church?
2. Why is Acts an important book in the New Testament?
3. What are four major teachings in Acts?
4. What are the five purposes of Acts?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a. Are there cults in your area? Discuss their teaching and find the error from Scripture. You need to be informed and prepared to help others to stand against false teachings. How can church members be warned about false cults?
- b. How are the four major teachings found in the book of Acts observable in your church today? If not, why not? List ways your church can grow in all four of these areas.
- c. Make of list of why a study of the book of Acts is needed for you and your church. What do you hope to learn?

Lesson Two

Acts 1 and 2

FIRST DAY

ACTS 1:1-26

One of the unique blessings for those of us who live in the New Testament age is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In the Old Testament God put His Spirit on certain people for specific tasks or purposes. Sometimes when the task was done or sin entered the life of the Spirit-empowered person the Holy Spirit would leave. (e.g. King Saul- 1 Samuel 11:6, 16:14) However, in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit dwells in all of God's people and does not leave them when they sin. In our study of Acts, we will see the change in the work of the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament age to the New Testament age. This will help us understand better the work of the Holy Spirit in our days.

Jesus taught and trained His disciples to continue His work after He would leave and return to His Father. To help the disciples in the task he had given them to do, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit. (John 16:7-14) In the forty days after His resurrection, Jesus taught and prepared the disciples for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Acts is the beginning record of Jesus' work from heaven through the Holy Spirit. Beginning in Acts, God gives the Holy Spirit as a gift to every one who believes and accepts Jesus Christ.

Question 1. Read Acts 1 and 2. a) What did the disciples do while they waited for the Holy Spirit? b) What happened when the Holy Spirit came?

Before His death, Jesus had clearly told his disciples that He would go away. (See John 14:1-4) However, He knew that they would need proof of His resurrection and so for forty days Jesus appeared on the earth to the disciples. He knew that the witness of the resurrection was important, for unlike all other religions, Christianity is based upon the resurrection from the dead of the leader, Jesus Christ. Jesus also taught concerning His coming kingdom. Jesus warned that he would soon be leaving them. The disciples didn't fully comprehend His going away at that time, but they would remember it after He ascended. The promise of a coming kingdom also prepared the disciples for His going away.

Q. 2. Read Acts 1:1-26 and answer the following questions: a) 1) Who is the writer of Acts? 2) To whom did he write the book of Acts? (Look at last week's lesson.) b) How long was Jesus on earth after His resurrection? c) What did Jesus tell the disciples to do until the Holy Spirit was given? d) What happened to Judas Iscariot? e) Why did Peter say it was necessary to appoint someone in Judas' place?

The truthfulness of Christianity is based upon the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that he did rise from the dead is seen by the many people who saw him after his death. Jesus appeared to as many as 500 people at one time. He talked with them many times over a period of forty days. Ten of Jesus' appearances are recorded in the New Testament. (Matthew 28:9, 16-17; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:15-31; John 20:19-24, 26-28; 21:1-24; Acts 1:2-9, 9:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:5-8) What greater proof for the resurrection is necessary?

Q. 3. Why is the resurrection so important to the Christian faith?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very foundation of the Christian faith. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." This is because, without the resurrection there is no proof that Jesus was the perfect sacrifice and that God accepted his sacrifice for our sins. We would be like all other religions who follow a leader who is dead. The Holy Spirit confirms Jesus Christ's resurrection to the hearts of those who believe in Christ.

Jesus' final command to his disciples was, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) (See Matthew 28:18-20.) Acts 1:8 is the key verse for the book of Acts and is an outline of the book of Acts. The story of Acts shows how the Gospel spread from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the Roman empire.

Q. 4. Memorize Acts 1:8.

In Acts, Jesus assumes that all of his disciples would be witnesses of him. This is the church's major responsibility. Although the church can be involved in many good programs or works (i.e. development, medical, orphanages) its primary responsibility is to reach out to others with the Good News. We must be careful that these other things we do does not take away from our work of reaching the world with Christ.

Q. 5. a) How is your church fulfilling Acts 1:8? b) Describe how some groups have been distracted from this work to do other jobs.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus said the disciples responsibility to witness started in Jerusalem, their home city. We see this fulfilled in Acts 1-7. Jerusalem was the immediate community the church was in.

Then the church was to reach out to Judea, the nation of the Jews of which the disciples were citizens. The disciples were not only to be concerned with their immediate community but their whole nation. We see this fulfilled in Acts 8-11.

Third, the disciples were to reach out to those who were of different ethnic groups but similar to them in culture. They were to reach the Samaritans who lived in Palestine but were ethnically and religiously different. This work is mentioned in Acts 8. This would be like Amharas working with the Oromo people who are similar, but still different.

Finally, Jesus said the disciples were to be concerned with the whole world, nations and people who had nothing in common with them. This began to be fulfilled in Acts 10, but is especially seen in Acts 13-28.

This is a good outline for all churches responsibilities in witnessing. A church must seek to reach its Jerusalem, its immediate community. But it must also be concerned with its nation and with the different people groups living in that nation. This could be called the church's Judea and Samaria. But all of us must seek to reach out to the whole world with the Gospel.

Q. 6. a) What would be the Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the end of the world for your church? b) How is your church reaching or planning to reach all of these groups?

If we are involved in witnessing to others in our nation and around the world, we are still continuing the story of Acts, for the Gospel has to yet spread throughout the whole world. The witness of the followers of Jesus began in Jerusalem and we will study how it spread out from Jerusalem to the known world of that time.

Q. 7. Describe how you and your church are continuing on that witness to the whole world.

When the disciples asked if Jesus would restore His kingdom at that time, Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." (Acts 1:7)

Q. 8. Why do some people today try to set dates for Jesus' return?

The Christians in the early church expected Jesus to return very soon and set up His kingdom on earth. They did not realize that He would delay his return for almost 2000 years so far. All of us must live like Jesus will return in our life time. But we do not know when he will return. Let us live faithfully for him until he return for us. It is not only wrong for us to set dates for the coming of Christ, but this brings great dishonor to the name of Christ among unbelievers when the predicted date passes and Christ has not yet returned.

After commanding the disciples to witness concerning Him, Jesus said, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised ... John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:4-5)

John the Baptist called the people of Israel to repentance in preparation for the kingdom of God. The Jews knew God's Word of the Old Testament and baptism was a sign that they repented of disobedience to the Law of God. (See Matthew 3:6 and Mark 1:5)

Q. 9. a) What does your church teach about the reason for water baptism? b) What are some false teachings concerning water baptism that people believe?

From the beginning of the Christian church, water baptism has been practiced for all Christians. Baptism is a witness that the one who is baptized is a follower of Jesus. Baptism followed repentance for sin and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior. Paul speaks of baptism as being buried with Christ, or the putting away of the old life. (Romans 6:3-4) However, putting off the old life is a continuing day by day union with Christ in fellowship and obedience to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. The act of baptism has no power in itself, but is a witness that the person has received new life in Christ.

Q. 10. a) Have you been a witness of your faith in Christ by obeying His command to be baptized? If not, why not? b) Have most of the Christians in your church been baptized? If not, why not?

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a gift from the Father and is given when we receive Christ as Savior from our sin. Jesus Christ has redeemed man from sin and He gives new life to all who accept Him. The Holy Spirit gives power to live the new life.

After Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit, the disciples watched Jesus disappear in the clouds as he went to heaven. As they gazed after Him, two angels appeared and comforted them with the promise that Jesus

would return to earth the same way that He left in His resurrected body. This means that his return will be physical, visible, and most likely be on the Mount of Olives in clouds of glory. (See Matthew 24:30)

Q. 11. Are you looking for Jesus' return? How does this affect your life?

The disciples returned to Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit as Jesus had commanded them. They met with Mary, the mother of Jesus, His brothers and the women and were constantly in prayer. This is the first mention that the brothers of Jesus believed in Him. Before His resurrection they doubted Jesus. (See John 7:3-5.) We will see later that one of them became the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

As the believers waited for the Spirit, they studied the Old Testament scriptures. There, David foretold of another to be appointed to replace the one who became an enemy. (See Psalm 109:8.) The disciples saw this as a prophecy of Judas' having to be replaced as the twelfth disciple. After betraying Jesus, Judas returned the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and then hung himself. (See Matthew 27:3-10.) Later, perhaps because no one buried his body, it rotted, fell to the ground and burst. The money he returned to the priests was taken by the priests and used to buy a burial plot.

To fill Judas' place and become twelve apostles again, the apostles chose between Barsabbas and Matthias who had the two necessary qualifications to be an apostle. These qualifications were: 1) He must be one who had been with Jesus from His baptism by John to the day of His ascension. 2) He must be one who had witnessed Jesus' resurrection.

After the apostles prayed, the apostles cast lots and Matthias was appointed to take the place of Judas. Casting lots was a method used in Israel to determine God's will. However, there is no evidence that it was used after the coming of the Holy Spirit. Instead, for Christians today, God's will is revealed in the Scriptures. We should not seek to place tests in front of God or cast lots in order to determine God's will. Rather, we need to study God's Word to find God's will, and obey what God has revealed to us.

Q. 12. How do many Christians in Ethiopia determine the will of God in their lives?

There is no evidence in the New Testament that the disciples were wrong in choosing another disciple. Some say that since the Holy Spirit had not been given, they were outside of the will of God. Others say that Paul was to have been the twelfth disciple. This is not clear from the teachings of the New Testament.

The last words of Jesus on earth were concerning the Holy Spirit and the need for his followers to witness. Jesus told his disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit and the power that he would give for he knew that only through the power of the Holy Spirit can the Christian live and witness for the glory of God. While waiting for the Holy Spirit, the disciples spent time in prayer. They also prepared themselves for their future ministry by choosing a replacement for Judas.

The Holy Spirit is given by God to all his children when they believe in Jesus Christ. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to empower believers-so that they will live pure lives and so that they can witness boldly for Him.

Q. 13. How has the coming of the Holy Spirit in your life changed you?

SECOND DAY

ACTS 2:1-13

When Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples returned to Jerusalem and waited for the promised Holy Spirit. As they waited they studied God's Word and prayed. The promised gift of the Holy Spirit would prepare them to obey Jesus' last command, "You will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Ten days after Jesus' ascension, as the disciples were gathered for prayer, God sent the gift of His Holy Spirit. This began a new era of God's dealing with His people. When Jesus died for our sin and rose again, He opened a new way of direct communion with God. When Jesus ascended, the promised gift was sent. And now every believer receives the gift of God's Spirit when he becomes a child of God.

Q. 14. Read Acts 2:1-13 and answer the following questions:

Q. 15. a) 1) What was the gift from the Father which Jesus promised? 2) What were the signs which confirmed the gift? 3) To whom was the gift given? b) 1) Why were there so many people in Jerusalem? 2) From which countries did they come? List them.

When the Holy Spirit came, he arrived on the "Feast of Pentecost." Pentecost means fifty. It was also called "Feast of Weeks" as it was seven weeks or 50 days after the beginning of Passover. Since it was the completion of the barley harvest, it was also called "Feast of Harvest". (Leviticus 23:15-16) The Feast of Pentecost was one of the major religious celebrations of the Jews and one which all male Jews were to worship at the Temple. It also became the major religious holiday when Jews scattered throughout the world would attempt to get to Jerusalem to worship God and pay their tithes. This is why there were so many Jews from different nations present in Jerusalem when God sent the Spirit.

The people who were gathered in Jerusalem were Jews and Gentiles who had converted to Judaism from many surrounding countries. There were Jews from Northern Africa, Arabia, the Middle East, Asia Minor, and even as far away as Rome. God knowingly sent the Holy Spirit on this day, for these Jews who believed in Jesus would then carry the Gospel back to their homes when they returned from the feast spreading the Gospel throughout the world.

Q. 16. Look at the map in Appendix A in the back and locate where these Jews came from. Make a list of the modern countries that these places represent.

On the Day of Pentecost the followers of Jesus were all together in one place, waiting for the gift from God the Father as Jesus had commanded them. Jesus had promised, "You will receive power." The disciples had no power in themselves but they had been given the task of taking the gospel to the whole world. As they waited and prayed, they probably questioned how they could obey Jesus' last command. That command, "Go and make disciples of all nations" was not only given to the disciples but to Jesus' followers today.

Q. 17. a) Do you have the power that Jesus promised? b) How is this demonstrated in your life?

Q. 18. What are you doing to obey Jesus' command of witnessing to the whole world?

As the disciples waited and prayed, suddenly there was a sound like a mighty wind. The sound filled the house where they were sitting. What seemed to be tongues of fire came and rested on each of the believers, and all were filled with the Holy Spirit. The disciples immediately began to praise God in the languages of the many people who had gathered to see what was happening. The people were amazed to hear Galileans speak in their own languages. Some mocked the disciples claiming that they were drunk but others asked, "What does this mean?"

Q. 19. When God first sent the Holy Spirit, why did he give signs?

Q. 20. How do we know that we receive the Holy Spirit today?

Remember that the book of Acts was a transitional period between the Old and New Testament, when God began to communicate with men in a new way-through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, to make clear this era, God used these signs (the fire and the tongues) to show to all that the promised Holy Spirit had come and to confirm this change to those who knew only the Old Testament relationship with God through the feasts and sacrifices.

Today, God does not need to confirm the coming of the Holy Spirit through the gift of tongues. Rather, in the Bible, we have the written promise of God that He freely gives the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit Himself also bears witness with our spirit that we are sons of God. (See Romans 8:16 and 1 John 3:24) The greatest proof that the Holy Spirit lives in us is by the change that God works in our life when the fruit of the Spirit is seen in us. (Galatians 5:22-23)

This is the only recorded time when the believers spoke in tongues which consisted of the languages of other people. It is not clear from the other times when people spoke in tongues (Acts 8:14-17, 10:44-46, 19:1-7) whether these were known languages or unknown languages. However, it is clear from other scriptures that speaking in tongues is not required of all believers to prove that the Holy Spirit is in their lives. 1 Corinthians 12 makes it clear that the gift of tongues is only given to certain people and that it is considered one of the least important gifts.

Q. 21. How does this differ from what some Christians teach?

One of the dangers for all of us, even for those who claim to speak in tongues is that our worship can turn into an empty ritual if our hearts are not right. We must be careful that our worship has not become only a familiar exercise without the "spirit and truth." (Read John 4:24.) In the time of the prophet Amos, the Jews became complacent and there was much sin in their lives. God spoke through the prophet and said "I hate, I despise your religious feasts. I cannot stand your assemblies." (See Amos 5:21-27) The Jews were bringing their offerings and celebrating their feasts, which were intended to bring honor to God, but their hearts were not right. They were worshipping idols and not practicing justice.

We too can go to church, sing in the choir, pay our tithes, preach or teach the Bible, and even speak in tongues or perform miracles and not worship God in spirit and in truth. If there is sin in our lives or wrong motives for our service, God is displeased and our service and worship are empty.

Q. 22. Do you think your worship pleases God or are you just doing the traditional things? Give reasons for your answer.

The promised gift of the Holy Spirit gave the early Christians power to live and witness for Christ. We cannot serve Christ or live for Him unless we are obedient to God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Obedience releases God's power. On the other hand, disobedience and sin hinders the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us and His power is not displayed even though we continue to try to work for him.

Q. 23. Is there anything in your life which hinders the power of the Holy Spirit? If so, take time to confess your sin now.

With the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, the early apostles were able to change the world. But too often, today we show little evidence of the Holy Spirit's power. Perhaps this is why we make little impact on our world. If we saw the power of the Holy Spirit as demonstrated not in speaking in tongues but in powerful witness in word and in our lives, we could change the world. But in order to demonstrate that power, we must be completely surrendered to the will of God. Are we?

THIRD DAY

Acts 2:14-41

As Jews from many nations of the world gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost, the Holy Spirit arrived in great power announcing the beginning of the church. This caused confusion in the crowd with some interested in the event and others thinking that the people were drunk.

Peter, who was always a leader of the disciples, stood up and preached his Pentecost sermon. In their sermons to the Jews, the disciples often reviewed the early history of the people of Israel or Jews as we now know them. There was a purpose for this review of history. As you read the scripture see if you can discern Peter's purpose.

Q. 24. Read Acts 2:14-41 and answer the following questions: a) Who addressed the crowd? b) Give a key verse which summarizes Peter's message. c) To whom does Peter address his message? d) Which Old Testament prophets does Peter quote? e) What was Peter proving from the Old Testament writings? f) How did Peter answer their question "What shall we do?"

Peter stood up with the eleven apostles to explain to those around that these amazing things of five and speaking in tongues that the Jews were seeing and hearing were the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. The writings of the Old Testament prophets were familiar to the Jews and so Peter used them to explain to the people what God was doing.

Peter's address was to the Jews- to those from Jerusalem and visitors from other lands. He began by quoting from the prophecy of Joel. The apostles realized that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them was the beginning of a new era in God's working with people. They realized that the Old Testament age was now over. They were living in "the last days." One of the greatest signs that they were living in the last days was the fulfillment of the promise "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." The Holy Spirit was for all who would believe- Jews and Gentiles. Joel also said "Your sons and daughters will prophecy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." (Joel 2:28-32) Rather than just giving His Spirit to certain mighty men like in the Old

Testament, God now gives His Holy Spirit to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Age, sex or nationality makes no difference to God when he gives his Holy Spirit.

Q. 25. What should this teach us about our attitude to people of the opposite sex or of another tribe?

With the coming of the Holy Spirit, a second great blessing was made available to all who believe in Jesus. All people, no matter if they were men or women, slaves or servants, all could talk with God and God would talk with them. They did not have to go listen to others to receive God's message to them. The message of the gospel would not be confined to the Jewish religious leaders- the priests and elders. On the day of Pentecost and afterwards the power of the Holy Spirit caused people to prophecy and there were signs and wonders. These would be characteristics of the early church age proving the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Some of the prophecy of Joel has not been fulfilled yet. (See Acts 2:19-21 with Luke 21:11,25)

Q. 26. What part of Joel's message was not completely fulfilled at Pentecost?

After telling the Jews that the new age had arrived Peter presented Jesus Christ who is the center of the Gospel. His sermon is characteristic of the early sermons of the church, especially when addressing the Jews.

- 1) He reviews the public ministry of Jesus- His miracles and signs which prove his being the Messiah.
- 2) He tells of the resurrection of Jesus which confirmed that He was the Messiah, and that the disciples were eye-witnesses of this.
- 3) From the Old Testament prophecies, he proved that Jesus was the Messiah.
- 4) Lastly, he exhorted people to repent, believe, and accept Jesus Christ.

Q. 27. Which of these four things do you think is necessary to present to people living in Ethiopia? Which ones are not so important for the unsaved to know until after they are saved? Why?

The Jews could not understand how the Messiah whom they thought would free them from the bondage of Rome could die. There Peter took them back to the Old Testament prophecies again to show how the death of the Messiah had been foretold. David, in Psalm 16:10, spoke of the Messiah saying that the Holy One would die, but His body would not see corruption and that He would not remain in the grave. David was not speaking of himself, as his body was buried and his soul went to Sheol, the place of the dead. Peter said that the "Holy One" of David's Psalm is Jesus of Nazareth and God has raised him to life. Jesus ascended to the Father who sent the Holy Spirit who was poured out on Pentecost.

Then Peter said, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:36-39)

Q. 28. Have you acted on this invitation to receive Christ? It is meant for all who wish to become a part of God's family.

Q. 29. When you witness to others, how is your witness similar to Peter's sermon? How is it different? Why is it different?

Q. 30. Compare Acts 2:38 with Matthew 28:19. a) Do these verses contradict each other? b) Why did Peter say, "Be baptized in the name of Jesus" and Jesus say, "Baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit"?

Many people raise questions about why in the book of Acts baptism was in the name of Jesus and not in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit like commanded in Matthew 28:19. (See Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5) They use these verses to prove that in the New Testament there is no longer Father or Holy Spirit, but only Jesus. It is clear from the teachings of the New Testament that God although one, consists of three persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We read of God the Father sending the Son and both God the Father and Son sending the Holy Spirit. Although we cannot fully explain the Trinity, the fact that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all three God and live at the same time is clear. (John 3:16, John 14:16, 15:26, 2 Corinthians 13:14)

The reason that in the story of Acts the disciples baptized in the name of Jesus is because they were usually preaching to Jews or Gentiles who were following the Jewish religion. They already believed in God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The biggest issue for them was to believe that Jesus of Nazareth who died on the cross was God, the one who died for their sins. They demonstrated their belief in Jesus by being baptized in his name. But Jesus commanded, "Make disciples of all nations." The Gentiles would not have a knowledge of God as the Jews did, and would need to learn about God the Father, His Son and the Holy Spirit. For them, they had to demonstrate their belief by being baptized into the full person of the godhead- God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Q. 31. How would you answer those in the Apostolic Church from the Bible to show them how God, although one, is revealed in three persons?

We need to be careful to examine different teachings with the whole of God's Word. Usually, false teachings start when teachers take one verse of Scripture and base their teaching on the one or two verses that refer to that teaching. But remember, God's Word does not consist of only a few verses. We need to look at the whole of Scripture and base our beliefs on all of it, not just a few verses.

The Jewish religious leaders had always rejected that Jesus was from God. All through his message Peter stressed that all Jesus did was of God. God delivered Him to death. God raised Him from the dead. God exalted Him. This convinced many that Jesus truly was the Messiah.

On that Day of Pentecost, ten days after Jesus' ascension, the gospel witness went out in Jerusalem. The power of the Holy Spirit, speaking through Peter, convinced many to accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Savior. On that day three thousand were added to the number of believers.

What is the center of our Gospel witness? Is it telling people what they must not drink, smoke, or commit adultery? Many evangelists spend more time explaining about what people must do after they are saved rather than explain the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only belief in the Lord Jesus Christ that saves anyone. People can change their actions to obey our rules, but unless they place their whole faith in Jesus Christ they are lost. We must be careful in our witness not to mix laws and faith in Jesus Christ. Keeping of laws do not save us even though they might be good laws.

Q. 32. a) Give examples of how some people emphasize more the keeping of laws than believing in Jesus when they witness? b) Give examples of how you witness to others and what you share to them about the Lord Jesus Christ.

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 2:42-47

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit, the promised gift from God, came upon the believers and gave them power in their witness. The truth concerning Jesus Christ in the Scriptures and the power of the Holy Spirit drew many to the Lord. The Holy Spirit also produced spiritual growth in the lives of the new believers.

From our lesson today we will see how the Holy Spirit worked in the lives of those first Christians.

Q. 33. Read Acts 2:42-47 and answer the following questions: a) Describe the fellowship of the believers after that day of Pentecost. b) List the four activities in the lives of the believers found in Acts 2:42-47. c) Describe how these activities are found in your church?

It is not enough just to bring people to Jesus and then let them go their way. Rather, God desires that all who come to know him through the Lord Jesus Christ grow in the faith and knowledge. The last few verses of Acts 2 describe what the apostles did to help all of these new Christians grow in their faith.

Q. 34. What does your church do with new Christians? What type of follow-up and teaching are they given? How can this be improved?

The activities of the apostles centered around four main things:

First, there was the teaching given by the apostles. They had been with Jesus and taught by him, so were qualified to teach. When a person comes to Christ, his knowledge of the truth is often very small. Therefore, one of the things that must first be done with new Christians is to teach them basic truths from the word. They need to learn about prayer, witnessing, studying God's Word, and worshipping God. They also need to learn about things that please and displease God.

Secondly, there was fellowship or sharing. The early Christians realized that in order to grow strong in the Lord and in their new faith, they needed each other. They needed each other to explain the truths of the Gospel. They needed each other for encouragement during times of trials. They needed each other when they encountered financial problems. They learned to share their possessions as well as their faith in Christ.

Thirdly, there was the breaking of bread, another way of saying that they partook of the Lord's Supper. The early Christians were so eager to learn from the apostles about the Lord Jesus Christ that they did not return to their own homes. You will remember that many of the new Christians came from areas thousands of miles away from Jerusalem. Before they went back home they had to learn as much as possible so that they would not fall away from the faith when they went home. Most of the disciples came from Galilee and had no homes in Jerusalem. And so those Christians who lived in Jerusalem gladly opened their homes

and fed all of these new Christians. As they ate together they fellowshiped together and observed the Lord's Supper, which was a memorial of Jesus' death.

Finally, they prayed together. Prayer is the way we communicate with God. It is also the source that God uses to change our lives and work through us. The early Christians realized that prayer was very important to the growth of the Christian and the church.

Since the early Christians were still Jews, they continued their worship of God in the Temple. There they demonstrated the reality of their faith to all. Their joy and love was a witness that drew many others to believing in Jesus Christ. These same characteristics are needed in the church today to attract unbelievers to Christ.

In John 17:22-23 Jesus prayed for all believers, that we might be one as He and the Father are One. He prayed that by our unity the world would know who He was and believe on Him.

Q. 35. Is the unity among the believers in your church a witness of Christ to the world?

New Christians are usually full of the Lord when they first believe. At this time, it is very important to use the first few weeks carefully teaching the new Christian about the Lord Jesus Christ, getting them studying, praying, and witnessing. They need a lot of love and care from the other Christians. After a while their first love often begins to grow cold and they do not grow as much.

Q. 36. List ways your church can increase their care for new Christians.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament?
2. How is the ministry of the Holy Spirit different since Pentecost?
3. What proof is there of Jesus' resurrection?
4. What is the difference between the baptism of John the Baptist and Christian baptism?
5. When is a believer baptized by the Holy Spirit?
6. Why were signs and miracles more common at the beginning of the church?
7. What is true worship?
8. Why did the gospel messages to the Jews include references to Old Testament Jewish history and prophecies?
9. What were three important characteristics of the early church?
10. When is the power of the Holy Spirit hindered in a Christian's life?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a. 1) Using Acts 1:8, describe what is your church's Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and world.
2) List the areas that your church is not reaching.
3) How can your church improve on its outreach to all people?
- b. 1) What is the Christian's source of boldness and power to witness?

- 2) How do we hinder that power?
 - 3) How is that power evidenced in the church?
- c. 1) Why were signs and miracles especially needed at the beginning of the church?
- 2) How has God used them in the church of Ethiopia?
- d. 1) Why is the unity, love and fellowship in our churches today not as forceful a witness as in the time of the beginning church?
- 2) What is necessary in order to have God's power like in the early church?
- e. 1) Compare the things Peter used to share the Gospel with what most people share today. How are they similar? How are they different?
- 2) How can we learn to improve our witness by following Peter's message?

Lesson Three

Acts 3:1-4:37

FIRST DAY

ACTS 3:1-10

The story of Acts is the story of how Christianity grew from a small group of about 500 disciples to thousands of believers scattered throughout the ancient world. Last week we read how the Holy Spirit descended upon the small group of believers to prepare them for the work of God of reaching the whole world with the Gospel. The gift of speaking in tongues which came with the Holy Spirit was used by God to draw many Jews to hear the Gospel. As a result of Peter's first message, we read of 3,000 believing in Jesus Christ.

The church in Jerusalem continued to grow daily as the apostles preached the message that Jesus was the Messiah. As the people saw the unity, love, and fellowship of the believers, many were drawn to believe in Jesus Christ. These same three things- unity, love, and fellowship are still needed in our churches today to attract unbelievers to Christ. Are the unbelievers seeing these three things in your church?

How were the Jews to know that the message about Jesus Christ was really from God and not something made up by man? Throughout the history of Christianity God often uses different miracles to demonstrate to people that the message preached by the evangelists is true. So also, soon after the coming of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were enabled by God to perform miracles so that all would know that their message concerning Jesus Christ was true.

Question 1: a) How has God used a certain miracle in your church to prove to unbelievers that the message of Jesus Christ is true? b) What was the result?

Today we will study the first miracle performed by the apostles after Jesus had ascended to heaven and after the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Q. 2. Read Acts 3 and 4. What was the result of the first miracle that Peter performed?
Q. 3. Read Acts 3:1-10 again and answer the following questions: a) Where was the first miracle performed? b) Why were Peter and John going to the temple? c) What name did Peter and John use to bring healing to the man? d) After the lame person was healed, what was the reaction of the people?

Sometime soon after the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples Peter and John went to the temple to pray. The Jews had a practice of setting aside three special times of the day for prayer. If they could, they would go to the Temple to pray. The first time of prayer was at the third hour (9 am), the second time of prayer was at the ninth hour (3 pm) and the last time of prayer was at sunset.

In the early Christian church most of the believers were Jews, and Christianity was considered a part of Judaism. It was not considered a separate religion until about 64 A.D. Therefore, the early Jewish

Christians continued to worship and pray in the Temple or synagogues along with all of the other Jews. It was not until many years later that Christians began to worship separately in churches. The place of worship is not the most important thing for the Christian- rather it is the attitude of worship for as Jesus said we "must worship in Spirit and truth." (John 4:24)

Q. 4. a) Why do some Christians think that they can only worship in a church? b) Is this correct? c) What is the purpose of a church building?

When Peter and John entered the Temple, at one of the gates of the Temple which was called Beautiful, a man who was crippled from birth begged for money. The Jews thought that by giving money to the poor they gained special favor with God. Therefore many Jews would give to the poor as they entered the Temple. This made it a good place for all of the poor and beggars to come and beg for help.

Q. 5. How is this similar to the practices of some churches in Ethiopia?

When the man asked Peter and John to help him, Peter said to the crippled man, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you." The man hoped for money but when Peter said, "Look at us!" the crippled man looked in faith. (See Acts 3:16) Just how much faith he had we do not know- but it was enough for God to use to heal the cripple. Peter said, "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk!" and lifted him to his feet, instantly his legs and feet were healed and made strong. Leaping to his feet he began to walk. He began to praise God. Those around him who recognized that he was the lame man who had been begging outside of the temple were amazed.

Q. 6. Read Acts 1:8. What are two signs in the lives of Peter and John which were promised by Jesus?

Just before Jesus went to heaven he had promised the disciples two things. First, He promised them power through the Holy Spirit. This power was demonstrated in the healing of the lame man. But Jesus also promised that they would be witnesses. Tomorrow we will see how Peter used the opportunity provided by the miracle to witness to many people concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are two major things concerning miracles that we need to learn from this story.

First, the reason for the miracle was not just to help a poor crippled man. And it wasn't to bring glory to Peter and John. Rather, the major purpose when God works miracles is to prove to all that the message of the Gospel is real. God used this miracle to prepare the Jews in the Temple to listen to the message about Jesus Christ. The miracle was a witness to all people that Peter and John were the messengers of God continuing the ministry of Jesus Christ. People were attracted to listen to the Gospel when they saw the power of the Spirit demonstrated.

Second, we see that miracles are never done in the power of a certain individual, but in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. The authority to heal was not in the **name** of the Lord Jesus Christ, but in the person of Jesus, the Son of God, the risen Savior. The Jews used the word "name" to speak about the character and authority of God. And so when Peter said "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" he was proclaiming to all people that the power to heal did not rest in him, but in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was saying to all that the power to heal was given to him by Jesus and it was based upon Jesus' power that the person was healed. When miracles are performed, or when we do anything that God uses to bless people, we must

always be sure to give glory to God, and not to claim it for ourselves. Sometimes people whom God uses to perform a miracle think the power is in themselves and they take the glory from God.

Q. 7. a) Have you seen people work miracles? Describe the miracle. b) Did the glory go to Jesus or to the one who did the miracle? Explain.

Why did Peter use the name "Jesus Christ of Nazareth"? This is a name for Jesus found often in the Gospels and in Acts, but not in the Epistles. During this time, the name "Jesus" was very common. Peter wanted all to know which Jesus had granted him the authority to heal. It was Jesus, who came from Nazareth, not from any other part of Judea. And that Jesus was the Messiah, or the Christ, the one whom the Jews were expecting to save them.

Throughout the history of the church, there have been periods when God worked many miracles, and periods when there were few miracles. Usually, God works many miracles when the Gospel first reaches into a new area. But once the Gospel is well established, the number of miracles decreases. This is because the power of the Gospel has already been demonstrated. God does not perform miracles just to show His power. Remember, miracles are especially given to prove the truth of the Gospel to unbelievers.

We need to be very careful in how we view miracles today. Remember, Satan also can perform miracles. Throughout the centuries he has used witchdoctors to work miracles to keep people under his bondage. How do we know if it is God or Satan who does a miracle? There are two major tests.

First, when you see a miracle, ask yourself, to whom is the glory going for this miracle? Does it go to the person doing the miracle, or does it go to God? When God uses his servants to perform a miracle, the glory always goes to Him. Notice in our story of today, when the miracle was performed, the one healed and all of the people praised God and not Peter and John.

Second, we need to ask, what is the result of this miracle? Is it used for the spread of the Gospel, or does it only lead to the fame of the person? God's purpose in miracles is to use it to spread the Gospel, not build up an individual.

Q. 8. a) Describe a situation that you know of where the miracle did not bring glory to God or further the Gospel. b) Describe another miracle you know of where God got the glory and not man.

Remember, the greatest miracle is not the physical healing of a person. Rather, the greatest miracle is when God changes the life of a sinner and makes him the child of God. Do not get carried away looking for miracles. Rather, seek to be used of God to perform the greatest miracle, which is to introduce someone to Jesus Christ.

SECOND DAY

ACTS 3:11-26

The signs and wonders performed in the early church were given to get the attention of the observers and to confirm the power of the risen Christ and the witness of the Apostles. When Peter and John healed

a man who was crippled from birth, many people who were in the Temple were amazed and ready to listen to Peter's message.

Q. 9. What released God's power to heal that crippled man? (3:16)

We can only prove the power of Christ to others by presenting the evidence of changed lives. Our personal testimony is one of the most convincing proofs of our faith. People cannot deny a changed life.

Q. 10. Read Acts 3:11-26 and answer these questions. a) To whom did Peter address his message? b) List the titles given to Jesus in these verses. c) How does this sermon of Peter's resemble the one in Acts 2 at Pentecost? Compare Acts 2 and Acts 3:17-26.

After the healing of the cripple, the word quickly spread to other Jews who had gathered for worship in the temple. They were amazed to see the man who had been begging at the temple entrance healthy and praising God in the temple. Peter asked, "Why does this surprise you...as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" Peter was quick to deny that the miracle was by any power of his own. He said, "It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given complete healing to him, as you can all see." (Acts 3:12,16) Peter realized that it was the faith of the lame man which released God's power to heal.

Peter used the opportunity provided by the working of the miracle to witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the healing of the cripple was done in the name and therefore the power of Jesus, it proved to all that Jesus Christ was in fact the Messiah. It also convicted some of the Jews who refused to accept Him. No doubt many of those who saw the miracle had not long before watched Jesus Christ be crucified.

Peter's sermon centers on the proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Q. 11. How is this similar to how all of our sermons and witnessing should be?

Since many of these Jews had no doubt witnessed the death of Jesus just a few months before, Peter started his sermon from the crucifixion of Jesus. He accused the Jews of disowning the very one they had so eagerly been waiting for the Messiah. He called the Messiah **the Holy and Righteous One**, a popular name among the Jews for the Messiah. This is because the Jews realized that the coming Messiah would be holy, separate from sin. Also, his reign would be one of righteousness, not like the reign of earthly kings. Peter reminded them of their guilt in causing the death of Jesus and asking that a murderer be released in His place. Peter said, "You killed the **Author of Life**, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this." (verse 15)

In his sermon Peter used four special names for Christ:

- 1) The Servant of God. The idea of the Messiah being the servant of God comes from Isaiah. (Look at Isaiah 52:13-53:12) There God foretold of his obedient servant who would die for the sins of his people.
- 2) The Holy One. Jesus was the one who completely fulfilled God's desire for man by being holy. Unlike all other men, He did not sin.
- 3) The Righteous One. Jesus alone lived in proper relationship with God and man without sin.

- 4) The Author of Life. Peter realized that Jesus Christ was the source of life. Not only did Jesus give eternal life to those who believe in him, but Jesus is also the creator and sustainer of all life.

What should our witness to unbelievers include? Peter's sermon to the Jews offers a good example for us.

1. The Gospel must always center around the Lord Jesus. Because the Jews were familiar with God the Father, Peter showed them how Jesus' death was by the will and purpose of God the Father and not an accident. Peter then explained that although the Jews had acted in ignorance, God fulfilled what had been predicted by the prophets, that His Christ would suffer. In our witness we must share two major facts concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a. Unbelievers must know that Jesus died for their sins and paid the penalty for their sins so that they can now have fellowship with God.
 - b. We should also include the fact that Jesus has risen from the dead for we do not worship a dead Saviour. Peter said "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead."
2. We must also challenge others to personally put their faith in Jesus Christ to receive forgiveness of sins. They need to "repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out." These Jews could not deny the witness of those who had seen the risen Christ. Their witness was also strengthened by the healing of the cripple in the name of Jesus. Peter's message, as at Pentecost, was that Jesus is the Christ for whom the Jews were waiting. By killing Jesus, the Jews had rejected the God of their fathers--Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Even though Pilate could find no reason to kill Jesus, the Jews refused to allow Him to be released. But this all fit into the purpose and plan of God. For it was through the death of Jesus that salvation was made available to all people.

Because the Jews were waiting for their Messiah which had been promised in the Old Testament, Peter also told them that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus was the one who would one day restore to Israel all of the promises that God had given to them in the Old Testament. But, in order for those promises to be fulfilled, they had to first believe in Jesus Christ. Peter admonished the people to repent and turn to God, so their sins would be blotted out. He longed for the people to receive the same gift that he had received. Peter reminded them that Moses had said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people." (verse 22) He reminded them that from Samuel on the prophets had foretold the coming Messiah and that the Jews were sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God had made with their fathers. He explained that God raised up His Servant Jesus Christ to bless them by turning each one from their wicked ways.

Christ's second coming was promised by the prophets. His second coming will bring blessing to all peoples who are His children. He will bring blessing to the Jews, who are heirs of God's covenant with Abraham and to the Gentiles who have received Christ and His salvation.

3. But the Gospel message also contains a severe warning to those who do not believe. Peter warned them that "anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people." For those who believe, the Gospel promises eternal salvation. But to those who do not believe, the Gospel promises eternal damnation in hell.

Q. 12. Examine your own life. Have you ever personally accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior? If not, do so now before you face the judgment of God.

Q. 13. Describe how you include the above three things in your witness to an unbeliever.

The healing of the crippled man is a picture of the gospel message of salvation. It shows man's need--he was unable to help himself. In his need, he looked to Peter expecting help. It was his faith that healed him. Faith is believing that Christ alone has power and authority to give eternal life. Faith releases God's power in our lives. Obedience to the word continues to release His power in the lives of Christians.

We cannot produce faith. Faith is a response to Christ's love which was revealed on the cross. When we have assurance of His forgiveness, He gives us the ability to respond. (Acts 3:16) Faith is expressed by our acceptance of Him. The Holy Spirit, who gives the gift of faith to believe continues to give faith for needs in our lives. Faith is confidence that nothing is impossible with the Lord.

It is the Spirit of the resurrected Lord who gives healing power--physical, emotional and spiritual healing. It is the gift of faith which gives us courage to pray in the name of Jesus. Unless the prayer request glorifies Him, we do not pray in Jesus' name and His power is not released.

Q. 14. Read John 14:12-14 and 15:5-8. a) What does Jesus promise when we pray in his name? b) What condition is given in verse 7 in order to receive what we ask? c) Have you discovered the power of the name of Jesus?

Jesus' promise that we can ask for anything in his name and he will do it, does not mean that when we pray for something bad or selfishly God must give it to us. Praying in Jesus' name means that we are praying according to the will of God. Whenever we ask for things that will bring glory to God we can be confident that God hears our prayer and answers. Jesus tells us that the way we can know what will bring glory to God is by abiding in him. A believer will have no fruitfulness apart from his union and fellowship with Christ. Just as a branch out of contact with the vine is lifeless we too must live in Christ or we will be dead and useless.

Q. 15. List different prayer requests of yours that God has answered. Thank God for answering your prayers.

THIRD DAY

ACTS 4:1-22

In yesterday's lesson we saw that a crippled man was healed at Gate Beautiful. (Acts 3:2) This gate was the entrance to the largest and busiest of all the Temple courts. It was at the Court of the Gentiles where the animals used for sacrifice were sold and the money-changers had their tables. When the crowds gathered to see the man who was healed, the temple guard and the Sadducees came to investigate.

Today we will see that Christians must often make decisions between obedience to God and the authority of man. It is in these choices that our faith is tested. The decision may seem a small thing but it is often the beginning of compromise that destroys our witness for Christ. When a believer takes a clear stand for Christ, he may be ridiculed or persecuted but his witness is effective and God gives strength and peace of heart and purpose to life.

Q. 16. Read Acts 4:1-22 and answer these questions. a) Who were the Sadducees? Read about them in the Bible Dictionary. b) Why did the Sadducees object to Peter's teaching? c) What happened to Peter and John? d) How did the people respond to Peter's message?

When the priests and temple guards came to investigate what was happening in the temple, they arrested Peter and John. Peter and John were put into jail for the night and the next day were brought before the Jewish high court which was called the Sanhedrin. In the New Testament times the Sanhedrin included the high priests, the scribes or lawyers, the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

The scribes in the days of the New Testament were special men, usually priests, who copied the Old Testament books into a new book. This was necessary because this was the only way the Bible could be duplicated. Because they spent so much of their time copying the law, they were considered experts in interpreting the law. In this they were called upon to give decisions in the meaning of the law, often acting as judges in the courts. Jesus often clashed with these men in their understanding of the law.

Also in the Sanhedrin were two other groups- the Sadducees and Pharisees. (Matthew 26:3,57, and 59) The Sadducees were both a religious group and a political group of the Jews. They were not very popular with the people and were made up mainly of rich priests and landowners. During the times of Jesus, the high priest and his family were all part of the Sadducee group having bought their right to the priesthood from the Romans. They followed closely the teachings of the Five Books of Moses, but denied the teachings that there was resurrection from the dead, judgment on those who had died, or that there were demons or angels. The Jewish court members were mostly Sadducees. Because they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, when Peter preached about Jesus' resurrection they became very angry.

The Pharisees were also a religious and political group of Jews. They were also members of the Sanhedrin. They continually fought with the Sadducees for political control over the Jewish people. The Pharisees, although a smaller group than the Sadducees, gained their support more from the common people. They sought to apply the Old Testament law in such a way as to make life easier for the people to follow, usually by making up many new laws for people to obey.

All three of these parties made up the spiritual and political leaders of the nation of Israel. Like the high court, they determined who was living according to the Old Testament laws and passed judgment on those who went against the law. It was this court that had sentenced Jesus to death not too many days earlier. Now these men questioned Peter and John about how they had healed the man.

Q. 17. What are two things that the Sanhedrin saw in the lives of Peter and John that amazed them?

Q. 18. Why were the Sanhedrin unable to deny the miracle that Peter did?

Q. 19. Have you ever been questioned or judged because of some good thing you have done? Explain.

Peter boldly answered the Sanhedrin's question by saying, "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth ... that this man stands before you healed. He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'" (Psalm 118:22) Peter reminded these Jewish leaders of the statement of Jesus not long before. The Jewish leaders were very familiar with the Old Testament so immediately knew Peter was referring to their Messiah. Peter clearly placed the blame for the death of the Messiah upon them. But he also reminded them that Jesus had risen from the dead as proof of his being God's Son, the Messiah.

Then Peter made a statement which is the basis of the gospel message. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."(Acts 4:12)

Q. 20. Verse 12 is a key verse in Acts 4. Memorize this verse now before you proceed.

These Jews thought that if they followed the Old Testament, they were saved. But Peter showed them that since the coming of Jesus, belief in God the Father was not enough. They had to also believe in the death of Jesus Christ for their sins and in his resurrection. There are many people who say they believe in God, but they expect to get to heaven in the name of another prophet or mediator or they try to earn their way to heaven by doing some good deeds. But the Bible tells us that there is only one way to God- and that is through Jesus Christ.

Q. 21. What does this mean for those who do not believe in Jesus Christ but in some other god or religious leader?

Q. 22. Read 1 Timothy 2:5. Who is the only mediator between God and men?

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) Many people think that if they are good enough, or if they follow Mohammed's or someone else's teaching they hope to get to heaven. But the Bible tells us that there is salvation in no other name or person than Jesus. There are many people in the world today who do not understand this.

Q. 23. a) What is your church doing to explain this message? b) Can you think of people in your community who need to hear about this truth? Who are they?

The Sanhedrin could not deny the healing of the crippled man. He stood there with Peter and John praising God that he had been healed. The Sanhedrin was afraid that the teaching about Jesus and miracles would threaten their authority and power over the people. But they also knew that all of Jerusalem knew of the miracles and were praising God and so they could not punish Peter and John. Their only recourse was to order Peter and John not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

Peter and John had a choice to make. Should they obey the command of the Sanhedrin or the command of Jesus? Jesus had said, "you will be my witnesses." (Acts 1:8) And "Go...and teach the gospel" (Matthew 28:19-20). Their answer to the Council was, "judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19- 20) Peter and John decided that they must obey God. When the commands of those in authority are directly in opposition to the commands of God, the Christian must always give priority to the commands of God- the King of kings. But when he then disobeys the commands of those in authority, the Christian must realize that those in political authority can punish him. Believers must accept this punishment with patience. They have to bear the consequences of their decision. Sometimes God protects his children from harm when they witness for Him (i.e. Daniel 3:16-18.) But other times they face imprisonment or death as Stephen did in Acts 7.

The Sanhedrin was amazed at the courage of Peter and John to oppose them. They marveled and recognized that they had been with Jesus- the one they had crucified and whom Peter preached had risen from the dead.

Q. 24. In what way does fear of men sometimes make you silent when you ought to speak and witness about God?

Q. 25. In what way do people recognize that you belong to Jesus? How is your life revealing Christ to those around you?

There was as yet nothing that the religious leaders could do against Peter and John. They had been threatened by the popularity of Jesus so that they condemned Jesus to death. Now, through the work of the disciples, the work of Jesus continued and this was still a threat to their power. Finally, they commanded Peter and John not to preach in Jesus' name and let them go.

FOURTH DAY

Acts 4:23-37

Peter and John had preached the gospel and healed a crippled man. They had been put in jail and threatened because of their message and good deed. When they were released they returned to the other Christians, realizing that the hostility against them was increasing. This week we will see their reaction to the persecution.

Today there is a world-wide increase of opposition against the Word of God. The opposition is against the moral standard of God's Word. We can learn from the example of the early believers. They responded with the greatest weapon the Christian has against a hostile world, which is prayer.

The two apostles came from the hostile council back to the Christians, who had probably been praying for them. They reported all that had happened and told them the warnings and threats that the chief priests and elders had made against them. When the others heard the report, they lifted their voices to God in prayer.

Q. 26. Read Acts 4:23-37 and answer the following questions. a) To whom did the believers address their prayers? b) What did this address reveal about the faith of the believers? c) What was their request of God, when they prayed? d) How did God respond when they prayed? e) How did the believers respond to God's obvious answer? f) Why did the believers share their possessions? g) Who was Barnabas and what is the meaning of his name? h) Why did Barnabas sell his land?

As the Christians heard the report of Peter and John they began to pray. They addressed God as "Sovereign Lord" or "Absolute Ruler". They believed that God was in complete control of all things, even the rulers on earth and their decisions. They acknowledged God as Creator saying, "You made the heaven and the earth and everything in them."

Q. 27. When you pray, do you pray with confidence that God is the Creator, and sovereignly in control of the universe? How does this affect your prayers?

The believers prayed with confidence because they saw God's Word being fulfilled in the events around them. They quoted from David's Psalm 2:1-2. The Jewish Old Testament scholars believed this Psalm to refer to the Messiah. The Christians believed it was written by David, but that the Spirit spoke from the foreknowledge of God, and they were seeing it fulfilled. The Christians now realized that the

conspiracy against Jesus by Herod, Pilate, the Jewish people and the Roman soldiers was permitted by God and was according to His plan. The death of Jesus was a victory not a defeat.

Q. 28. Have you seen God use the evil deeds of men to accomplish His purpose? Explain.

Some years ago five young men went into the jungles of South America to take the gospel to a dangerous tribe of Indians. All five men were killed by the Auca Indians but as a result of their deaths, the wife of one of the men and another one's sister were able to share the gospel with those people. As the news of the tragedy spread around the world many young people told the Lord that they would go in place of the five who were killed. Many more missionaries went to many places in the world to people who had not heard the gospel. The death of these five young men was used by God to further the Gospel.

Q. 29. Have you seen God use a death, illness or accident to speak to someone who was resisting Him? Explain.

After praising God for fulfilling His promises and confirming their faith that He was in control, notice what the early believers asked of God. They knew that they were in danger and asked God to notice it. They did not ask that the threats would cease, or that they be protected from persecution. The Christians only asked for courage to speak the word of God and that God would continue to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders. They wanted strength so they would not fail in the work God gave them to do. They wanted the glory to go to God through the name of His servant, Jesus Christ.

Q. 30. How should we pray when we are threatened with difficulty and persecution?

Q. 31. When the Christians had prayed how did God answer their prayers?

Perhaps we would like God to answer our prayer as immediately and clearly as He answered the Christians' prayer that day. Though God does not shake the building as He did that day, we have His promises in His Word. In Acts 4:24-30 the Christians had confidence when they prayed because they were abiding in Christ and obeying His commands. This caused them to ask according to His will.

Q. 32. Read 1 John 5:14,3:21-22 and John 15:7. What do these verses say give us confidence as we pray?

Q. 33. Do you have confidence when you pray? If not, in the light of the following verses examine the reason. See Isaiah 59:2 and James 1:5-8 and 4:2-3. What are the reasons we do not get the answers we want when we pray?

The confidence of the believers in Jerusalem that day was confirmed when the place where they were praying shook like there was an earthquake. They spoke the Word of God boldly, because they were filled with the Holy Spirit. The early Christians did not have many of the written testimony and promises to guide and assure them which we have in the New Testament. We can have confidence when we pray that whatever answer God gives, it is the best for us.

Persecution drew the believers together in prayer. As they prayed together there was unity and concern for each other. They were of one purpose and were concerned about each others needs. Rather than selfishly claiming possessions they shared everything they had. Satan knows there is strength in unity and tries to destroy it. Next week we will see that even good deeds can be corrupted by wrong motives.

Q. 34. a) Are the believers in your church "one in heart and mind"? b) How is this demonstrated? If not, why not? c) How has persecution helped in the past to accomplish this? d) What can be done to encourage greater unity?

The unity and love among the believers gave them concern for those who were poor. Those who had more, shared their possessions with those who lacked. Those who had houses and land sold them and brought the money to the Apostles, who distributed it to those in need. The rich did not give because they were forced to but because they were lovingly concerned about the poor.

Q. 35. What should be a Christian's motive in giving to the poor?

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus was one of the believers. The Apostles called him "Barnabas," which means Son of Encouragement. Later we will learn more about Barnabas and his ministry of encouraging others. (Acts 11:22-24) Barnabas sold a field which he owned and brought the money and laid it at the Apostles' feet. It was given in love, to help others. There was no rule or law among the believers telling them to sell their land or share their possessions. They were living together, eating and praying together in a fellowship which helped to strengthen them. This was a great witness to the people around them.

Q. 36. What does God's Word say about giving? Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-8, Matthew 6:1-4; Deuteronomy 16:17; 1 Corinthians 16:2. Are you practicing this in your life? Ask yourself the following questions: 1) How should we give? 2) How much should we give? 3) When should we give? 4) Why should we give? 5) Why is the motive for giving important?

The early Christians and Barnabas gave their gifts with the right motive. It was with love and concern for those who had need. They practiced the advice Paul gave later in Galatians 6:2 which says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Q. 37. How is the giving in your church used to help those in need?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is one of the clearest proofs or evidences of the truth of Christianity?
2. What was the purpose of the signs and wonders in the early church?
3. What caused Peter to boldly witness about the gospel?
4. Who were the Sanhedrin?
5. What did the Sadducees believe?
6. Give a brief explanation of what the gospel message includes.
7. Give a key verse in Acts 4.
8. What gives confidence when we pray?
9. What do Christians today have which strengthens our faith, that the early Christians did not have?
10. What can we learn from the example of Barnabas?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a) 1) If someone wants proof that Christianity is from God, what is the best confirmation?
2) How have you seen this proven in your church?
- b) When is it right to disobey civil authority and obey God? Give examples of how this has happened in your lives.
- c) 1) What is the Christian's responsibility to the poor?
2) Give examples from your lives and from the ministry of the church as to how this is being fulfilled.
- d) Discuss things that prevent prayers from being answered. How can you teach the members of your church about this?

Lesson Four

Acts 5:1-6:7

FIRST DAY

Acts 5:1-11

Last week we studied the story of the healing of the crippled man and the disciples first imprisonment because of their testimony of Jesus. We saw that even though ordered by the Jewish leaders not to teach about Jesus, they answered "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." The command of Jesus to witness took precedence over the command of the Jewish leaders not to teach about Jesus.

After Peter and John were released from prison, God again confirmed to them that the Holy Spirit was with them. Part of the demonstration of the presence of the Holy Spirit among the early Christians was in the fellowship that the early Christians had with each other. Through the baptism of the Spirit they were all now members of one body, the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:13) This fellowship made them willing to share their possessions. When they saw someone in need, those who had possessions or land sold them and gave the money to the apostles to divide among the needy. Today, however, we will see how Satan sought to corrupt this fellowship with hypocrisy and sin.

When there is sin in the church, what should the church do about it? In today's lesson, God dramatically dealt with Ananias and Sapphira to show the people how much He hates sin. In the church, there is a temptation for us to try to appear to be more spiritual than we are. This is hypocrisy. God showed the early church that they cannot hide sin from Him.

Question 1. a) Is there hypocrisy in your life? How is it seen? b) Are you pretending to be someone you are not, or hiding some sin? If the answer is yes, take time right now to ask God's forgiveness.

Q. 2. Read Acts 5:1-6:7. a) As the opposition increased, how did the apostles respond? b) Because of the increasing number of people to care for, what did the apostles do?

Q. 3. Read Acts 5:1-11 again and answer these questions. a) What was wrong with Ananias' gift? b) What was his purpose in trying to deceive the apostles? c) How did Peter know the plan of Ananias and Sapphira? d) Why do you think God judged so severely and so quickly?

We saw last week how the Christians in Jerusalem shared their possessions with others because of their love for one another. Part of the reason that the early Christians were so eager to sell their earthly possessions was because they expected the Lord to return soon so they may have believed they would not need earthly things. God had not commanded them to do this. In fact, some scholars think that because these early Christians sold their houses, businesses, etc. this is one reason the Jerusalem church later was so poor. We read in Acts 11:27-30 and 2 Corinthians that the Gentile Christians had to help their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ in Jerusalem financially at least twice. God wants us to always help fellow Christians and others who are in need. But, in doing so we need wisdom so that we can continue to help others over a long period of time and not just immediately.

Last week we read about the generous gift that Joseph, the one they called Barnabas, gave to the apostles. This no doubt caused a special joy for all the believers and Barnabas was held in great honor. Ananias and his wife Sapphira, two other believers in the Jerusalem church, also decided to sell a piece of land. But their motives were different. Whereas Barnabas gave out of a generous spirit and a desire to help the believers, Ananias and Sapphira sold their house in order to look spiritual in the eyes of the believers. They no doubt wanted praise like Barnabas had received. They agreed that they would give only a part of the money they received to the church. However, they told everyone that they had given all of the money they received from the sale of their property. They wanted to look good in the eyes of others and receive honor. But they told and lived a lie. This of course was hypocrisy and a sin. Not only was it a sin against the church, but they were sinning against God as well.

Probably the Holy Spirit had told Peter what Ananias and Sapphira were doing. When Ananias came to give Peter the money from the sell of the property, Peter asked Ananias, "how is it that Satan has so filled you heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?" (verse 3) The land belonged to Ananias and the money after he sold it was also his. No one compelled him to sell the land or give the money. There were no rules in the church which forced the richer Christians to sell their lands. But Ananias brought the money and lied by pretending it was all of the money they had received from the sale of the land.

Q. 4. How do Christians sometimes commit a similar sin against God today?

This first sin in the church was the sin of deceit and hypocrisy. The church should be a place where we are completely honest- with God and with each other. God's judgement of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was severe and immediate. Peter pointed out the sin, but God judged it. Peter did not blame Ananias for keeping the money. He could have kept all the money if he had wanted. But when he pretended something that was not true, he lied to the Holy Spirit.

Upon Peter's judgment Ananias fell dead and they carried him out and buried him. Three hours later Sapphira not knowing what had happened to her husband, also lied about the amount of money that they had received from the sale of the land. She also died and was buried.

Why was this such a bad sin? For us, telling a little lie in order to seem to be more spiritual does not seem so bad. We often stretch the truth by lying about the work we have done for the Lord, the number of people we have led to Christ, etc. This desire to seem to be more spiritual than we are is a common disease in the church. Peter pointed out that the sin of hypocrisy Ananias and Sapphira had committed against the church, was really committed against God the Holy Spirit. When we lie to others, we are not just lying against each other, but against God.

Q. 5. List some sins that people commit that we often think are small, but are wrong in God's eyes.

We sometimes wonder why God judged Ananias and Sapphira so severely. Notice the result of the death of Ananias and Sapphira. "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events" (verse 11.) Fear here means a reverence toward God which is a realization of his great power and that he is a judge. It leads to a desire to live a life of holiness before God.

Q. 6. Do you have a reverence, a fear, an awe of God? How does this affect your life?

The Holy Spirit of God cannot work in a church where there is pretense or hypocrisy. In the church, there must be openness and honesty between the members and before God. Many churches today do not have any witness because there are those in the church who are pretending to be spiritual, but are covering sin in their lives. This can happen to individual members, but leaders of the church are also often living as hypocrites.

We don't know the motive for Ananias and Sapphira's deception. Perhaps they saw the honor and joy over the gift which Barnabas had given and wanted the same recognition and honor.

Q. 7. What is the motive behind your giving and your service in the church?

Today there are also people trying to keep money for themselves but pretending to be pious and generous. Recently in another country, one evangelist who preached on television used the money that people gave for his ministry to build himself a luxurious home, for personal clothing and other things. Today, he is in prison for misusing the money.

Another evangelist was living immorally but preaching against sin. He was disciplined but his ministry will never be trusted by many people. Both of these men have brought much harm to the gospel witness and to the reputation of the church.

Q. 8. If God judged us as severely today as He did Ananias and Sapphira, what do you think would happen in your church?

God's judgement on Ananias and Sapphira was a warning to the early church. It showed that God hates sin and disciplines the sinner. When a believer gives thought to some sin, Satan can encourage that thought into action. The Bible says that Satan prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8) Many things in the early church happened as examples and guides. God does not always judge sin as quickly and drastically. Nevertheless, God may still use death as discipline at times. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32) Though God doesn't always judge so immediately, He will judge sin. He knows our hearts and our motives.

Q. 9. How can we guard against hypocrisy and wrong motives in our own lives?

Our warfare with evil begins in our thoughts. When we covet something or jealously think about another person, those thoughts often lead to sinful actions. Ananias and Sapphira wanted to appear generous and spiritual by giving a large monetary gift to the church but they also wanted to keep part of the money. Their sinful deed caused their deaths.

Q. 10. Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, Ephesians 6:10-18 and Philippians 4:8-9. List the different ways we can fight sin in our lives.

The immediate and severe judgement on this first recorded sin in the church was God's way of teaching His standard of righteousness to the early church. Today, His standard is clearly taught in the New Testament. Although God's judgement may not always be as immediate today, His standard of holiness has not changed. God is merciful and gracious to give people the opportunity to repent of their sin. (2 Peter 3:9)

SECOND DAY

ACTS 5:12-20

The immediate and severe judgement on Ananias and Sapphira put the fear of God in the believers and unbelievers. The believers realized that God would not close His eyes to sin. This fear of God led to holiness in the church and attracted many non-Christians to Christianity.

Q. 11. What are ways that we can discern when someone says he is a Christian but whose life seems a pretense?

Even though a serious judgment had fallen on the Christian group in Jerusalem, God's dealing with sin preserved the purity of the church. It was very clear that there was supernatural power at work. Acts 5:11 is the first time the group of Christians were called a church in the book of Acts.

When God's power is mightily seen, Satan's opposition becomes greater.

Q. 12. Have you seen increased opposition against the church when God is working? Explain how this happened.

Q. 13. Read Acts 5:12-20 and answer these questions. a) Where did the believers meet? b) How were the believers regarded by the people? c) Why were people afraid to join the Christians? d) Who were added to the number of Christians? e) Why did so many seek Peter? f) Why were the High Priests and Sadducees angry? g) Who released the apostles from jail?

The Christians continued to go to the Temple to pray and they gathered in Solomon's Colonnade, which was a veranda on the east side of the Temple. Although many unbelievers were afraid to associate with the Christians as they prayed in Solomon's Colonnade, they respected the believers. Everyone had learned to fear what could happen to those whose faith was not completely true. Nevertheless, more and more people believed in the Lord and their number increased.

The apostles continued to perform signs and wonders. They miraculously healed the sick and cast out evil spirits. God was working especially through Peter and those who had faith were healed, even when they were only touched by his shadow. There was no power in Peter's shadow or as some think in handkerchiefs or other objects that have been blessed. The power is in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. That power is released in our lives when we believe in Him.

As the church grew stronger in their faith the presence of the Holy Spirit became well established and the miraculous signs decreased. God still heals today but not always in such dramatic ways. He may also use medicine and the skill of doctors. We now have the New Testament with the record of the early church to teach and confirm to us the presence of the Holy Spirit. God continues to work today through His people who are controlled by the Holy Spirit. Every life that is saved from sin by faith in Christ is a miracle.

Because the apostles were preaching, teaching and performing miracles and more people believed. This made the priests and Sadducees very angry and jealous.

Q. 14. Why do you think the religious leaders were jealous? b) Have you seen religious leaders become jealous? What did they do?

For the second time, the priests and Sadducees arrested the apostles and put them in prison. This time it was not only Peter and James but others of the apostles that had to go to jail because of their testimony about Jesus. That night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. He told the apostles to go back to the Temple and tell "the full message of this new life." (Acts 5:20)

Q. 15. What does "the full message of this new life" mean? Make a list of things that you think are included in the Gospel message.

God's full message of new life in Christ is much more than healing from a physical illness. New life begins when we recognize that we are sinners and that only Christ can save us. We accept Him by faith and turn from our sin. However, this is only the beginning of our new life. We are to grow in our knowledge of the Word and the guiding of the Holy Spirit. As we obey the Word and the Holy Spirit, our new life which Christ provided for us, becomes one of peace and joy. Our life in Christ gives purpose to our lives.

Throughout the history of the church, persecution has resulted in a cleansing of the church. Persecution winnows out those who have not truly committed themselves to the Lord. There are always some who profess to believe in Christ because it seems profitable to do so. But when persecution comes, they soon turn away. Tomorrow we will study how the early Christians reacted to persecution.

Q. 16. Have you experienced the cleansing of the church because of persecution? If not, ask some of the older people in your church if they have seen persecution and how it affected the church.

Jesus encouraged his disciples by saying, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) God uses trouble and persecution to strengthen our faith, as He gives His peace and grace in the midst of it. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Romans 5:3, 8:35)

THIRD DAY

ACTS 5:21-42

The apostles were arrested the second time by the Priests and Sadducees. The first time the apostles were warned and threatened but released. They were told not to teach in Jesus' name, but they said that they must obey God. As they continued to teach and heal the sick, the number of believers increased. The Priests and Sadducees saw the many who were turning to Christ and they feared that their authority was threatened. Their anger and jealousy led them to arrest the apostles again and put them in jail. For a second time the apostles had to choose between obedience to civil authority and obedience to God.

The greatest danger to the church has not been persecution. It has been when the church was accepted and admired in a country that it became weak. When this happens, people often become Christians without a real commitment to Christ. Soon the church begins to resemble the world rather than living separate from the world. The church needs Christians who will not compromise whether in times of peace or in times of persecution. They must always be ready to obey God rather than submit to the pattern and pressures of the world around them.

Q. 17. Read Acts 5:21-42 and answer the following questions. a) Who called together the Sanhedrin? Why were they called together? b) What did the officers find when they went to the jail? c) Where did the apostles go after the angel brought them out of prison? d) Why did the officers not use force in bringing the apostles from the Temple? e) What was the accusation against the apostles?

After the angel released the apostles from prison, the apostles obeyed the angel who said, "Go stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life." They did not try to hide their faith even when they knew it would again bring them imprisonment. At daybreak they began to teach the people. The High Priest had called together the Sanhedrin, the full assembly of the elders of Israel. When they sent for the apostles the jail was locked, but the apostles were not inside. Then someone reported that the apostles were in the Temple courts teaching the people.

Previously Peter and John had clearly stated that they would continue their preaching even though told not to preach by the authorities. (Acts 4:18-20) Their disobedience when they had been told not to teach in the name of Jesus made the Priests and Sadducees very angry. They were also angry because they thought the apostles blamed the Sanhedrin for the death of Jesus. However, at the time of Jesus' trial the crowd had said, "Let his blood be on us and on our children." (Matthew 27:25) This was true in a sense that they did not understand. Therefore all of the people and not just the Sanhedrin were guilty.

The captain of the temple guard and his officers brought the apostles to the assembly. It was only fear of the people that kept the officers from using force and the angry priests from immediately putting the apostles to death.

The high priest questioned and rebuked them for continuing to teach in Jesus' name. Peter and the other apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than men!" And then rather than defending themselves, they boldly declared the gospel to the whole Sanhedrin.

Many in the Sanhedrin were so angry they were ready to kill the apostles. But Gamaliel, a highly respected Pharisee and teacher of the Law, the teacher of Paul, asked that the apostles be taken outside. He then advised the council to let them go! Gamaliel cited two examples of men who had tried to lead rebellions but who were both unsuccessful and after their deaths their followers scattered. He advised the Sanhedrin saying, "Let these men go! If their message is only from men, it will fail. However, if it is from God... you will only find yourselves fighting against God." (verses 35-39) Gamaliel's advice persuaded the Sanhedrin, who had the apostles flogged, repeated the command that they should not preach in Jesus' name, and let them go.

Q. 18. a) What are the results when true believers are persecuted? b) Have you or someone you know been persecuted for your faith? Explain what happened.

God often raises up help and deliverance for His people from unexpected sources. He used Gamaliel to help the apostles. However He doesn't always deliver His children from trouble. Many Christians have been called before judges and some have lost their lives. It is almost 2000 years since the day Peter and the others stood before the Sanhedrin. The Christian church still stands and the gospel of Jesus Christ is still being proclaimed. Just as Gamaliel predicted, "If it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men."

Perhaps Gamaliel only wanted to avoid a political uprising. Or perhaps Peter's declaration, "We must obey God rather than men," caused Gamaliel to defend the apostles. Perhaps he was a secret believer. (John 12:42) We do not know but God used him to change the Sanhedrin's decision.

This does not mean that the apostles were freed without any pain. They were flogged- even though had done nothing wrong. But this was one way that the anger of the religious leaders could be appeased. Again the disciples were ordered not to preach in the name of Jesus.

The apostles returned to the Temple day after day and continued to preach the good news that Jesus was the Christ, their Messiah. They continued to obey God rather than men.

The attitude of the apostles in suffering for Jesus is very unique. Rather than ask God to punish the Jewish leaders for the injustice done to them, they rejoiced. They realized that it was a privilege to suffer disgrace for the Name of Jesus. Paul called the receiving of persecution the "fellowship of sharing in Jesus' suffering." (Phil. 3:10) Rather than viewing suffering for the name of Jesus something to be ashamed of, it is actually a mark that we are faithful to God and he trusts us to go through suffering for his glory.

Q. 19. a) Make a list of the different types of suffering or persecution that Christians face today. b) What is the usual response of Christians to persecution? c) How are these sufferings a privilege and not something to be ashamed of?

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 6:1-7

Although the apostles were commanded twice by the religious leaders not to preach in Jesus' name, they continued to teach and work miracles. Many people believed. When the number of people in the church increased, so did the problems. We have seen one problem within the church when Ananias and Sapphira were judged for deceit and hypocrisy. Now, another problem arose within the fellowship of the believers.

Q. 20. Read Acts 6:1-7 and answer these questions. a) What was the problem which arose in the church? b) Who were the two groups involved in the problem? c) How did the twelve apostles solve the problem? d) Who choose the seven men? e) Describe the qualifications needed for these men. f) What were the chosen men to do? g) What did the apostles believe was their responsibility?

Even within the church there is often tension between ethnic groups because of a difference in culture and an unwillingness to accept and trust each other. As the Jerusalem church grew, many Grecian (or Hellenist) Jews were among the believers. The Grecian Jews were Jews who had lived in other countries and had learned the Greek culture and language. They were not as well respected as the Jews that grew up in Judea and who spoke Hebrew and Aramaic. There are called Hebraic Jews. Even the Hebrew Jewish Christians were guilty of playing favorites and helping their own people more than those from other groups. The Grecian Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews. The Hebraic Jews had grown up in Jerusalem, spoke Aramaic or Hebrew and believed they obeyed the Old Testament Laws more accurately.

Q. 21. How have you experienced disagreements between ethnic groups, between families or the rich and poor within the church? How has this affected your church?

Satan uses every opportunity to destroy the unity of the church. One method of destroying the unity of the church is when one group is favored and other people outside that group are neglected and not treated as well as the ones in the favored group. We must be on guard against this.

As a result of the teaching of the Word, the church grew in numbers. This was exciting but it soon led to problems in the church. The problem that arose was over finances and the distribution of goods. The widows of the Hellenistic Jews complained that they were not receiving the daily distribution of food. Frequently, problems in the church are over money or goods. It is very important that a careful accounting is kept of these things and they are distributed fairly.

With the growth of the church it became necessary that others share in the responsibilities of leadership. The apostles saw that they needed help.

Q. 22. How would you deal with such a problem in your church?

The early church saw the need of widows who had no relatives to help and took the responsibility of helping them. However, the apostles saw the spiritual need of the church and they believed that the teaching of the Word and prayer was their first duty. There is a need for a material ministry in the church but it must not become more important than the spiritual ministry. The apostles in the beginning church saw the need for both ministries.

The solution to the problem was a wise one. The apostles gathered all the disciples together. The apostles said that they believed they were called to teach the Word and pray. Therefore, they asked the Christians to choose seven men from among them who were spiritual (full of the Spirit) and wise to supervise the distribution of food. Even though these men were chosen seemingly to have only a ministry of distributing food, the apostles realized that they had to also have the right spiritual qualifications. These two qualities are necessary for any person who had responsibility in the church. God has given different abilities and gifts to different people but most importantly, they should be spiritual men or women.

Q. 23. Why is spirituality the most important quality for those chosen for responsibilities in the church?

The disciples chose seven men to help in the ministry in the church. Their Greek names indicate that they chose all Hellenistic Jews. Perhaps only Greek Jews were chosen so that all accusations of impartiality by the minority group would be stopped and the unity restored in the church. If only Hebraic Jews had been chosen, then the accusations would have continued. We will learn more about Philip and Stephen later on. Nicolas may have been the leader of false teaching called the Nicolaitans in Revelations 2:6.

Q. 24. a) How is the word "deacon" in the New Testament different from the use of the word "deacon" in many churches of Ethiopia today? b) Why is this?

In the New Testament a deacon was not a "young person" like it is used in Ethiopia today. Rather, it was a leader under the authority of the elders (apostles) whose major responsibility was to care for daily matters in the church such as assisting the poor.

God gives different gifts for the purpose of building up the body of Christ and to bring unity in the church. (Ephesians 4:11-13) The apostles who were eyewitnesses of the ministry, death and resurrection

of Jesus, were given the responsibility as the foundation of the church to teach the Gospel and pray. Some gifts may seem more important, but God judges our faithfulness in using the gift He has given us. As each member of the body of Christ uses his gift faithfully for its intended purpose, it will strengthen the church.

Q. 25. What happens when a Christian serves in the church with wrong motives, for example for money or self-honor?

The Lord's command in Acts 1:8 was for every Christian. All Christians are called to be witnesses for Christ no matter where they are working. But God also gave each Christian unique spiritual gifts to be used in the church. We will each be judged according to how we used the abilities, gifts and opportunities which are given to us. The work of the church is not just for preachers, evangelists, and teachers. Each of us has to share the responsibility. Some will go, others will support those who go. Some will preach or teach, others will serve tables etc. All can pray! Together in unity we are a witness to the world.

Q. 26. Ask two people who know you well what they think your spiritual gifts are. How are you using your gifts?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe the fellowship of the early believers.
2. a) What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira?
b) Why did God judge them so severely?
3. How did the judgement of Ananias and Sapphira affect the church and the unbelievers?
4. How did persecution affect the apostles?
5. How has the advice of Gamaliel to the Sanhedrin proven true?
6. What was the purpose of signs and miracles?
7. Who were members of the Sanhedrin?
8. Why were the Sadducees so opposed to the apostles' message?
9. What was the cause of the second internal problem in the church?
10. a) Who are to serve in the church?
b) What should be the motive for serving?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a) 1) Discuss the two problems we studied in the early church.
2) How are they similar to problems in our churches today?
- b) Does church discipline hinder the growth of the church? Discuss.
- c) 1) What are the major ethnic groups in Ethiopia?
2) Which groups have difficulties getting along?
3) How are these problems seen in the church?
4) What causes tension and misunderstandings?
5) What is the solution?

- d) The Word teaches that we should obey those who are over us in authority. Are there times when we can not obey? Give illustrations of when we should obey but don't and when we shouldn't obey.
- e) 1) Make a list of the different spiritual gifts being used in your church.
2) Are all of the members using their gifts in some way?
3) How can your church get everyone involved to use his gifts so that the church can grow better?

Lesson Five

Acts 6:8-7:60

FIRST DAY

ACTS 6:8-15

One of the signs of a healthy church is that it grows in knowledge of God and also in numbers. We have seen how the early church grew quickly as each member witnessed to others concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. But we have also seen that growth also brings problems. Last week we saw how problems arose between different Christians and how the leaders sought to overcome their problems.

Originally, the small church in Jerusalem was under the leadership and administration of the twelve apostles. The apostles were responsible for church life in general, including the ministry of the Word of God and the care of the needy. But in our previous lesson we saw how the apostles asked that other Spirit-filled men be chosen to help in the gospel ministry by taking care of the daily problems of helping the poor. Like all good leaders, they gave some of their responsibility of leadership to others as the church grew and the work became too great.

Question 1. a) Make a list of your church leaders. Who are they, what do they do? b) How are they similar or different to the apostles and deacons of the early church?

Q. 2. Read Acts 6:8-7:60. a) Make a list of all of the characters from the Old Testament that Stephen talked about in his sermon. b) What kind of man was Stephen?

The deacons that were chosen to assist the twelve apostles did not only oversee the physical help given to the poor within the church. Although this was part of their responsibility, they also were active in witnessing about Jesus. Luke now describes the ministry of two of the deacons, Stephen, the first martyr of the church and Philip, the evangelist.

The Jews had been worshipping God for many centuries. Their worship was symbolized in the feasts and sacrifices. However, their spiritual fellowship with God, which the symbols taught, had become lost and the feasts and sacrifices had become empty rituals. The Jews were proud of their Temple, of their religious gatherings and of the rigid keeping of every detail of the Law. They practiced all the rites and sacrifices and they tithed even to the smallest item, but there was no real contact with God. When Jesus was on earth He rebuked the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, not for following the Law but for the things they failed to do. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus said, "You have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness."

Q. 3. a) Do you think church attendance and other Christian practices today can become an empty ritual in a Christian's life? Explain. b) What can you do to prevent it from becoming a ritual in your own life?

Like the Jews of old, it is easy for us to begin to worship God out of habit, and not in "spirit and truth." When we lose the real worship of God and only worship in empty ritual, God will cause godly Christians to arise and proclaim the truth of God. This often leads to resistance by the established leaders-and even

persecution. We will see this as we examine the life of the first Christian martyr, a great man called Stephen.

Our lesson for today is Acts 6:8-15. Read this section carefully and answer the following questions.

Q. 4. a) To whom was Stephen witnessing? b) What did Stephen say which caused the men of the synagogue to become angry? c) What happened when the men of the synagogue tried to argue with Stephen? d) What was Stephen's reaction to the leaders' anger?

Stephen was a man full of God's grace and power. We saw last week that he was one of the seven deacons chosen to help the apostles care for the daily matters in the church. Stephen did not only assist the poor. He too became a powerful witness to his own people. The early Christian witness to the Jews always related the gospel to the Old Testament teachings. They wanted to show the Jews see how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies concerning the Messiah.

Whereas initially we read of only the apostles performing signs and miracles, (Acts 2:43, 3:4-8) after the laying on of hands Stephen also began preaching the gospel and working miracles. The laying on of hands was a Jewish practice of passing on the authority of an office and separating a person for a specific task. (Acts 13:2-3) We have seen that the purpose for the signs and miracles was to draw people to listen to the gospel message and to confirm its authority.

Stephen was a Jew who was born outside of Palestine, and was therefore called a Hellenistic Jew. When he started preaching he had a deep concern for Hellenistic Jews like himself. As a result he took the Gospel message to other Jews who worshipped in a synagogue in Jerusalem called the Synagogue of the Freedmen. Jews who were from different parts of the Roman empire worshipped there.

A synagogue was a meeting place for Jews. Anywhere that many Jews live they make a meeting place where they listen to the reading of the Old Testament and worship together. But it was only in the Temple that there were animal sacrifices and the following of the Old Testament worship rituals.

In Jerusalem there were many synagogues one of which was called "the Synagogue of the Freedmen." The Freedmen were Jews who had been Roman prisoners or the descendants of prisoners. When Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63 B.C. he took many Jews as prisoners. They were later released in Rome. The descendants of these Jewish prisoners were called "freedmen" and were probably the members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen. They were Jews who spoke the Greek language and knew Greek culture and were called Hellenists. It was common practice for Jews from different nations to form their own synagogues.

Q. 5. a) Do ethnic groups usually form separate churches today? b) Are there problems in your church between different ethnic groups?

In his witness Stephen told the Jews of a new fellowship with God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit which was superior to the Old Testament worship. It centered on God Himself and replaced the law and the old temple worship system. The Jews misinterpreted the message thinking that he was speaking out against the law and even against the God of Abraham. The Freedmen tried to argue with Stephen but

were unsuccessful. They became very angry. They were probably convicted, but refused to consider that their relationship with God was empty and lacking in sincerity.

Q. 6. How does the preaching of the gospel today bring argument and opposition from other people?

The Jewish leaders were angry because they were convicted by the truth in Stephen's witness. From the time the Law was given, the Israelites continually neglected their fellowship with God. All through Old Testament times the prophets rebuked and warned the people to repent and return to God. Soon after the Law was given, the Israelites begged Aaron to make a golden calf for them to worship. (Exodus 32:4) While the Israelites travelled through the wilderness on their way to the promised land, they turned from their worship of God to worshipping Baal with the Moabites. (Numbers 25:1-3) King Ahab turned to idol worship. (1 Kings 16:29-33) These are only a few examples of how the Israelites failed to obey God's commands and keep their fellowship with God. God spoke through the prophet Amos saying to Israel, "I hate, I despise your religious feasts. I cannot stand your assemblies...but let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream." (Amos 5:21-24)

The Israelites were offering sacrifices and they were keeping the feasts, but their hearts and motives were not right. God said that He hated their ritual. Rather than repent, the Jews reacted against anyone who said that they or their worship was insufficient. They were proud in their heritage as the people of Israel, the children of God.

Q. 7. How would God judge your worship? Could this same judgment be brought against the worship of your or other churches? Explain.

Q. 8. a) Can going to church, singing in the choir and even teaching a class become a legalistic practice?
b) Search your heart: Have your activities become empty rituals or are you worshipping God in a way that will please Him?

But Stephen realized that true worship started with the heart. It starts with a correct relationship with God. All rituals in the church, if they do not come from the heart, are useless. Stephen also realized that with the coming of Jesus, things had changed greatly. God now had a program for all people and not just the people of Israel. Worship took place in hearts, not in temples or just in Israel. Stephen realized that speaking the truth would bring opposition and even persecution. But he refused to keep quiet. He witnessed for God.

Although they argued against Stephen, the arguments of the Freedmen could not stand up against Stephen's wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. Therefore they stirred up the people against Stephen, took Stephen captive and brought him before the Sanhedrin. There they produced false witnesses against him and accused Stephen of speaking against the Law and the Temple.

The Sanhedrin was the highest court for the Jews. It was made up of the high priest, elders, and teachers of the law. Although they had a lot of power, they were still under the control of the Romans and could not pass the judgment of death on anyone.

Even in the midst of false accusations Stephen remained calm. The accusation was read and when they looked at Stephen to see how he would answer, "they saw that his face was like the face of an angel." (Acts 6:15) When the opportunity came he clearly presented his defense to the people.

Q. 9. a) Describe how the wisdom and spirit of your witness sometimes silences those who oppose the gospel? b) How do you respond when you are unjustly accused? c) What can we learn from Stephen's attitude when falsely accused?

Q. 10. a) What are wrong motives we and others sometimes have when we worship God? b) What makes our worship acceptable to God? Look at Psalm 51; John 4:24; and Hebrews 13:15 for your answer.

Remember that Jesus did not rebuke the Pharisees because they practiced the Law. He judged them because they neglected the more important things: justice, mercy and faithfulness. (Mark 7:6) Worship does not only include what we do in church, but how we live.

SECOND DAY

ACTS 7:1-19

Yesterday we saw how the witness of Stephen to fellow Jews brought opposition from the Jews and religious leaders. Stephen was called up before the Jewish Court to defend himself against the false accusations brought against him. Stephen's wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke frustrated and angered the men in the synagogue in Jerusalem. The men accused that Stephen spoke against the Temple and the Law. However, their rejection of God and His messengers had been repeated many times in history.

The apostle Peter warned Christians to always be ready to give an answer for their belief- even when standing before those who oppose the truth. (See 1 Peter 3:14-15) Stephen was ready to give an answer for the Gospel he preached, even before the Jewish court.

Q. 11. How does one prepare to give an answer of the Gospel when falsely accused? Give suggestions.

Today we will begin our study of Stephen's defense before the Jewish high court or Sanhedrin. The way Stephen defended himself against the false accusations was to trace the history of the Jewish people. His desire was to prove to them that God was concerned not only for the Jews, but for all people. He also wanted to show that God worked outside of Israel as well as inside Israel. Finally he wanted to tell them that their treatment of Jesus made them like their forefathers who killed the prophets.

In the Old Testament, God called the Jewish people for a specific purpose. All the nations had turned away from God and were worshipping idols. They had refused the witness that God had given them. (Romans 1:18-25) Therefore, God called one man, Abraham and told him that his people were to be a witness for God among the nations. The Jews always proudly claimed Abraham and his descendants as their fathers. But, instead of being a witness to the other nations, their pride set them apart and kept the Jews from hearing and obeying God.

Q. 12. Do you know groups of people who are discriminated against because of their work or ethnic group? Name them and explain why people are prejudiced against them.

Q. 13. a) Why has God called Christians today? b) How is this similar to the call of Abraham? c) How can pride over your own race or ethnic group be a stumbling block to your testimony for Christ?

Q. 14. Read Acts 7:1-19 and answer the following questions. a) Why did Stephen address the Council saying, "Brothers and Fathers"? b) Did Abraham always live in Israel? From what country did God call

Abraham? c) What promise did God give to Abraham? d) Why did Joseph go down into Egypt? e) How did God use Joseph in Egypt? f) Why did Stephen point out that God's dealings with the Jewish fathers was outside the land of Israel?

You will remember that yesterday we saw that Stephen was being accused for "speaking against this holy place (the temple) and against the law." In his defense, Stephen answered these accusations by showing how God worked throughout the history of Israel. In his defense, Stephen started with the beginning of Jewish history in Mesopotamia and ended in the wilderness, where the Law was given to the Israelites.

The Jews took great pride in four things:

1. They felt that God lived and worked only in Israel and that he had no plans outside of judgment for the Gentiles. Stephen however showed them that God had continually worked outside of the land of Palestine.
2. They believed that God worked only through the Jews, as a special people. Stephen however shows them that God had plans for all people.
3. The Jews were proud that God had given them the Law and that they kept even the smallest detail of the Law. Stephen showed that even the Law was given outside Israel.
4. They were also proud of their Temple and their worship but Stephen reminded them that the Tabernacle was given in the wilderness before they entered Israel and that God could not dwell only in a building.

Stephen was accused by men from a Hellenist synagogue. But because he was a Jew he addressed the Sanhedrin as "brothers and fathers." You will remember that the Hellenists were Jews who lived outside of Israel and had learned the Greek language and culture.

The main emphasis of Stephen's argument in this section is to prove that God worked outside of the nation and land of Israel. He was a God of all the world, not just Israel. The history of the Jews proves God's work throughout the whole world.

The Jews took great pride in their land and objected when Stephen reminded them that their forefathers had not always lived in Israel. Stephen started his historical review from Abraham. We could summarize Stephen's talk by the following outline:

1. The story of Abraham, the father of the Jews. (Acts 7:1-8) Abraham was the honored father of the Jewish people. However, God called Abraham while in Mesopotamia not while he was in Canaan. While in Mesopotamia God called him to leave his country and people. But initially Abraham only got as far as Haran in his obedience to God's call. It was only after his father died and God called him again to leave Haran that he moved on to Canaan which later became the land of Israel. Although God promised the land to Abraham and his seed, Abraham did not receive the promise. All he owned was a small burial site at Hebron which he purchased when Sarah died. (Genesis 23:17-18) He lived in tents as did his son, Isaac and his grandson, Jacob. In fact, even before Abraham had a child to carry on his name, God told him that "Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years." By this God was prophesying the captivity of Israel in Egypt where they would stay for four hundred years.

Abraham remained a pilgrim in the land of Canaan which the Jewish people so proudly claimed. The covenant of circumcision, the external mark of a Jew's relationship to God, was given many years later after God had already made a covenant with Abraham. It could be said that Abraham was a Gentile up until the time that God gave him the sign of circumcision.

2. The story of the sons of Abraham. (Acts 7:9-16) Stephen continued his defense by reminding the Jews of Abraham's offspring. Isaac was the son of Abraham and his son was Jacob who was the father of twelve sons. These twelve sons were the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Because of jealousy, the eleven sons sold Joseph into slavery and he was taken to Egypt which was also outside of the nation of Israel. It was the Egyptians who trained Joseph and honored him. It was Joseph who helped save the Jews and Egyptians during the seven years of famine. Joseph brought all of the Jews, 75 in total to Egypt to live. They died in Egypt but their bodies were taken back to Canaan for burial.

3. The story of the oppression and release of the Israelites. (Acts 7:17-36) After many years, said Stephen, the number of Israelites grew into a great people. However, they were still in Egypt. They were now slaves. A new ruler who know nothing about Joseph oppressed the people and forced them to kill their newborn sons. (Exodus 1:6-16) No doubt some of the Hellenistic Jews listening to Stephen were from Egypt.

Tomorrow we will continue this section as we study the life of Moses.

God is not a small God limited to one country. He is not only the God of Israel or the God of the West. Rather, he is the God of all the world. He alone created the world. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He has great plans for all people and not just for some select group of individuals. God met with His people of Israel in other lands, even as He had with those who were scattered by the Babylonian invasion. God was not restricted to only the boundaries of Israel. Many of God's dealings with His people took place in other lands before the Temple worship was established. Stephen was explaining that God wasn't confined to one country. Even as God called Abraham out of the land of Mesopotamia, He was now calling out a people for His name from among the Gentiles.

Many times we can become proud of our churches, or our people and think that God is working only through us. The Apostles and Stephen realized that God worked through other people and that all who call on the Lord will be saved.

Q. 15. a) Have you seen ethnic groups or church groups in Ethiopia who believe themselves superior to others? b) How do you think God looks on such an attitude? c) What is the Christian's responsibility to the whole world and not just to one tribe or people?

Remember the command that Jesus gave in Acts 1:8? We are to be witness to the whole world, not just to the areas close to us. All churches need to be thinking and praying how they can reach their city, their tribe, their country, and the whole world with the Gospel. Is your church obeying Jesus' command?

THIRD DAY

ACTS 7:20-36

We have learned that Stephen was accused of two things: 1) Speaking against the Law; 2) Speaking against the Temple. Yesterday we saw how Stephen proved from history that God's work was not confined to one land and one people. He did this by pointing to three major events to prove God's working outside of Israel. First, he looked at the life of Abraham, second, he looked at the early patriarchs, and third, he began to look at the captivity and release of the people of Israel from Egypt. Israel's history as a nation in the holy land did not begin until many years after God's promise to Abraham. The Jews did not want to think about that because they were so proud of their land, Israel, as the land where God dwelt.

The Jews in the synagogue in Jerusalem were rebelling against Stephen and his message because he was suggesting that God had plans for other people and nations. Stephen's message was that through His death and resurrection, Jesus provided a direct access to the Father. Because of the Holy Spirit it was possible to worship God in spirit wherever they went. See John 4:23-24. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." (Hebrews 1:1-2) God gave the Temple worship, but now He had provided a better way through Jesus Christ.

Q. 16. a) In what way is God's communication through Jesus better than through the Old Testament worship system? b) Why do many people resist change in how they worship or do certain things?

Today we will examine further Stephen's argument as he examines the story of the children of Israel under bondage to Egypt and God's working with Moses.

Q. 17. Read Acts 7:20-36 and answer these questions. a) Who took Moses and raised him as her own child? b) Why did Moses flee to Midian? c) After 40 years in the Midian desert, how did God communicate with Moses?

For the Jews, there were three key leaders that they looked at as key examples of how they were to live. First, there was Abraham, the friend of God and the father of the Jewish nation. Second, there was Moses, the leader of Israel from bondage and the giver of the law. Third, there was David, the great godly king from whose line the Messiah would come. We have seen how Stephen showed how God worked with Abraham even when outside of the Promised Land. Now we will see how God called and used Moses who never did enter the Promised Land.

After the Israelites had lived in Egypt many years, a new Pharaoh became ruler who knew nothing about Joseph and he greatly oppressed the Jewish people. Moses was born at this time. He was raised in Egypt as son of Pharaoh's daughter and was given a privileged education. He learned all of the great wisdom of ancient Egypt. Some scholars think that Moses was a possible heir to the throne of Egypt. He acted so much like an Egyptian that the Jews found it difficult to believe that he was their leader, the one to free the Israelites from bondage. Although he would later become a great leader of the Jews, initially the people of Israel rejected Moses, much like they rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. Moses heard the call of God. Rather than choose to remain an Egyptian, he chose to identify with his slave people, the Jews.

Q. 18. a) Why was this a difficult choice for Moses to make? b) How is this similar to choices we have to make if we want to follow God?

One day while defending one of the Israelites from an Egyptian who had mistreated him, Moses killed the Egyptian. Moses thought the people would understand that he would save them from their slavery. But the Israelites misunderstood his motives. Later when he tried to stop two Israelites from fighting, they questioned his right to rule. Moses was afraid that they would inform the Egyptians leaders that he had killed an Egyptian and so he fled to Midian. Moses tried to lead the people of Israel in his own strength and before God had prepared him or the people. Like many of us, he tried to serve God in his own strength rather than letting God work in God's time.

Q. 19. a) Describe some ways that we can try to do God's work in our own strength. b) Describe some ways that we can try to do things before God is ready.

So far we have seen that God was working on behalf of his people Israel, but not in the land of Palestine. Rather, he was working in Egypt. Then, while in the land of Midian, God was working in the life of Moses, preparing him for leadership. After 40 years in the desert, God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and called him to lead the people out of Egypt. At first Moses was amazed at the sight of the burning bush and went closer to see it better. But when God introduced Himself as "the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," Moses trembled with fear and did not dare look at Him. God then instructed Moses to show his respect by taking off his shoes and explained His concern for the Israelites suffering in Egypt. Moses was sent to be the Israelites' ruler and deliverer by God Himself. The first time Moses tried to help ended in murder and exile. But the second time, with God's call and help Moses led the people out of Egypt and did miraculous signs for the next 40 years.

Q. 20. a) Have you seen someone suffering and tried to help? b) Were you successful or did the people resent your intrusion? c) Have you prayed and asked God about a situation and found that He used you in a special way to make a difference in someone else's life? Explain.

Although the Jews of Stephen's day greatly revered Moses, throughout his life, Moses was continually facing the rejection of the people of Israel. Like many of us today, they did not see God working in their midst, and when God sought to bring change, even freedom from slavery in Egypt, they rebelled. We will see more of this in tomorrow's lesson.

God's ways and God's timing is often not what we would like. It takes a Spirit-led person to be able to work for God and know when to wait for God's timing, and when to go ahead. Moses had to learn through 40 years in the wilderness that only when God's work is done God's way in God's timing that God will reward it. So also we need to learn this as we work for God here in Ethiopia.

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 7:37-60

We have seen how Stephen, in giving a review of Israel's history, touched three areas which convicted his accusers. 1. Their false pride of country and culture which was hindering the Israelites witness for God. 2. Their worship had become empty and only an outward show. 3. Then Stephen demonstrated to them

that God's presence was not confined only to the Temple. God met with His people in many places and by various means. Today, we will see the conclusion of Stephen's message.

Q. 21. a) Describe how all three of these areas can become a problem for Christians. b) How can we keep ourselves witnessing and worshipping as God intended?

Q. 22. What do you think caused the Jewish religious leaders to become opposed to the gospel message?

The history of the Israelites could be classified as the history of the people's disobedience to God. Down through their history, from the time the Law was given in the wilderness, the Israelites disobeyed the commands of God. As we follow their wanderings in the desert and their settling in the promised land, we see that the Israelites did not separate themselves from their neighbors who worshipped idols. They were jealous of their position as God's people, but they were not willing to live like God's people.

Q. 23. a) How do the lives of Christians today compare with those of the Israelites? b) Are you trying to live a holy life as God's child? If so, how is this seen?

Q. 24. Read Acts 7:37-60 and answer the following questions. a) To whom did Moses refer in Acts 7:37-38? b) What are the "living words" that Moses received to pass on to the Israelites? (See Deuteronomy 32:45-47.) c) What acts of disobedience did the Israelites do? d) Because of their disobedience, where did God say He would send the Israelites? e) At what point in his message did the Jews rise up against Stephen?

So far in our study of Stephen's talk before the Sanhedrin, we have seen that he proved from the life of Abraham, from the story of the sons of Abraham, and from the early history of Israel under captivity that much of Jewish history took place outside the land of Palestine. In today's lesson, Stephen deals with some things in Israel's history from the time of wandering in the wilderness up through the building of the Temple.

God greatly used Moses to release the Israelites from bondage. Through him many miracles were performed. Even though considered Israel's greatest prophet, Moses prophesied of another prophet. "God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers." (Deuteronomy 18:15) Stephen meant that Jesus was the prophet promised by Moses. But we will see that the Israelites treated both Jesus and Moses the same. They rejected the leadership of both of them.

Stephen continued his proof that God worked outside of Israel by the following ideas:

4. The people of Israel refused to obey Moses in the wilderness. (Acts 7:37-39) God called Moses from the desert where he had spent 40 years after being rejected by his people as their deliverer. Then God sent Moses back to Egypt to deliver a people who had become slaves and needed a leader with the training that Moses had to lead them. However, the people refused to obey Moses and they wanted gods like the Egyptians worshipped. They made an idol in the form of a golden calf. Again Stephen reminded them that the Israelites were more Egyptian than Jewish.

5. The law was given at Mt. Sinai outside of Israel. (Acts 7:35-43) The Law given at Mt. Sinai, which Stephen was accused of condemning, was not given in their land of Israel but in the desert of Midian. Stephen calls the law the "living words" for they were given by God, the living God and were God's Word showing God's will for his people. Although Stephen had been accused about speaking against the law, the Israelites throughout their history had refused to accept the law. Soon after they received the law of God, they wanted to return to Egypt. Even while at Mt. Sinai, they asked Aaron to make a golden calf and

worshipped it. Because of their persistent disobedience, God allowed them to continue on in their worship of false gods. The Old Testament prophet Amos is quoted by Stephen as proof of the continual rebellion of the people of Israel. (Amos 5:25-27)

Q. 25. In what way could the history of the church be like the history of Israel where God's people seem more prone to sin than to be holy?

The second accusation against Stephen concerned the Temple. Because Stephen taught that Jesus Christ had opened up a new avenue to worship God, they accused Stephen of speaking against the Temple. In Acts 7:44-50 Stephen defended himself against the accusation that he was against the temple.

6. The tabernacle was built in the wilderness not Israel. (Acts 7:44-47) While at Mt. Sinai, God gave Israel the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. The first tabernacle--God's dwelling place on earth--was built in the wilderness and then carried with the Israelites everywhere they went. Stephen called it the "tabernacle of the Testimony" because the most important thing in the tabernacle was the ark of the Covenant and the two tablets of ten commandments which were called "the Testimony." (Ex. 25:16,21) Later, they brought the Tabernacle with them into the promised land. Throughout the times of Joshua and the Judges, it was the place of worship. Even David who wanted to build a permanent dwelling place for God, a temple, could not. It was not until Solomon, David's Son that a temple was built.

"But did God even dwell only in the Temple?" the Jews asked. The answer obviously is no. God's real dwelling place is not in a building built by man. It is not in a temple or a church. God's major dwelling place is in heaven. Stephen reminded his accusers that God spoke through the prophet Isaiah saying, "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, so they came into being? declares the Lord." (Isaiah 66:1-2)

Q. 26. In what ways do some Christians think that God especially lives in a building like a church?

God's dwelling place was not in one Temple, controlled by one group of people. Even their beautiful Temple couldn't possibly contain God. The second accusation concerning the Temple was defeated by Stephen's wisdom.

The Jews' pride over their Temple, rather than drawing people to the Lord, had separated them from other people and nations. They saw themselves as superior to all others.

Q. 27. a) Today, is the church the only place to meet the Lord? b) Where else does God dwell today?

Q. 28. Do you know of groups of believers whose pride in their building separates and hinders their fellowship with other believers?

Rather than dwell in a building, God teaches that He dwells in the hearts of His people. The most important thing is not the building that we meet in. Rather, it is the hearts of believers that Jesus dwells in. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19) Are our hearts pure for the holy God to live in us?

The Sanhedrin became very angry. Stephen's defense left the Jews without further argument, only conviction, and made them furiously angry.

Then Stephen addressed the Jews who were accusing him saying, "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! (Acts 7:51) The Jews prided themselves in outward rituals and actions. Therefore they were proud of their great beautiful Temple. They were also proud of their being circumcised. But Stephen accused them of being stiff-necked and refusing to repent of their sins and return to God. He accused them of having hearts that were uncircumcised. Although externally Jews by circumcision, like Gentiles internally they were like Gentiles. Just like their fathers in the wilderness resisted God and Moses, they resisted the work of God and the Holy Spirit in their midst. They killed the prophets and even the "Righteous One", who is Jesus Christ. They received the Law, but they disobeyed it. Even though it had come through angels, like their fathers, they lived in disobedience. The Jews believed that when God gave the law on Mt. Sinai, he first gave it to angels who then gave it to Moses. (Gal. 3:19, Heb. 2:2)

Q. 29. Is there rebellion and disobedience in your life that destroys your fellowship with God and makes your church attendance, your witness and even your prayers empty?

When Stephen charged that his accusers killed the Holy One, Jesus, the Messiah, the Jews became furious and rose up against him. In doing this, they were proving that all Stephen had told them was true. The many years of resisting God and His commands had hardened their hearts. The Jewish religious leaders no longer had fellowship with God. They substituted the rites of Temple worship and the keeping of certain rules for fellowship which comes through obedience to God and His Word.

As they rose against Stephen, he looked up into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at His right hand. This made the leaders furious and they dragged him out of the city to stone him. As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit...Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Stephen was the first martyr in the Christian church. His faith in God and obedience to His Word gave him the strength to face death. His forgiving attitude is an example to all of us on how we should accept suffering and persecution.

Q. 30. a) Why do you think God allows some people to die for their faith and others to be delivered? b) How are the words of Stephen similar to Christ's words on the cross? Compare Acts 7:59-60 with Luke 23:32-34, 44-46.

In our next lesson we will see what happened as a result of Stephen's death.

Though he faced death, Stephen did not compromise but faithfully declared the message that the Holy Spirit led him to give. There are times when Christians must stand for the truth. Satan will try to destroy our fellowship by tempting us to resist the leading of the Holy Spirit or to disobey the commands of the Word of God.

Q. 31. Why was Stephen able to stand firm in his faith in Christ, even to face death?

Stephen was accused and killed because he presented a new and superior way to fellowship with God, through Christ and the Holy Spirit. We have that same message to give to the world today. Stephen's message touched the false pride of the Jews over their race, position and worship. Let us examine our hearts! Are we like the Jews?

Q. 32. How is your fellowship with the Lord? Examine your heart and ask God for forgiveness if necessary.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. To what position in the church was Stephen appointed?
2. What does Stephen's appointment tell about the needed qualities of spiritual leaders?
3. Why did Jesus rebuke the Pharisees?
4. Why was Stephen arrested?
5. Who were the Freedmen?
6. Of what was Stephen accused?
7. How did Stephen refute the Jewish pride about their land of Israel?
8. How did the Jews fail in the purpose for which God had called them?
9. How was God's call to the Jewish nation similar to the final command from Jesus in Acts 1:8?
10. Why could Stephen identify himself with the Jews in the synagogue of the Freedmen?
11. a) How did God speak to His people in the past?
b) How does He speak to His people today?
12. Where was the Temple worship first established?
13. What was the second accusation against Stephen?
14. a) What is true worship?
b) Where can a person worship?
15. Why did the Jews have no reason to claim that they alone had access to God?
16. List three things that Stephen's review of Jewish history revealed to the Sanhedrin and the Jews who accused him.
17. Through the years, what had caused the Jews to harden their hearts against the message which Stephen brought?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a. 1) What can we learn about Christian leadership from Stephen?
2) What are qualification your church uses to choose leaders?
3) Is spirituality our priority when we choose leaders? Describe how this happens or doesn't happen and why.
- b. 1) How can we become legalistic in our service and worship in our churches?
2) How can we guard against it?
- c. 1) What does it mean to worship God? (John 4:23-24)
2) What are things which hinder worship?
3) What are ways to prepare our hearts to worship?
- d. 1) How does pride of country, race or ethnic group hinder fellowship between Christians?
2) How can we break down prejudice in our church and country?

Lesson Six

Acts 8:1-40

FIRST DAY

ACTS 8:1-8

Last week we examined the defense of Stephen as he stood before the Sanhedrin. In his message, Stephen reviewed the history of the people of Israel. He wanted to prove to the Jews that God's purpose and work was not only in the land of Israel. Rather, much of God's work was with his people while they were in Gentile lands. Stephen showed that all the things in which they were boasting in: the law of Moses, their being Jews, and having the Temple of God in their midst were only temporary and were fulfilled and only had meaning in Jesus Christ. The Jews had rejected Jesus and hung Him on the cross. Like Jesus, Stephen was accused of blasphemy against God by false witnesses. The Jews rose up in their wrath and stoned Stephen to death, as he called on the Lord not to hold it against them.

Question 1. Read Matthew 26:65, Luke 22:67-71 and Acts 7:54-60. Compare the likeness between the trials of Stephen and Jesus.

The death of Stephen marked the end of one phase of the command of Christ--"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem." This is also the end of the first section in the book of Acts as Christianity now began to reach out past Jerusalem. Because of the fearless preaching of the apostles, and the signs and miracles all over Jerusalem people had heard the gospel message. But now God's time had come for the witness to move out from Jerusalem to other parts of the world. Rather than just working in Jerusalem, God forced the Christians to carry their witness to others-into Judea and Samaria.

Q. 2. Read Acts 8:1-40 and answer these questions. a) Who are the four main characters in Acts 8? b) What caused the gospel to spread out from Jerusalem? c) List three towns in which Philip proclaimed the gospel.

Q. 3. Read Acts 8:1-8 again and answer the following questions. a) On what day did great persecution break out against the church? b) What happened to the believers? c) Where did Philip go and what did he do?

At the stoning of Stephen was a young man named Saul who watched the stoning with great joy. He had already made a name for himself among the Jewish leaders as someone very zealous for the law. The fact that all of the clothes of those who stoned Stephen were put at the feet of Saul showed that he was encouraging those men to stone Stephen. With the death of Stephen, a great time of persecution broke out upon the Christians in Jerusalem. The leader of the persecution was Saul who later became one of the greatest witnesses of Christianity the world has ever seen. Saul began to try to destroy the church by going from house to house and dragging men and women off to prison and killing some. Many Christians fled from Jerusalem, but wherever they went they preached the Good News of Jesus Christ. Persecution became God's instrument to drive the Christians out of Jerusalem so that the next stage of his program which was the spread of the Gospel to Judea and Samaria could be completed.

- Q. 4. How do we know that the Christians who fled from Jerusalem were still faithful witnesses?
- Q. 5. What good things resulted from the persecution of the believers in Jerusalem?
- Q. 6. Look up the Samaritans in the Bible Dictionary. Why was it more difficult for the orthodox Jews in Jerusalem to accept the Samaritans and other ethnic groups, than it was for the Hellenists to accept them?

With the death of Stephen, Jerusalem was no longer the only place where there was a gospel witness. Although the apostles remained in Jerusalem, many of the Christians, especially the Hellenistic Jews who had grown up in Gentile lands fled. Some may have come for the celebration of Pentecost and remained in the Christian fellowship after they believed. Because of the persecution, they returned to their homes in the surrounding cities and countries. Wherever they went they preached the Word of God. One of them was Philip, who was one of the seven chosen to serve as deacons in the church in Jerusalem. Philip went to the city of Samaria and proclaimed Christ there.

The Samaritans were a mixed race, partly Jewish and partly Gentile. They are the result of the intermarriage after the northern kingdom of Israel was sent off into captivity into Assyria. The Assyrian government brought Gentiles into Israel to mix with those Jews that remained in Israel. Not only were they mixed racially, but because of enmity with the Jews in Judah, they built their own temple and started their own worship system in Samaria. The Samaritans believed in the Law of Moses but they did not believe the Old Testament prophets were from God. They set up a temple on Mt. Gerazim and did not worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. At one time they desecrated the temple in Jerusalem by scattering bones in it during a Passover celebration. They had also killed some Galilean Jews going to Jerusalem to worship. These and many other things caused great animosity between the Samaritans and the Jews. Therefore the Jews despised them and had no dealings with them.

Q. 7. When had the Gospel previously been preached in Samaria? (Look at John 4)

The Hellenistic Jews who had lived among other people and cultures were more tolerant and accepting of other ethnic groups than the Jews who had always lived in Jerusalem. Therefore they were willing to live together with the Samaritans, and the Samaritans were willing to listen to their witness concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the city of Samaria, Philip proclaimed Christ, performed miracles healing many who were crippled and paralyzed and casting out evil spirits. The miracles attracted the people who then listened to Philip's message. People began to believe in Jesus.

Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria." Because of persecution, the gospel quickly spread as Christians fled from Jerusalem, faithfully witnessing wherever they went. The spread of the message would not have been so great nor as speedy if the persecution had never happened. The persecution by Saul was the beginning of the outreach to the rest of the world, in which Saul later became a very important messenger.

Persecution of the church is always sad, but it did not weaken the early church. Persecution caused Christians to flee but when the Christians scattered they spread the Gospel to people and places that otherwise may not have heard the Good News.

Q. 8. Can you give an example of persecution which caused the gospel to be told to people who had never heard before?

Although it is good to have close Christian fellowship, to study God's Word and pray together, this can become a danger for Christians. If this is all they do and if they neglect to go out among the non-Christians and share about Jesus Christ, they are not fulfilling the command of Jesus. Although the Christians would have preferred to live in Jerusalem and be taught by the apostles, God would not let them. He brought persecution upon them to scatter them and spread the news about Jesus Christ to others who needed to hear.

Q. 9. In what way can Christians in church spend too much time with other Christians in worship and meeting together that they forget that they are to go out into the world and witness?

SECOND DAY

ACTS 8:9-25

The preaching of Philip began a new section of the history of the early church. The first seven chapters of Acts show how the church was founded. The first witness was only in Jerusalem and the believers were all from Jewish background. The next five chapters, Acts 8-12 tell how the good news was carried to Judea and Samaria and even as far as Antioch where Gentiles were admitted to the fellowship of the church. It was another period of transition.

Q. 10. Read Acts 8:9-25 and answer the following questions. a) What happened to Simon's followers? b) What do you think Simon believed? c) When did those who believed in Samaria receive the Holy Spirit? d) Did Simon receive the Holy Spirit? How do we know? e) Is it possible to know the truth of the gospel and not enter into a fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit? Explain. f) What is necessary to enter that fellowship?

Miracles always attract people. The miracles performed in the power of Satan through his agents like Simon cause people to believe false teachings. And the miraculous signs performed by Philip attracted people to the truth.

Q. 11. a) Have you seen witchdoctors or other non-Christians perform a miracle? Explain what happened. b) What happened when God used a Christian to work a miracle?

In the town of Samaria there was a sorcerer named Simon. His power was so great that people even thought that he was a god or had special powers given to him by the gods. Simon did some amazing things and he had quite a following. But when he saw Philip being used by God to work miracles of healing, he followed Philip around observing his power. When he saw the work of the Holy Spirit through Philip he began to plot how he could get that power for himself. He decided to become a Christian along with many of those who used to follow him. He made a profession of faith and was baptized along with many other people.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that many of the Samaritans had believed, Peter and John went down to meet with the new Christians. Peter and John were able to lead the new believers in Christ into the truth about the Holy Spirit. After Peter and John had prayed for them, the apostles placed their hands on the new believers and they received the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew 16:17-19 Jesus had promised Peter that he would be used in a special way to bring people into the kingdom of God, the church. God gave Peter and the other apostles the right to bring new people into the kingdom of God. Therefore when the growth of the church took this major step of allowing Samaritans to enter in equal fellowship into the church, Peter and John were sent to authenticate their faith and to welcome them as equal partners into the church. Peter was used by God to pass on the gift of the Holy Spirit. The fact that they were now equal with Jews in the church was proven by the Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit in the same way as the first Jews had. The wall of hatred and prejudice between Jews and Samaritans was broken down by God by equally giving the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans. There is no evidence that after the initial group of Samaritan believers received the Holy Spirit, that other Samaritan believers had to go through a second act to receive the Holy Spirit. In fact, Luke seems to be implying that the fact that they did not receive the Holy Spirit immediately was unique. There is no record that they spoke in tongues, but it was clear that God received Samaritans into His church in the same way He received the Jews.

Q. 12. How is this different from how some Christians understand the giving of the Holy Spirit?

We cannot use this section of Scripture to prove that the Holy Spirit normally comes upon Christians at a separate time after belief in Jesus. It does not come through the laying on of hands by some great person, or by special fasting and praying. Rather, the Holy Spirit is given to all Christians immediately upon their belief. The only reason it did not happen this way for the initial group of Samaritans was because God wanted to prove to the Jewish Christians that He accepted the Samaritan Christians equally as He accepted the Jewish Christians. There was to be no racism or greater or lesser Christians in the church. (1 Cor. 12:13) All were equal in God's eyes. Paul says in Romans 8:9 "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."

Simon, who had been following Philip trying to learn his power, saw how the Holy Spirit came on those new believers when the apostles touched them. Since Simon did not receive the Holy Spirit at this time it is obvious that his belief and baptism were a false profession.

Q. 13. Do you see people in the church today, who like Simon, have only a head knowledge and not a heart acceptance of Jesus? What is lacking in their lives?

When Simon saw the power of the Holy Spirit come on the believers, he wanted that power for himself. He thought that Peter's ability to give the Holy Spirit was like his ability to do magic. He thought it was something he could get by money and could manipulate so as to earn money from others by giving them the Holy Spirit. Since his pretense of being a believer did not give him the Holy Spirit, he offered money to the apostles to sell the power to him to give the Holy Spirit to those on whom he placed his hands.

Wealth has great power in the world in which we live, but it cannot buy the Holy Spirit or the fruit of the Spirit. Money may bring some comforts but it cannot bring peace of heart or eternal hope. Peter rebuked Simon for trying to buy the gift of God with money saying, "Your heart is not right. Repent!" (verse 21) Unfortunately, Simon did not repent. In fact, early church history teaches that he became a major enemy of the church and started a false teaching called "Gnosticism" that would later cause great problems for Christianity. Although for awhile he seemed to have believed in Jesus and even went through baptism, this did not mean that his life and heart had changed. He thought that Christianity was another way to make money from people. The fruits of his life later proved that his initial faith was not genuine. His request that Peter pray for him came not out of a genuine desire to repent, but only to protect his life from judgment.

In the city of Samaria many responded to the message of Christ. As the apostles returned to Jerusalem, they proclaimed the gospel in many of the Samaritan villages. The witness of the gospel was expanding, fulfilling Jesus' command to go and be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. The "ends of the earth" would be the next outreach in God's program. (Acts 1:8)

Q. 14. In what ways is it right or wrong for us to covet the power of the Holy Spirit?

In one sense, coveting the Holy Spirit is a good sign showing that we are hoping to grow deeper in the rich love of God (Ephesians 3:18-19) and striving to obey God's command in Ephesians 5:18. But if we are coveting the Holy Spirit in order to become rich or famous or seem spiritual, we are sinning against God. As it is with other desires, our motivation for obtaining something, whether it is the Holy Spirit or a good job, or a spouse or anything else shows the real condition of our hearts and whether we are wanting to glorify God or have selfish motives and desires.

Q. 15. How do Christians sometimes try to buy the peace of God or gain His favor by giving money? Have you ever done this?

One young man believed the Lord had called him to serve as an evangelist in another country. But he met a girl he wanted as his wife and she did not want to go to another country. Instead of obeying the Lord, he married the girl and tried to justify his disobedience by giving money to send others to do the Lord's work.

There are many who try to cover their disobedience with gifts to the church or to some social cause. Though many are called to give of their wealth to send others, it should not be a substitute for obeying the Lord.

Q. 16. Are you willing to commit yourself to obeying God completely--no matter what He would ask you to do? Pray now to your loving heavenly Father and give yourself completely to Him.

THIRD DAY

ACTS 8:26-40

Philip was one of the Hellenist Jews who had remained in Jerusalem after Pentecost to study and fellowship with the believers. He was one of the seven appointed to help distribute food to the widows. However, when the persecution in Jerusalem became severe, Philip and many others left the city to return to their homelands and cities. They went, carrying the gospel witness into Judea and Samaria, as God had commanded. Philip was having a very fruitful ministry in the city of Samaria when suddenly God spoke to him through an angel. He told Philip to go south from Jerusalem on the road to Gaza.

Today we will see how God prepared the heart of one man to receive His Word and how He led and prepared Philip to witness to him. God, by the Holy Spirit prepares hearts for His message and uses obedient people to carry that message to them.

Q. 17. Read Acts 8:26-40 and answer these questions. a) How did God prepare the heart of the Ethiopian official? b) How do we know his heart was prepared? c) What means did God use to direct Philip to the Ethiopian official?

Philip obeyed God's command. He left a very exciting ministry in Samaria and went south of Jerusalem on the main highway to Egypt which went through Gaza. This was a long trip. First he had to leave Samaria and go to Jerusalem which was about 40 kilometers away. Then he had to travel some distance to the south. As he walked on the busy road a chariot passed him and the Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go to the chariot and stay near it." The man in the chariot was an Ethiopian official returning to his country from Jerusalem.

The ancient nation of Ethiopia did not contain the same boundaries of modern Ethiopia. Rather, it consisted of northern Sudan and northern Ethiopia. Most likely this Ethiopian was an official in the government of Ethiopia. He was also a proselyte. A proselyte to Judaism is when a Gentile believes in the God of the Old Testament and wants to become a full Jew. In order to become a Jew, the Gentile had to leave his old religion, believe in God, be circumcised, and obey all of the laws of the Old Testament and follow the Old Testament worship system. Although racially a Gentile, in actuality he was now a Jew.

No doubt the Ethiopian eunuch was going back to Ethiopia after having worshipped in the Temple. But God wanted to bring this man into a full relationship with Him and so he sent Philip to tell the Ethiopian about Jesus Christ.

As Philip drew near to the Ethiopian, he heard him reading aloud from a scroll of the book of Isaiah. He was reading Isaiah 53:7-8. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (vs. 30) Although the Ethiopian understood the words, he did not understand the meaning of the passage. Nor did he realize that it had already been fulfilled by Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian invited Philip to come into the chariot and explain it to him. Beginning with the passage in Isaiah, Philip explained the birth, death, resurrection and coming return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Q. 18. a) Why is it not enough just for an unbeliever to read the Scriptures? b) What else is necessary?

The heart of the Ethiopian was prepared by the hand of God. He had been to Jerusalem to worship. He was a Gentile but was attracted to the religion of the Jews, who worshipped one God, in a day when so many people worshipped many gods. He had read the Scriptures and since he came all the way to Jerusalem to worship, he may have been a Jewish proselyte. Yet, he needed someone to explain the Word of God to him.

As Philip explained the Scripture to the Ethiopian man, they came to some water and the Ethiopian said, "Why shouldn't I be baptized?" (vs. 37) The Ethiopian must have heard about Jesus' command to be baptized. He wanted to obey completely God's command and so wanted to be baptized immediately. Therefore they went down into the water and the Ethiopian was baptized. Then the Holy Spirit suddenly took Philip away, and the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing.

- Q. 19. What were the means God had used to bring understanding to the heart of the Ethiopian official?
Q. 20. Why was God able to use Philip?
Q. 21. What is the purpose of baptism today? Are most of the people in your church baptized? If they are not, why do so many people not get baptized when it is God's command?

Although God had prepared the heart of the Ethiopian, he still used Philip to lead him to Christ. Philip also was ready to obey God and witness concerning Christ. Philip began by explaining the verses that the Ethiopian was reading. Philip's explanation also must have made it clear to the Ethiopian that he must personally accept Jesus and the purpose of baptism. If Philip had not had a good knowledge of the Word of God, he could not have taught the Ethiopian. Philip was also willing and quick to obey the Holy Spirit's leading.

- Q. 22. a) Why is it very important for a Christian to have a thorough understanding of the Word of God?
b) What are the dangers in not knowing God's Word?

Believing in Christ also means obeying God's commands. The Ethiopian man asked to be baptized after he had heard and accepted Philip's teaching about the good news of Jesus. The ceremony of baptism was an outward act, performed on people who had believed in Jesus Christ for their salvation. The Ethiopian was baptized because he had become a Christian by faith in Christ. Baptism did not save him, but was an outward sign of an inner change in his life.

God used an angel to bring His command to Philip to go to the desert of Gaza. However, it was the Holy Spirit who directed Philip to go near to the chariot. Because Philip was obedient to God's instructions, he had the opportunity to explain the Gospel to the Ethiopian man who was the first recorded Gentile who became a Christian. God was not only concerned with the many in Samaria, He also saw the need of this one Gentile man and sent Philip to lead him to faith in Christ.

When we witness, the Scripture we use should lead the listener to see the Lord Jesus. All Scripture must be related to Christ as He alone is the One who can save us from our sins.

- Q. 23. Can you give an example of someone you know whose heart was prepared by God to receive the gospel? Ask God to lead you to someone whose heart is ready to receive the gospel message. Be ready to share the good news of salvation with him.

Q. 24. Make a list of Scripture verses that you can use while witnessing to unbelievers to lead them to Christ.

We cannot bring anyone to salvation unless God first works in his heart. We are called to boldly and clearly witness for Jesus. It is God's responsibility to open the person's heart and lead him to belief. It is our responsibility to witness.

FOURTH DAY

SAUL

We have seen how God spread the Gospel witness from Jerusalem to Samaria and then began to reach the Gentiles beginning with the Ethiopian eunuch. Today we will look at the life of a man, Saul of Tarsus, who was used by God to reach out with the Good News of Jesus to large numbers of people. You will remember how when Stephen preached the sermon which led to the Jews stoning him to death, Saul was there approving his death. This young zealous Pharisee was soon to be God's messenger to the Gentiles.

God often uses very unlikely people in His service. Later concerning himself, Paul said, "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God." (1 Corinthians 15:9) Saul, who was persecuting the church was chosen by God and became Paul, His messenger to the Gentiles.

Q. 25. Read the following verses and list the things you read about Paul's life. Acts 8:1-3, Acts 22:1-21, 25-28; Galatians 1:11-24; Philippians 3:4-6. Also read about Paul in the Bible Dictionary.

Saul was born in Tarsus, in the region of Cilicia, in Asia Minor which is modern Turkey. (Look on the maps in Appendix B in the back of the book for Tarsus.) His father, although a Jew, was a Roman citizen, which made Saul a citizen of Rome, giving him special privileges. We will see later that this status was a benefit to Paul as he travelled in other countries in the Roman empire, allowing him to preach the Gospel before kings and even Caesar.

Saul's father was also a Pharisee and reared Saul in the strict rules and regulations of the Pharisees. Jewish law required that a boy begin the study of the Scriptures at five years of age. At thirteen a boy became a "Son of the Commandment" and became fully responsible to the Jewish law. It was probably at this age that Saul went to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel, perhaps living with his married sister. (Acts 23:16) Saul became very zealous of the Jewish traditions.

Having grown up in the Gentile-Hellenistic world of Tarsus, Paul also had a good understanding of the Gentile people and cultures. This was later beneficial as he travelled in the Gentile countries preaching the Gospel. He spoke fluent Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. Paul had a brilliant mind and knew both Hebrew and Hellenistic culture.

Saul's home influence and his training in the Jewish traditions made him opposed to the gospel concerning Jesus Christ, which he considered heresy. It was his zeal for Judaism which made Saul a willing observer when Stephen was stoned to death and made him determined to destroy the church. More than

other Jews, Paul advanced quickly in his knowledge and obedience to the Jewish religious laws. He was even chosen to be on the Jewish supreme court, the Sanhedrin.

In Acts 5 we saw that Saul's teacher, Gamaliel counselled the Jews to be patient and moderate in their persecution of the church, but Saul did not have that view. He saw that the new teachings of the gospel were not in agreement with Judaism. Stephen's message made this very clear to Saul but he refused to accept that Jesus was the Messiah, because death on a cross was a curse. He did not think that the Messiah could die that way. (See 1 Corinthians 1:23)

But when Jesus called him on the Damascus road, his zeal and devotion changed from persecuting the church to preaching the Good News about Jesus. (Acts 9) Paul's training and background explain his zeal for Judaism. But it also prepared him for the ministry to both Jews and Gentiles. After he met Christ his zeal was for instead of against the gospel. He was exactly the kind of man Jesus would use to lead the church out into the world. See the book "The Life and Ministry of Paul" for more details on this man's life.

- Q. 26. Make a list of the different things in Paul's life that prepared him to be the apostle of the Gentiles.
Q. 27. Make a list of things that God has done in your life that you think he can use for your service of him.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Stephen's message make the Jews so furious?
2. What event began the severe persecution against the church in Jerusalem?
3. a) What were the similarities between the Samaritans and Jews?
b) How was the worship of the Samaritans different from that of the Jews?
4. Who first took the Gospel into Samaria?
5. What was Simon's motive for wanting the Holy Spirit?
6. Why was the Ethiopian official so quick to accept the Gospel?
7. What preparation for his ministry did Paul's background and training give him?
8. Who are those whom God can use in His service?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a) Discuss how God can use persecution for the spread of the Gospel. Give examples from your own church.
- b) 1) What was the purpose of miracles and signs?
2) Why should we be cautious of miracle-workers today?
- c) Discuss the receiving of the Holy Spirit on the Samaritan Christians.
 - 1) Why did it take place only through Peter?
 - 2) Why did God not give the Holy Spirit to them when they first believed?
 - 3) What answers do you give to Christians who think that the Holy Spirit is only given when someone lays hands on a Christian or is a second act after salvation?

- d) 1) Is reading the Word of God adequate for an unbeliever to know Christ? What more did the Ethiopian man need? Explain this in depth.
- 2) Make a list of scriptures that should be used when witnessing to a nonbeliever.

Lesson Seven

Acts 9:1-43

FIRST DAY

ACTS 9:1-18

Paul was one of the most important men in the development of the church. Yet, in the beginning he led in the persecution of the church in Jerusalem, going door to door to find the Christians and put them in prison. This scattered the believers into the surrounding cities and towns of Judea and Samaria. We saw last week, however, how God used this persecution to get the Gospel message out into Judea and Samaria. As the persecuted Christians scattered, they carried the Gospel message with them.

The most important event in history was the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The reason He came to earth, died and rose again was to form His body, the church. After His resurrection and ascension, Christ came to live in the believers' hearts in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Another important event in the continuing of Christ's work on earth, was the conversion of Saul, Christ's messenger to the Gentile world. Saul, or as he was called in Greek, Paul was completely changed after seeing Jesus on the Damascus road. He changed from being a major enemy of Christianity to becoming an apostle of the Gospel, even willing to be persecuted himself. The creation of a new creature in Christ is one of the greatest proof for the truth of Christian faith. As Gentiles, many of us owe much to Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles. Through him, Christianity became a universal religion, not just another sect of Judaism. This is why Acts tells many of the details about his life and work.

Question 1. Read Acts 9:1-43 and answer these questions: a) Why was Saul going to Damascus? b) After he received his sight, what did Saul do? c) Where did Peter continue his ministry?
Q. 2. Read Acts 9:1-18 again and answer the following questions. a) 1) What happened to Saul while he was traveling to Damascus? 2) How did Christ reveal himself to Saul? b) Why do you think Saul was blinded for three days? c) Why did Ananias question the Lord's command? d) After Saul received his sight, what did Saul do?

After the death of Stephen, Saul continued zealously in his attempt to destroy the Christian church. He got permission from the high priest to go to Damascus and bring all the Christians to Jerusalem in order to put them in prison and later kill them. Damascus was about 150 kilometers away from Jerusalem. Already Christianity had spread among the Jews to this great city and Paul wanted to stop its growth.

However, as Paul travelled from Jerusalem most likely God was speaking to his heart. As he thought about Stephen's defense against the Hellenistic Jews, Saul probably found that he had to agree with much of Stephen's message. Yet, Saul had consented to Stephen's death and watched him die with the glorious light of heaven shining on his face. Saul had heard Stephen declare that he saw heaven and Christ at God's right hand. All of this brought conflict into the mind of Saul.

Q. 3. a) What is the work of the Holy Spirit in unbelievers? b) How does He work in believers' lives? c) How has the Holy Spirit worked in your life?

The road to Damascus was a six days journey from Jerusalem and Saul probably did a lot of thinking as he traveled. As they neared the city, suddenly there was a blinding flash of light from heaven. Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Anytime that God's people are persecuted, Jesus Christ the head of the church is also being persecuted. This must have caused great conviction because Saul was a young man zealous in following the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Saul cried, "Who are you, Lord?" The voice said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." God reveals Himself to any seeker who truly seeks to know Him. Saul was given a vision of the risen Jesus Christ which completely changed his life's purpose.

All of the conflict in Saul's convicted, restless heart and mind was suddenly made clear and Saul surrendered to the Christ that he had been persecuting. Jesus of Nazareth, whom Saul thought was dead, was alive and Saul's error was suddenly revealed.

Jesus said to Saul, "now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do." Jesus sent Saul to the very city that Saul had originally intended to visit but with a very different purpose. Saul probably stumbled to his feet, as he was blind. It must have been difficult for him to go into Damascus because many who opposed Christ were waiting for him, expecting him to help in persecuting the church. No doubt they would be angry at his rejecting his job of destroying Christianity. Yet he rose up and went in obedience to his new Lord.

For three days Saul remained blind and neither ate or drank anything. Those three days gave time for Saul to re-evaluate his purpose in life. He probably thought through the Old Testament prophecies which he knew so well and realized that Jesus was truly the long anticipated Messiah.

As Saul waited in darkness, God prepared another man, Ananias to go to Saul. He told Ananias to go and restore the sight of Saul. Ananias was doubtful, because he had heard about Saul and his reason for coming to Damascus. But the Lord said, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel." In our study of Acts we will see how this prophecy was fulfilled in the life of Paul. God also revealed to Ananias that Saul would suffer for Jesus' name. We do not know much about Ananias. He was God's disciple and God's instrument in Saul's life. Although Ananias had doubts about visiting Saul he was obedient to God's command and helped open the eyes of a man who became very important in the development of the church.

Q. 4. Have you ever had God lead you to witness to someone about the Lord Jesus or to talk to a believer who was struggling with some problem? Write out the circumstances of the situation and whether you were obedient to the Lord's command.

Right from the start God told Ananias and Saul what his major work would be. Rather than minister to the Jews or those who had accepted Judaism, Paul was to minister to those who were Gentiles. The Gentiles were hated by the Jews who often looked at them as being completely outside of any of God's plans. Rather they were doomed to eternal damnation. But God is not a tribal God, a God of Jews only. Rather he is the creator God who created all people. He loves them all equally. Therefore, God chose Paul as his major instrument to open the Gospel for the Gentiles. Since most of us today are Gentiles, we owe

a great debt to the apostle Paul who brought the Gospel that in Christ there is no Greek or Jew- but all are one. As the body of Christ we are to reveal this oneness across racial and economic lines.

Q. 5. a) How has the Gospel done away with racial and social barriers in Ethiopia? Give some illustrations.
b) What are some racial barriers in the church that we still need to destroy?

Concerning Ananias Paul said, "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law." (Acts 22:12) God uses our background as well as our talents. Like Saul, Ananias was a Hebrew not a Hellenist, so was able to speak to Saul, who was "a Hebrew of the Hebrews". (Philippians 3:5-6)

When God spoke, Ananias answered, "Yes, Lord." Although he knew Saul's reputation and purpose for coming to Damascus and faced the chance of being captured himself, he obeyed and went to the house of Judas on the street called "Straight". Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "the Lord - Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here - has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

As Ananias spoke these words, sight returned to Saul's eyes. He got up and was baptized. From that time on Paul's life was completely given over to the Christ he had persecuted.

Q. 6. a) How is your life similar to Ananias'? If you have sensed God's leading but from fear have been disobedient, pray right now and ask God to give you the strength to carry out the task He is asking of you.
b) Has your commitment to Christ been as complete as that of Paul? Explain. If you have not been committed to completely following Jesus, pray right now and make the commitment to go anywhere and do anything that He asks you to do.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, better known as Paul the Apostle, was the beginning of the gospel message going "to the ends of the earth". It was a very important event in the history of the church. A changed life is one of the strongest evidences of the truth and power of the Christian faith. There is no other explanation for the change in Saul and the ministry of Paul, apart from the risen Christ. It was the revelation of the risen Christ which convicted Paul of his sin. Today, it is seeing the risen Christ by God's gift of faith, that we become new creatures in Christ. Only Christ can make a difference.

Q. 7. Are you a new creature in Christ? How has He made a difference in your life?

SECOND DAY

ACTS 9:19-31

Zealous for the Jewish traditions and law, Saul the young Pharisee was on his way to Damascus to seize the Christians. However, he saw the risen Lord Jesus on the Damascus road. Suddenly, Saul realized that he was fighting against God. Later Jesus told Saul about the plans He had for him- both of witnessing and suffering.

The Lord has a plan for every life which we discover only after we have met Him. The Holy Spirit convicts and gives a restlessness until we come to Christ. Then He leads us, sometimes through delays, as He did in the life of Saul. We all have a place in God's plans. He desired to use us for his kingdom in unique ways. Are we willing to be used even if it means suffering?

Q. 8. Read Acts 9:19-31 and answer these questions. a) With whom did Saul stay in Damascus? b) Where did Saul witness? c) How did the Jews receive Saul's message? d) When Saul went to Jerusalem what was the reaction of the disciples? e) Who interceded for Saul to the disciples? f) How did Saul continue the work of Stephen? (vs. 29) g) Why did the Christian brothers send Paul to Caesarea? h) Who strengthened and encouraged the church and caused it to grow?

After Saul's conversion and baptism, he began immediately to preach in the synagogues in Damascus, that Jesus is the Son of God. This was the message he came to Damascus to stop by putting the Christians in prison. This perplexed both the Jews and the Christians. The Jews thought he had come to destroy Christianity. The Christians thought he had come to spy on them. Neither group trusted or understood Paul. As Saul's message became more convincing and powerful, after many days the Jews conspired to kill Saul.

Q. 9. Read Galatians 1:16-18. How long were those "many days" in Acts 9:23? How long was it between the time of Paul's conversion and the time he went to Jerusalem?

Q. 10. Read 2 Corinthians 11:32-33. What did Paul's enemies plan to do?

In order to understand the chronology of the events in Paul's life, we must look at Galatians and 2 Corinthians. Those "many days" in Acts 9:23 were about 3 years, most of which Paul spent in Arabia. Paul says that after his conversion he went to Arabia. From Arabia he returned to Damascus where he preached until a plot was made to kill Paul. Hearing of the plot, and since his enemies were watching the city gates, the disciples took Paul at night and lowered him in a basket through the window in the city wall. Paul says that it was three years from the time of his conversion that he went to Jerusalem.

Christ's commission to Saul was to carry the name of Christ before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. (Acts 9:15) Three years had passed and except for a witness in the synagogues in Damascus, Paul had not been able to obey this commission. He spent almost three years in Arabia. The opposition in Damascus made it necessary to flee. When Paul arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all still afraid of him and didn't trust his testimony.

When Paul was rejected by the disciples in Jerusalem, Barnabas the encourager, took Paul to the Apostles. He explained how Saul had seen the Lord on the Damascus road and how he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Paul stayed with the Apostles and preached boldly. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, the Hellenists who had stoned Stephen to death. They too tried to kill Paul. When his Christian brothers heard this they took Paul to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus, his home. Again, Saul's efforts to preach the risen Christ was delayed. The hostility of his people, the Jews would in time send him to the Gentiles, and he would experience all his life the resistance of his own people.

Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus persuaded him of three things.

1) His former zeal against the church was wrong. A voice from heaven had corrected him. The Law of Moses, which he had considered final authority was given to bring men to faith in Christ, not to keep for salvation. (Galatians 3:19-24)

2) Jesus, whom Saul was persecuting, was alive, having risen from the dead. Christ's death on the cross, did not make Him an imposter but He was God's provision for man's sin and was the fulfillment of

prophecy. Christ's resurrection was also fulfillment of prophecy and proved that those who believe in Christ will receive new life in Him. (See 1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

3) Paul was persuaded that he had been appointed by Jesus Christ to be an apostle to the Gentiles. (See Romans 11:13; 15:16)

Paul declared that this new understanding of God's plan of redemption for Jews and Gentiles came to him in a revelation given by Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:11-12, Ephesians 3:2-3) However, this became more clearly understood as he saw Gentiles being accepted into the body of Christ by faith, in the same way as the Jews. Saul's old friends became his enemies and tried to kill him. Those he had once persecuted as his enemies became his friends.

Paul's immediate testimony strengthened his faith and commitment. Something a new Christian must be encouraged to do as soon as they put their faith in Jesus is to start witnessing concerning Jesus Christ. They need to tell Christians of what Jesus has done in their lives. But they also need to share with their non-Christian friends about their new faith. It is often during these first days of faith that they are able to bring others to Christ.

Paul's desire to serve God was often frustrated with many delays. But God was using the times of delay to work in Paul's life to prepare him for greater service. This time in the desert of Arabia was time Paul needed to re-think his former belief and time for the Holy Spirit and Christ by revelation to teach him concerning the new covenant which Christ established by His death and resurrection.

Q. 11. a) Have there been times in your life when it seemed that God was not using you? How did you respond? b) What can you learn from God's dealing with Paul?

We may ask, "Why did it take so long before Paul was able to begin his ministry? Why all the delays and threats on his life?" God had work to do in the young Pharisee's life before He could use him in a mighty way. Paul's understanding of God's plan and purpose through Christ needed to be refined and established. When Paul did return to actively carry out his commission, he was ready--to preach, to write letters, to establish churches, and train leaders to assure the development of the church.

There are times in our lives, when we are impatient to do what we believe God has called us to do. It is difficult to wait, but the Lord has things to teach us. We need preparation for the work for which He has commissioned us.

Q. 12. a) How does becoming a Christian today often give a person new enemies and new friends? b) Why does acceptance of Jesus Christ change our friends? c) Why should new Christians not be quickly given major ministry responsibilities?

THIRD DAY

ACTS 9:32-43

While God was molding and preparing Paul for his commission to the Gentiles, He was also working in the life of Peter. Because he was the apostle to the Jews, Peter's major ministry was to the Jews. The

apostle's ministry of teaching and healing was continuing. Peter was traveling through Judea, strengthening the Christians and healing the sick. (Acts 2:42)

The early church faced many struggles with prejudice. Many years passed before the barrier between the Jews and Gentiles was overcome. There were also other prejudices needing to be overcome. We will see this in Peter's life in our study today. There have always been tensions in the church over various prejudices. Part of our growth in Christ is learning to see these evil prejudices with the eyes of Christ and change. The ability of a Christian to love those he once hated is a strong proof of the truth of the Gospel.

Q. 13. a) What prejudices do you experience in your church or in society? b) Are they a hinderance to the testimony of the church?

Q. 14. Read Acts 9:32-43 and answer the following questions. a) Why was Peter traveling about the country? b) Why did many turn to the Lord in Lydda and Sharon? c) Who was Tabitha? What was her ministry and where did she live? d) Who sent to Lydda for Peter and why did they send for him? e) What happened as a result of Tabitha's restoration from death? f) With whom did Peter stay in Joppa?

Peter went to visit the Jewish Christians in Lydda which was a town about 20 kilometers away from Jerusalem. In Lydda there was a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been in bed for eight years. Peter healed the man and all who saw it believed and turned to the Lord. The miracle was used to prove the authority of Jesus Christ and open a door of greater ministry.

While in Lydda, Peter received a call to go to Joppa. Joppa was a town about 50 kilometers away from Jerusalem by the Mediterranean Sea. A disciple of Christ named Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas, had become sick and died. The Christians having heard of Peter's ability to heal the sick, in faith, sent for Peter. When Peter arrived he saw the love they all had for Dorcas. She had ministered to the widows by making them clothing. After prayer, Peter raised Dorcas from the dead, and presented her again to the disciples and widows who loved her and had mourned her death.

One of the results of Christianity was the acceptance of women into the church as equal members with the men. At that time in the Roman Empire, women were considered as property. They had no rights and their status was often that of a slave. Christ accepted women as His disciples. They were among His followers. The resurrection of Jesus was first announced to a woman. (John 20:10-18) Jesus healed women and they were his friends. God seeks to use women as well as men to spread the Gospel and reach the world.

Q. 15. a) What role do women have in your church? b) Are they treated with the respect and dignity that Jesus gave them?

Love is another characteristic of the Christian faith--a fruit of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:22) Dorcas showed her love in practical ways by serving others. There is no evidence of any prejudice against Dorcas, who was a woman and a disciple. Many in Joppa believed in the Lord because Dorcas was raised from the dead. Peter continued to teach in Joppa where he stayed with Simon the Tanner.

For the Jews, anyone who worked as a tanner was considered unclean. This is because the Old Testament said that anyone who touched the dead body of an animal was unclean. Therefore Jews would

not eat with or visit any tanners but saw them as cursed, always living outside of the law of Moses. This was a common prejudice among the Jews, but Peter was no longer bound by this partiality. Christ had been working in Peter's heart and overcoming some of his prejudices.

Q. 16. a) How is this type of prejudice seen in Ethiopia today? b) Is your testimony hindered by some prejudice? c) Are you willing to let the Lord give you victory over it? Pray asking God to show you any prejudice in your life that might be a hindrance in your spiritual life.

God was working in Peter and preparing him to recognize an even greater barrier, his suspicion of Gentiles, which was hindering his ministry. The work of the Holy Spirit gently leads and points out the things in our lives which are not honoring to Christ. We must be sensitive and willing to recognize our need to change. The Holy Spirit does not reveal all the things that need to be changed at one time. But recognizing things we must change and yielding them to the Lord, causes us to grow in our spiritual lives.

Some of the tensions of the early church are the same or similar to ones in today's churches. The problems between ethnic groups, prejudice because of occupation, social status, sex or economic level are as common today as they were in Peter's time. Only the control of Christ in our lives can remove these.

Q. 17. Read Galatians 3:26-28 and Colossians 3:11. Are love and acceptance of all people characteristic of your life? How is this seen in your life?

FOURTH DAY

REVIEW QUESTIONS FROM ACTS 9:1-43

1. Why was Saul so intent on destroying the church?
2. What is the most important event in history?
3. Who was the most important messenger to the Gentile world?
4. Where was Paul during the first three years after his conversion?
5. a) What were two prejudices which had to be dealt with in the early church?
b) Are these tensions still evident in the church in Ethiopia today?
6. How did Paul prove his sincerity from the very beginning of his Christian life? Is this a characteristic of your life?

REVIEW OF LESSONS 1-7 (ACTS 1-9)

1. a) Which command gives a summary of the book of Acts?
b) How much of that command is fulfilled in Acts 1-9?
2. List specific events which show the work of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1-9.
3. List the main points of the Apostles' message in the early church.
4. List 5 men that the Lord especially used in the growth of the church.
5. What were 2 internal problems in the church?
6. Compare Acts 9:31 with Acts 6:7. How far had the church extended its boundaries?

The book of Acts is the continuation of the work of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit in the lives of His followers. "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the

earth." Acts 1:8 is a summary of the book of Acts. In one sense this was the special task given to the 11 apostles, who had been with Jesus during His earthly ministry and had witnessed to His resurrection. However, the task was not theirs alone. Many other Christians shared in the early spread of the gospel message. We too are called to continue on with that witness.

What is the gospel message? In brief, it is the good news that Jesus, who was raised from the dead after being put to death by the Jews, is Savior from sin for all who will receive Him. The blessings of salvation are the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit who gives joy, peace and the power to live the new life.

The small group of believers who gathered in Jerusalem after receiving the Holy Spirit, greatly increased in numbers. The main emphasis of Acts is the growth and spread of the gospel message. Acts 2-5 tell of the growth and establishing of the group of believers in Jerusalem.

Q. 18. What caused the gospel witness to spread out from Jerusalem?

Beginning in Acts 6 there is an awareness that the gospel was not only for the Jerusalem Jews. Many Hellenistic Jews--those who had lived outside of Jerusalem and Judea were being converted. These Hellenistic Jews spoke Greek and had grown up in the Greek culture. They were often considered inferior Jewish citizens by the Jerusalem Orthodox Jews. However, when persecution began in Jerusalem with the stoning of Stephen, it was the Hellenistic Jews who left Jerusalem carrying the gospel message into Judea and Samaria. The Samaritans were the first believers who were not fully Jewish. By the middle of Acts 9, the church had spread throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria, and even a traveler from Ethiopia had received Christ as the Messiah.

The apostles primarily preached to the Jews. They proclaimed the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead; that He was the Messiah predicted by the prophets and that He is Lord and the source of salvation. It was Jesus' resurrection and exaltation which were the center of the message to the Jews. The apostles gave the Jews a call to repentance.

With the salvation of Paul, things began to change within the church. Paul's commission was to both the Jews and the Gentiles. When the Jews rejected the Gospel, he went to the Gentiles. (See Romans 1:16) A new era was about to begin for the church with Gentiles entering it.

With the spread of Christianity, the opposition of Satan also increased. Satan used three main methods which he continues to use today.

First, he used persecution. As soon as the apostles began to witness concerning Jesus, they were imprisoned and whipped by the Jewish leaders. Although ordered not to witness concerning Jesus, they continued that witness because Christ had commanded them. Later, Stephen, the first martyr of the church died because of his witness of Christ. Many Christians then were imprisoned and some even killed because they refused to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, Satan also tried to create division within the early church. In the early church in Jerusalem there were two main groups of believers. There were the Hebrew Jews who had grown up in Judea. There was also the Hellenistic Jews who had grown up outside of Judea. As both became Christians, there was suspicion between the two groups, especially the widows over the fair distribution of aid. The apostles quickly stopped this by appointing 7 deacons to oversee the financial responsibilities of the church.

Third, Satan tried to corrupt the holiness of the Christians. He used the sin of hypocrisy in the lives of Ananias and Sapphira to disrupt the holiness of the people. God's quick judgment on them brought fear and a desire to live in holiness before God.

Q. 19. a) How is the spread of the early church similar to the spread of Christianity in Ethiopia? b) What lessons can we learn from the first 9 chapters of Acts concerning spreading the Gospel and facing persecution? c) What can we learn about the work of the Holy Spirit through believers? (Write down your own answers. You will discuss this together in the weekly meeting.)

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a) 1) What did the vision of the risen and glorified Christ reveal to Saul?
 - 2) What additional help did Saul need, which Ananias was able to give?
 - 3) What does this tell us about the Lord using people?
 - 4) How was this a double-confirmation to Saul?
- b) Discuss prejudices in your church--social, sex, age, ethnic or family. What can you do to make people more accepting of one another?
- c) 1) How is the spread of the early church similar to the spread of Christianity in Ethiopia?
 - 2) What lessons can we learn from the first 9 chapters of Acts concerning spreading the Gospel and facing persecution?
 - 3) What can we learn about the work of the Holy Spirit through believers from the first 9 chapters of Acts?
- d) Do you know individuals whose lives have changed dramatically, like that of Paul? Share about this.

Lesson Eight

Acts 10:1-11:18

FIRST DAY

INTRODUCTION

We have seen how God's message of salvation spread from the Jewish nation to their neighbors. It started in Jerusalem, spread throughout the nation of the Jews, Judea, and then on to the neighboring tribe, the Samaritans. This week we will see what happened when the time had come in God's program for the gospel to move out into the Gentile world. Up to this time there is no record of Gentiles being included in the church except for the Ethiopian official, who may have been a proselyte to the Jewish faith.

Perhaps about eight years had passed since Pentecost. The conversion of Saul, who had been leading the persecution against the Christians, was followed by a time of rest and growth for the Christian church. Philip and Peter travelled throughout Judea and Samaria witnessing and strengthening the believers. God was preparing the way for the next phase of His command, that the gospel should go to the whole world. However, the hostility between Jews and Gentiles had to be dealt with first. God had to teach the Jewish Christians that he would receive Gentiles into his family on an equal basis with the Jews without the Gentiles first having to become Jews.

Question 1. List different hostilities that used to be or are present between tribes or social groups within Ethiopia.

Paul had been given the commission to carry Christ's name to the Gentiles. At this time God was training him in preparation for that ministry. Peter, however, was God's instrument to open the door for the Gentiles. You will remember from our previous discussion that Jesus had said to Peter that He would build His church on the rock of the Apostle's faith in Him. (See Matthew 16:17-18) Peter was God's agent of authenticating the faith of new groups of Christians like the Samaritans and the Gentiles. He was given the privilege of welcoming them into the family of God. He was also used by God to demonstrate that these new Christians were to be considered equal with the Jews by being present when the Holy Spirit was given to each new group. But even though a strong leader in the church, Peter's faith needed to be expanded and strengthened. God had to teach him that his understanding of the plans of God had to be expanded to include the Gentiles.

Q. 2. Read Ephesians 2:11-22 and answer these questions: a) What were the Gentiles called? b) From what were they excluded? c) What were they without? d) What has Christ accomplished for the Jews and the Gentiles? e) What was Christ's purpose for Jews and Gentiles?

As the Jews compared themselves to the Gentiles, there were several things that they thought made them better than the Gentiles. First, they were circumcised and the Gentiles were uncircumcised. You will remember that God gave the sign of circumcision to Abraham as an external sign that his descendants were under the covenant promises which God gave Abraham. For God, the major thing was not the external mark of circumcision, but the thing that it represented, their agreement to live under the

commands of God. The Jews however, felt that God was concerned mainly in the external act of circumcision. Paul later taught that God had always been concerned about those who are circumcised of heart, not just of the flesh. (Romans 2:28-29)

Q. 3. Why are men and women in Ethiopia circumcised today? Compare the reason with the Old Testament purpose.

Second, because the Gentiles were not circumcised they were excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenant promises. The Jews believed that the promises of God were only for those who were Jews. The Jews were members of the nation of Israel. They were the recipients of all of the promises God gave from the time of Abraham down through the prophets. They were the chosen people which meant they believed that all who were not physically Jews were not included in the promises of God. If a Gentile wanted to become part of the family of God, he had to become a Jew. This meant he had to be circumcised, be baptized, and agree to follow all of the laws of the Old Testament. Many Gentiles saw these as barriers to following the true God. They became "god fearers" - in other words they believed in only the one God and sought to live a moral life before Him. But they did not go so far as to become full Jews through circumcision. In today's lesson we will read about Cornelius who was a "god-fearer."

Finally, the Jews thought Gentiles were without hope and without God. Some Jews even taught that Gentiles could never become equal members in God's family since they were not the children of Abraham. Because they thought that only Jews would receive the promises of God, and because they hated the Gentiles who were often cruel to them, they took great joy in the fact that the Gentiles had no relationship with God and would therefore receive eternal punishment. The Jew had forgotten that they were to be a light to the Gentiles. (Isaiah 49:6)

However, this was not the plan of God. Christ's death was for all people, not just the Jews. In Christ and because of His shed blood, Gentiles have been brought near to God. Christ has destroyed the barrier between Jew and Gentile. By His death, he has fulfilled the law and its commandments and regulations. Jesus Christ has made Jew and Gentile into one body, the Church, reconciling both to God and making peace between them. Both have access to the Father by one Spirit and are now fellow citizens and members of God's household.

The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus as the chief cornerstone. Jews and Gentiles are joined together by faith in Christ, and become a Holy Temple in the Lord, in which God lives by His Holy Spirit.

This is what the death and resurrection of Christ made possible, but the hostility and division between Jew and Gentile was still present in the early church. This hostility between Jew and Gentile became one of the greatest struggles that the early church had to overcome. It took many years for the Jewish Christians to realize that God did not demand that the Gentiles become Jews in order to experience the full blessings of his salvation.

Q. 4. What is the relation between Jews and Gentiles today? Who are Jews and who are Gentiles?
Q. 5. a) What are other divisions between people in the world today? b) How does this apply to the distinctions made between potters or metal workers and other people in the church? c) What does the death of Jesus teach us about how our relationships should be with those from other tribes or social groups?

Q. 6. What is the only way that there will be oneness between the peoples of the world? (Relate this question to how Christ's death made Jews and Gentiles one.)

The tenth chapter of Acts tells of the reception of the first Gentiles into the church without first becoming Jewish proselytes. The barrier of culture and law was crossed in Caesarea, a Gentile city, by Simon Peter the leader of the Apostles.

SECOND DAY

Acts 10:1-23

We have seen from Ephesians chapter 2 some of the things which separated the Gentiles from the Jews. For many years the church had grown and become strong in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, but it had not reached out to the Gentiles. Paul was commissioned to take the name of Christ before the Gentiles but he was forced to leave Jerusalem and Judea and return to Tarsus, his home. He was no doubt witnessing to family and friends but there is no record of it. Peter was the one God used to open the door to the Gentiles.

Jesus once said concerning the faith of a Roman centurion, "I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 8:10-11) Jesus did not discriminate against the man because he was a Roman. Jesus realized that one day people from all cultures would join the family of God together with the Jews. God looks at the heart and is looking for faith in each one of us. Now we will see another Roman centurion who had great faith as well.

Q. 7. Read Acts 10:1-11:18. How does this section show that God broke down the walls of division between Jews and Gentiles?

Q. 8. Reread Acts 10:1-23 and answer the following questions: a) Who was Cornelius? b) How did God speak to him? c) Why did God speak to him? d) Where was Peter? e) How did God speak to Peter? f) What truth did God teach Peter?

Cornelius was a respected military commander in charge of about one hundred soldiers. He was a Roman and a man of good character. He believed in the one true God and worshipped Him three times a day, as the Jews did. Cornelius gave liberal gifts to the needy Jews around him. However he did not go through the circumcision process in order to become a full Jew. Although the Jews respected him, they still saw him as outside of the full blessings of God. They called such a man a "god fearer."

Cornelius lived in the Roman garrison town of Caesarea which was a major port city for the nation of Judah. Even though some Jews lived there, most of the population were Gentiles. Through his contact with the Jews Cornelius had learned to love and respect God. He demonstrated this love by trying to be good to all those in need. However, he did not know about Christ. One day at three o'clock when Cornelius was praying, God sent an angel who told Cornelius to send to Joppa for Peter. Joppa was about 40 kilometers away from Caesarea. God knew that the heart of Cornelius was prepared for the Gospel message. Therefore he prepared the way for Cornelius to hear about Jesus and believe and be saved.

Q. 9. a) Is fear of God sufficient to save someone? Explain. b) Why did God tell Cornelius to send for Peter instead of letting the angel tell the Gospel message?

The next day as the messengers from Cornelius were approaching the city of Joppa, God began to prepare the heart of Peter to teach the Gentiles. We have already seen how God had overcome some of Peter's prejudice by helping him live in a tanner's house. But Peter still had much to learn about God's plans for the Gentiles.

In Joppa, Peter was praying on the housetop. Jewish houses usually had a flat roof. Because it was often cooler than the house, the Jews would spend much time on the roofs. Peter became hungry and while the food was being prepared, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened. Three times Peter was shown various animals, birds and reptiles, all forbidden by the Old Testament laws for food. He was told to kill and eat. Three times Peter refused, saying, "Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." Although Jesus had already declared all foods clean (Mark 7:18-19), Peter was still conscientiously following the laws concerning clean and unclean animals listed in the Old Testament. It was not wrong for him to follow the tradition that he had grown up with in a Jewish home, but God used this vision to teach Peter that it is wrong when cultural customs become a barrier to the witness of the Gospel. A voice spoke to Peter saying, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

In his vision, God was teaching Peter two important truths. First, he was teaching Peter the truth that God no longer demanded that people only eat certain foods. Rather than be concerned with the external things of eating and drinking, God was more concerned with the heart. It was the heart that determined whether something was clean or unclean.

Q. 10. a) Make a list of foods that people do not eat in Ethiopia. Why do people refuse to eat certain things? b) What can we learn from Jesus response in Mark 7:18-19 and Peter's vision in Acts concerning our eating or not eating certain foods.

Second and more importantly God was teaching Peter that the Gentiles which Peter considered unclean, were created by God and were therefore clean. God was trying to destroy Peter's prejudice against the Gentiles so that he would be prepared to take the Gospel to Cornelius.

We can see how God was preparing two men. He prepared the Gentile, Cornelius to hear the gospel message, and Peter the Jew, to go to the Gentiles with the message of Christ.

Having shown him the vision, the Holy Spirit said to Peter, "Three men are at the gate looking for you. Don't be afraid to go with them. I have sent them."

Peter's natural reaction would have been to avoid having any contact with the Gentiles. Since they did not follow the Old Testament Scriptures Gentiles were considered "unclean" and would contaminate a Jew if he had contact with them. After the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter, he received the messengers from Cornelius and invited them into the house, breaking down the initial barriers to relating to Gentiles and eating together. When they explained their reason for coming, Peter's heart was prepared.

Q. 11. What three means did God use to speak to Cornelius and Peter?

Q. 12. What means does God use today to speak to you?

Part of becoming a new creature in Christ is the changing of our cultural understanding of certain things and other people. This change is often difficult. It is sometimes hard to separate what is part of our culture and what are the things that God demands of all people. In our pride and prejudice, we think that we are the better people and the way we do things is best. Growing in maturity in Christ means that we need to look at these things in our culture that create pride and separation, and see them as potential enemies of the Gospel rather than just differences. If we allow things like food or tribalism to create barriers to the Gospel, or if we believe that other people are inferior to us and their culture is inferior, we are guilty of the same sin that Peter and the Jews were guilty of. We need to learn that God is concerned about the prejudice in our hearts. He wants us to be more concerned about people and what we believe in our hearts rather than focus on what people wear, what they eat, or from what tribe they are from.

Q. 13. a) List ways that Christians in Ethiopia continue to show prejudice in race, food, etc. b) What do you think the Christian attitude should be to these differences? c) How can you be used by God to point out the prejudice and pride of other Christians and encourage them on into a more mature stance?

THIRD DAY

ACTS 10:24-48

Peter and Cornelius were each prepared by a vision for their meeting with one another. This tenth chapter of Acts is very important for several reasons: 1) It tells how the door of faith was opened to the Gentiles. 2) It introduces two issues that later caused great trouble in the church: a) how enemies like Jews and Gentiles could relate socially when their cultures were so different and b) what requirements had to be placed on the Gentiles like circumcision so that they could be saved and admitted into the church. These questions were later debated at the Council of Jerusalem. (Acts 15)

Peter realized that the vision which concerned the eating of foods previously considered unclean, involved much more than the eating of foods. Rather, it also involved the Jews relationship with Gentiles. His understanding was evident as he invited the messengers from Cornelius to eat with him and spend the night. The door to the Gentiles hearing the Gospel and being accepted into the church was opening.

Q. 14. Read Acts 10:24-48 and answer these questions. a) Who did Peter take with him to Caesarea? b) Who were those waiting for Peter when he arrived? c) Why was it not fitting for Peter to accept the honor which Cornelius gave him? d) How did God prepare Peter's and Cornelius' hearts? e) How did Peter begin his message? f) What evidence was there that Cornelius and his family and friends believed and accepted the truth which Peter taught?

When Peter went to Caesarea, he took along with him some of the Jewish Christians from Joppa. When he arrived in Caesarea, he was met by Cornelius and some of Cornelius' friends and relatives. Cornelius fell at his feet as if to worship him. Peter told Cornelius to get up, saying, "I am only a man myself." This is another example of an opportunity for Peter to claim honor for himself but instead he wanted Cornelius to know that God is the only one we should worship. A leader in a church must always be sure people focus their attention and honor on Christ, not on him.

Q. 15. How is this sometimes a danger to Christian leaders?

When Peter entered the house of Cornelius, he was met by a large crowd of Gentiles who also had an interest in the true God. Peter began his message to the gathering in Cornelius' home by reminding them that it was against the religious law for a Jew to visit a Gentile or associate with him. Then Peter said, "God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So, when I was sent for, I came...May I ask why you sent for me?" (Acts 10:28-29) Peter wanted to make clear to the Gentiles that it was God who was breaking down the barriers and allowing fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. God was not a God of Jews alone, but of all people.

Cornelius told how an angel appeared to him, saying that God had heard his prayer and remembered his gifts to the poor. Then the angel told Cornelius to send to Joppa for Simon Peter even telling him what house Peter would be living in. Cornelius said, "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us." (Acts 10:33)

What a wonderful opportunity! Cornelius had gathered together his relatives and close friends and they were waiting with great anticipation to hear what message God had given Peter. God had prepared their hearts for the Gospel.

Q. 16. Compare Acts 2:36 and 3:13-15 with Acts 10:34-38. a) When Peter addressed the Jews, what truths did he use to awaken their consciences? b) What truth did he use in speaking to the group gathered at Cornelius' house?

Peter started his message by saying, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." The very fact that God had personally sent an angel to meet with a Gentile was an amazing truth for Peter, even though the prophets had taught that God was concerned about the Gentiles. God had continually told the Jews that the nations would also be involved in the worship of God. (See Isaiah 42:6, 49:6,22)

Beginning with the baptism of John the Baptist, Peter reviewed the ministry of Jesus whom God had anointed with the Holy Spirit and power. Obviously these Gentiles had lived in Palestine long enough to know the rumors concerning Jesus of Nazareth. The greatness of Jesus was proven by the fact of his healing the sick and freeing those who were under demon power. Then the Jews in Jerusalem killed Jesus. Peter blamed the Jews, not the Romans for the death of Jesus, for the Jews should have known better. But the amazing fact that Peter emphasized was that God raised Jesus from the dead. He along with many others were witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. They were also commissioned as witnesses to all people. Peter said, "We were witnesses of everything he did...He chose us...and commanded us to teach the people that He is God's appointed...of whom the prophets testified. And all who believe in Him receive forgiveness of sins through His name." (Acts 10:39,41-43) It was the resurrection that proved that Jesus Christ was unique, and that his sacrifice for sin was accepted by God. Peter realized that God was the God of all people, "the judge of the living and the dead." Whether they be Jew or Gentile all must stand before him to be judged. The only way to escape that judgment was through belief in Jesus Christ.

Q. 17. Make a list of the major things in Peter's sermon that we should include in our witness to others.

While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all those who heard the message. These people did not receive the Holy Spirit just because they were in the room. Rather, they had all been prepared by God to believe the Gospel as soon as it was explained to them. No doubt they were amazed and relieved

that they could become children of God without becoming Jews first. It was the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles that proved to Peter and the rest of the Jews that God had in fact accepted the Gentiles as equals in the church even though they had not been circumcised. The Jews who came with Peter were amazed that the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles. They heard the Gentiles speaking in tongues and praising God. Notice that this time Peter did not have to lay his hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit. In fact the Holy Spirit came before he had finished his sermon! God gave them the same evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit that he gave Jews on the first day of Pentecost which was the ability to speak in tongues. Since they had received the Holy Spirit the same as the Jews, Peter ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus. Never again do we read in the book of Acts that Gentiles were required to go through a separate act of receiving the Holy Spirit after they had believed. Rather, like the Samaritans, God used Peter to confirm that these were true believers by witnessing the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them. Cornelius and his friends received the Holy Spirit the moment they believed. Water baptism followed their belief, as a witness to their new relationship with Christ.

Q. 18. Cornelius was a God-fearing man before he heard Peter's message. What did he gain by believing in Jesus? See Acts 11:13-16.

Q. 19. What have you gained by believing in Jesus? Take time to thank God right now for the wonderful gift He has given to you.

The door for salvation to the Gentiles was opened but the tensions between Jew and Gentile were not as quickly overcome. For many years, this tension between Jews and Gentiles would remain one of the major issues of the early church.

Q. 20. List some historic tensions and prejudices which are difficult to overcome in your church.

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 11:1-18

God had clearly revealed that salvation through Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit were for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews. There had been another Pentecost-type experience in Caesarea. But many Hebrew believers still thought that the only way to Christ was through the rites and rituals of Israel--particularly circumcision.

Some of the disciples who had accompanied Peter to Caesarea were Hebrew believers and were amazed that the Holy Spirit was given to the uncircumcised Gentiles. It was good that they witnessed the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles, as the controversy over this issue was not yet finished.

Q. 21. Read Acts 11:1-18 and answer the following questions. How did the apostles and Christian brothers in Jerusalem receive the news of the conversion of Cornelius and the others in Caesarea? b) How did Peter defend his actions? c) With what vital question did Peter end his defense? d) How did the apostles receive Peter's explanation and report?

Before Peter returned to Jerusalem the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem had already heard about what they considered Peter's unacceptable behavior in Caesarea. As usual everywhere, rumors spread rapidly. Many Jewish Christians began to accuse Peter of not being faithful to God. Peter remained for some time

in Caesarea teaching the new Gentile believers. After he returned to Jerusalem he was immediately questioned by "those who were of the circumcision". These were Hebrews who were especially zealous for the Law. Although they believed in Jesus Christ, they were adamant that to be fully Christian, people had to be circumcised and follow the Old Testament rituals. They criticized Peter saying, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them." (Acts 11:3) They accused him of not obeying the ritual of true Jews who refused to contaminate themselves through close contact with Gentiles.

Peter's defense of his conduct was to tell the complete experience of his vision on the roof top in Joppa and his objection to defiling himself by eating unclean food. Then he told how the messengers had come from Cornelius and the Holy Spirit had told him to go. When Peter heard Cornelius' request and how the angel told him to send for him, Peter had understood that truly God does not show favoritism. Then Peter explained to the Jewish believers that the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius and those gathered just as it had on the disciples at Pentecost. Peter concluded his defense by asking, "So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:17) The only way to stop such rumors is by making the truth known to all.

Q. 22. Why did Peter's defense defeat the criticism of the Hebrew Christians?

Q. 23. What criticisms arise between Christians today? b) Are some complaints over legalistic matters as it was in Acts 11? Explain.

Whenever a Christian goes against what most Christians believe is right even if there is little Scriptural evidence, he is distrusted. But, if we are convinced that what we believe and do is from God, we must be willing to obey God, facing their criticism until God also shows them his will.

Unfortunately, Peter did not completely learn this lesson about the oneness between Jews and Gentiles. Some years later, he went down to the city of Antioch where there were many Gentile Christians. But because of accusations of the Jews, he refused to eat and fellowship with the Gentiles until Paul openly accused him of hypocrisy. (See Galatians 2:11-16)

Although the Jewish Christians temporarily accepted the word of Peter, they did not fully agree with Peter. In Acts 15 we will read of a major council held by the Christians in Jerusalem to decide what things Gentiles had to do to be accepted by God. Even after the church decided to accept the Gentiles who had faith in Jesus as true Christians, these Hebrews followed Paul around on his missionary journeys teaching Gentiles they had to be circumcised. The epistles of Romans and Galatians are Paul's answer to these Jews.

One of the things Satan seeks to do is to corrupt the Gospel. Sometimes this is done by having Christians add certain requirements on top of faith in Jesus Christ for people to be saved- like not drinking, going to movies, etc. By doing so, he turns the Gospel of grace into a gospel of works.

Q. 24. What requirements do some Christians in Ethiopia add to the Gospel in order for a person to be saved?

Although many of the rules of a church are necessary to follow, we must be careful in our presentation of the Gospel that we show that salvation is only by believing in Jesus Christ. The obedience to God's Word or church regulations later become evidences of a changed life.

REVIEW OF ACTS 10:1-11:18

1. a) What is the meaning of Peter's vision?
b) How did the vision affect the way Peter treated the three men who came to visit him?
2. How did Cornelius' testimony in Acts 10:30-33 increase Peter's understanding?
3. a) What kind of man was Cornelius?
b) What do we learn about him from his servants?
4. a) If Cornelius is godly, why did he need to send for Peter?
b) What did he gain from Peter's message?
5. What convinced the Jerusalem believers that Peter was right in going to Cornelius and having fellowship with the Gentiles?
6. How does Acts 10 fulfill God's purpose as stated in Acts 1:8?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a) 1) What are different tribal groups or social groups that have little relationship with each other in Ethiopia?
2) What are some different groups of Christians that have little fellowship?
3) List ways in which the Gospel should be breaking down barriers in these different areas.
4) What can you and your church do to show that in Christ there is no prejudice?
5) What are areas your church needs to improve so that there is no prejudice?
- b) 1) List what Peter thought was necessary to tell Cornelius concerning the gospel.
2) What requirements do some Christians in Ethiopia add to the Gospel in order for a person to be saved?
3) a) Make a list of things that your church requires that all of its members obey in order to be considered Christian.
b) Which of these do you tell to a person before he becomes a Christian?
c) Which do you tell as the new believer grows in his understanding of the will of God?
- c) What are some barriers or hostilities between Christians today? Discuss ways to remove them.
- d) 1) Make a list of foods that people think they can eat and can't eat in Ethiopia.
2) Why do people refuse to eat certain things?
3) What can we learn from Jesus' response in Mark 7:18-19 and Peter's vision in Acts concerning our eating or not eating certain foods.

Lesson Nine

Acts 11:19-12:25

FIRST DAY

ACTS 11:19-30

Previously we saw that after Stephen was stoned and there was great persecution started by Saul, the believers scattered. Most of these believers who scattered were Hellenistic Jews. As they went back to their homes in the surrounding areas like Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch they began to witness to the Jewish communities. It was natural for them to want to share the good news with their families and friends. However, some of the Jewish believers from Cyrene and Cyprus began to witness to the Greeks or Gentiles as well as to the Jews. Since they had grown up among the Gentiles, it was much easier for them to share about Jesus to the Gentiles than those who lived in Jerusalem where the hatred of Gentiles was so strong.

Today's Scripture portion reflects a turning point in the history of the early church. At the same time that God led Peter to witness to Cornelius and showed the Jews in Jerusalem how he was willing to accept them and give them the Holy Spirit, the believers who had been scattered by persecution began to preach the gospel to Gentiles in Antioch, Syria. As many Gentiles believed the church grew rapidly. Later, Antioch would become mainly a Gentile church and the major church which God used to send the Gospel to the rest of the Gentile world.

Question 1. Read Acts 11:19-12:25 and answer these questions. a) As a result of the persecution, to which cities had the gospel spread? b) Why did the church in Jerusalem send Barnabas to Antioch? c) How did King Herod cause opposition to the gospel? d) Why was Peter put in prison? e) Why was Herod struck down by God?

Read Acts 11:19-30 again and answer the following questions. Q. 2. a) Who were the men who went to Antioch to witness? To whom did they witness and what was the result? b) What was Barnabas' ministry in Antioch? c) Why did Barnabas go to get Saul in Tarsus? How long did they live in Antioch and what did they do there? d) How did the younger church at Antioch help the older church in Jerusalem?

After the church began to accept Gentiles into their fellowship, the Antioch church grew rapidly. God had created a great hunger among the Gentiles for the Gospel. Many were dissatisfied with the immoral idol worship. They began to wonder if the teachings of their forefathers concerning the many gods was right. They were hungry for the truth. Many Gentiles were being attracted to the Jewish religion, to the teaching of a just and moral God who was creator of all people. However, they did not want to be circumcised and become Jews in order to relate to God. Therefore, when they heard the truth about Jesus Christ and realized that they did not have to become Jews in order to have fellowship with God, they quickly accepted the Gospel.

When the news of many Gentiles becoming believers reached Jerusalem there was suspicion concerning what was happening. Before, the Gentiles had only believed in small numbers, but now they were believing in large numbers, perhaps becoming more than the Jewish believers in some areas. In order

to understand fully what was happening, the apostles sent Barnabas to visit the church in Antioch. No doubt they were wondering if a false cult had started since they had no way to control the Antioch church and none of the apostles had seen the work there.

You will remember from our previous study that Barnabas was one of the early believers of the church. He was a Hellenistic Jew who had grown up among Gentiles. And yet he had proved his spiritual qualifications to the Jerusalem church. We have already seen how he sold his house and gave the money to the apostles. He had also been used by God to introduce Paul to the Jerusalem believers. Therefore Barnabas was a good choice to send to Antioch, a Gentile city. Barnabas saw how the Lord was working and was glad. He began to encourage the Gentile believers to be loyal and obedient to the Lord. The life and ministry of Barnabas, who was full of the Holy Spirit, drew many more people to Christ.

Because of the quick growth of the church, and because there were so many Gentile Christians who knew very little about the basic teachings of God's Word, Barnabas realized he needed help in teaching the people. One day Barnabas remembered Saul. He remembered how Saul had grown up in a famous Gentile city called Tarsus and was familiar with the culture and language of the Gentiles. He also remembered the vision that Paul had and the words of the Lord stating that Paul was to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles. Therefore, Barnabas went to Tarsus to get Saul, whom he believed could help teach the many new Gentile believers. Barnabas and Saul stayed in Antioch for a year, teaching the people.

Q. 3. a) How did God use the backgrounds of both Barnabas and Paul in opening the work in Antioch among the Gentiles? b) Give examples of certain church leaders you know whom God has used their backgrounds for the furtherance of the Gospel.

Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman empire. About 500 km north of Jerusalem, the citizens had a reputation of having great energy for work. But Antioch was also one of the most corrupt cities in the Roman world. It was known for the worship of Astarte a famous goddess. Connected to the worship was religious prostitution. Close to the city was a sanctuary dedicated to Apollo, one of the Greek gods, and famous groves dedicated to Daphne, a goddess who people believed changed into a tree in order to escape Apollo. It was in this city that Paul began his ministry of preaching Christ to the Gentiles.

Up to this time, Christianity was considered a sect of the Jewish faith. But as the church began to accept non-Jews, it began to separate itself from Judaism. Among themselves, the early Christians called one another "disciples, saints or brothers." Or they called themselves followers of the "Way." However, in Antioch the unbelievers, perhaps in ridicule, began to call the believers "Christians". By interpretation it means "those belonging to Christ." It may have begun as ridicule but it was actually a compliment. The early Christians desired to follow Christ so much that even the unbelievers knew that they had committed their lives to Christ. Although the word "Christian" is only mentioned two other times in the New Testament (Acts 26:28, 1 Peter 4:16), in time the name Christian was commonly used for those who believed in Christ.

Q. 4. a) How is the name, "Christian" used today in your community? b) If asked, would your neighbors say you are a believer? c) What are some ridicule names non Christians use of believers today?

One of the gifts of the Spirit is the gift of prophecy. Although we usually think of a prophet as someone who is able to foretell the future, in the Old Testament a prophet was someone who had a specific message

from God for the people. Sometimes that message related to events in the future. But usually, the message was for the people of that time, calling them to repentance.

Q. 5. Name 5 of the Old Testament prophets. What are some of their prophecies that related only to the people of that time and were not really prophecies of the future? (e.g. 2 Samuel 12:1-14, 1 Kings 17:1, Jeremiah 44:11-14)

In the early church there were also prophets. Since the New Testament had not yet been written, they were used of God to proclaim God's message to the Christians. Most of those messages did not have to do with the future.

Q. 6. a) Are there prophets in the church today? b) If so, how are they similar to the Old Testament and New Testament prophets? c) What are some guidelines to know whether they are true prophets or false prophets?

One of the most famous of the New Testament prophets was a man named Agabus. Through the Holy Spirit he predicted that a severe famine would come to the entire Roman world. Since Judea was already a poor country, the richer Christians in Antioch realized that many of their brothers and sisters in Christ in Jerusalem would face starvation. Even though they did not know the Christians in Judea, the disciples in Antioch decided to provide help for the brothers in Judea. They collected their gifts and sent the money with Barnabas and Saul to the elders in Jerusalem. They demonstrated through their gifts, the love and unity they had in Christ. One of the greatest ways Christians can witness to the change in their lives is by showing their love to people they do not even know.

Q. 7. a) How has your church reached out to other Christians that they do not know but who have great needs? b) How could this be done more often?

As the church in Antioch grew and reached out to help others, it became a prominent church during this time. At the same time, the church in Jerusalem was having a discouraging time. Not only was there famine, but there was a renewed time of persecution. King Herod wanted to gain popularity and support from the Jews. The best way to do this, he found was by persecuting the Christians.

Q. 8. a) Why do you think the strong churches are sometimes set aside and other churches become the leading or prominent churches? b) Have you seen this happen in your region? Why did it happen?

Q. 9. a) Are you experiencing a time of peace and growth in your life or difficulty? What has God been teaching you during the peaceful or difficult times? b) Make a list of other believers in your church and throughout Ethiopia who are going through times of difficulty. How can you and your church help them as the church in Antioch helped the believers in Jerusalem?

SECOND DAY

Acts 12:1-5

God was blessing the church at Antioch and many Gentile "Christians" were being added to the church. Barnabas, who was sent by the Jerusalem church to investigate, realized the great need for teaching. Since it was more than he alone could do, Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Paul back to

help him. As they taught large numbers during the next year, the church grew and began to reach out to help the needs of others.

In Matthew 28:19, when Jesus gave the great commission to the apostles, he not only told them to witness, but to teach all people all of his commands so that they would truly become Christ's disciples. The church is not responsible only to win the lost, but to teach them the truths of God's Word.

Q. 10. How does your church teach new believers the truths of Christianity so that they will become true disciples of Christ?

Just as the Antioch church was experiencing tremendous growth, persecution was resumed against the mother church in Jerusalem. Sometimes God's dealings seem almost contradictory, but His ways are not men's ways.

Q. 11. a) Why were the religious leaders opposed to the Apostles? b) Did the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church increase their opposition? Why?

As Christianity grew in numbers, so did the opposition from the Jews. The major enemy of the early church was not the Roman government, but the Jews. It was not until many years later that the Roman government began to strongly persecute Christians. When Christianity began to break out from being mainly a sect of Judaism, and when Jewish Christians began to fellowship openly with Gentiles, the antagonism of the Jewish leaders increased.

Q. 12. What is the church's best weapon in times of persecution?

Q. 13. Read Acts 12:1-5 and answer these questions. a) Who was the ruler in Judea? b) Why did he kill James? c) Why did he seize Peter? d) Why was Peter kept in prison and not immediately killed? e) What was the church doing?

In the New Testament, the kingly line of the Herods are pictured as being evil men who were enemies of the truth. Since it is difficult to keep the different Herods separate, following is a list of Herods mentioned in the Bible.

1. The first king of the line, **Herod the Great**, was the king in Jerusalem when Jesus was born. He ruled the territories of Idumea, Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Traconitis, and Perea. You will remember that he sought to kill Jesus Christ by executing all of the babies in Bethlehem. He ruled from 37 B.C. - 4 B.C.

2. Upon the death of Herod the Great, his large kingdom was divided up between three of his sons. The ruler of Idumea, Judea and Samaria was Archelaus (4 B.C. - 6 A.D.) (See Matthew 2:19-23) The ruler of Galilee and Perea was **Herod Antipas** (4 B.C. - 39 A.D.) This is the Herod most often referred to in the New Testament since he killed John the Baptist and before whom Christ stood for trial. The ruler of Traconitis was Herod Philip II (4 B.C. - 34 A.D.) He is mentioned in Luke 3:1.

3. Another son of Herod the Great, Aristobulus, who is not mentioned in the New Testament was the father of **Herod Agrippa I** who later became king of Idumea, Judea, and Galilee. (37 A.D. - 44 A.D.) This is the Herod of today's story who seeking to please the Jews killed James and imprisoned Peter.

4. **Herod Agrippa II**, the son of Herod Agrippa I, took over from his father and was the Herod before whom Paul made his defense while he was a prisoner. (Acts 25:13-26:32)

Herod Agrippa I had grown up in Rome and was a friend of Gaius who followed Tiberius as emperor in 37 A.D. Emperor Gaius made Herod the ruler of southern Syria and gave him the title "king". Two years later Galilee and Perea were added to his rule. When Claudius became emperor in 41 A.D., Judea was also added to Herod's rule.

Herod tried to maintain his popularity with the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem by persecuting the Christians. The first victim of Herod's attack was James, the brother of John. He was the first of the apostles to die a martyr's death. The death of James is the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction in Mark 10:38-39.

Since the death of James pleased the Jews, Herod also had Peter arrested. However, it was the Feast of Unleavened Bread or the Passover week, so Peter was put in prison until after the festivities. After the Passover, Herod planned to give Peter a public trial and then execute him.

Q. 14. Remembering that James had been killed, how would you have prayed for Peter?

If we allow Him God uses everything for His glory and for our own spiritual growth. We cannot control persecution but we can control our response to persecution. We should listen carefully to what God is teaching us during times of persecution. We can ask boldly and trust Him completely. We know any answer he gives is part of God's greater plan.

Peter was put under a heavy guard, probably because Herod knew that he had previously escaped from prison. There were four guards at a time, two on either side to whom he was bound with chains and two at the door of his cell. However, we will see that all of Herod's efforts to prevent Peter's escape were in vain. God is not hindered by soldiers or chains. So while Peter was kept in prison the church was earnestly praying for him.

Q. 15. a) Why did God allow James to die? We do not know all the reasons but look at Romans 8:28-29. b) What promise is there for us to claim when we don't know the answers to why things happen as they do?

Q. 16. a) What are some things in your life that you don't understand? b) Have you learned to pray boldly and yet trust that the answer is a part of God's plan? c) Are you listening to learn what God is teaching in the perplexing situation?

God often works in different ways from what we expect. No doubt the Christians expected God to protect James from death. But it was God's will that he die. Others no doubt expected Peter to die even though they were praying for his release. But God released Peter. In both situations, God was working out His will. We do not know or understand many of the things that happen to us. Even though we pray, sometimes God does not answer like we wanted or expected. But since God is in control, we must trust him even when he does not give us the answer we expect. The important thing is that we remain faithful to him.

THIRD DAY

ACTS 10:6-19

For the church in Jerusalem, times were difficult. James, the brother of John, had been killed by Herod. Peter was in prison waiting for a public trial after which he was to be killed. The Jerusalem church was going through another time of persecution and was earnestly praying for Peter. The mother church in Jerusalem was losing its popularity and was becoming secondary to the expanding church in Antioch.

Herod had planned to bring Peter to trial on the next day. That night, Peter, though chained between two soldiers, was sleeping soundly. Then God's time arrived to reveal His power in answer to prayer.

Q. 17. Read Acts 12:6-19 and answer these questions. a) Describe Peter's deliverance from the heavily guarded prison cell. Who delivered him? b) What did Peter say and do when he found himself on the city street outside the prison? Where did Peter go? c) Do you think the Christians who were praying expected Peter to be released? Why? Why didn't they let him in? d) What did Peter ask the believers to do?

God takes care of opposition in many ways. Sometimes he allows his children to face death. But other times, he works great miracles to cause their release.

While Peter was waiting in prison, the Christians were praying earnestly concerning his release. Many of the Christians gathered in the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. John Mark was no doubt a young man at this time- but he would later be used greatly by God. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Later, God would use him to write the Gospel of Mark.

No doubt the doors of the house were locked and everyone was afraid that they too would be captured and put in prison. Although fearful, they knew that only God could answer and deliver them at this time.

While they were praying, Peter was sleeping. Even though he thought that his life was probably going to be taken from him, he believed that his life was in the hands of God. He had that peace of God which passes all understanding. (Phil. 4:7) While in a deep sleep, an angel came, woke Peter up, caused the chains to fall off and led Peter outside. On the way, the angel closed the eyes of the guards so that they would not see Peter. After a short distance, the angel left Peter.

As soon as Peter realized that all of this was not just a dream, he went to Mary's house where many Christians were gathered in prayer. He wanted them to know that he was safe and God had answered their prayers. Peter's amazing deliverance from the closely guarded prison was a great surprise to the praying Christians. When Rhoda who was probably a servant came to answer Peter's knock at the door she was so excited she did not open the door for Peter. When she told those who were gathered praying that Peter was standing at the door they did not believe her, so Peter continued to knock. When they finally opened the door they were astonished! Peter, motioned them to be quiet and then described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. Then, Peter said, "Tell James (the brother of Jesus) and the brothers." Peter then left Jerusalem to go to another place and hide. By this time, James, the brother of Jesus, was the recognized leader of the Jerusalem church. Sometime shortly after the resurrection of Jesus who appeared especially to him, he put his faith in Jesus. He later was recognized as the leader of the Jewish church.

Q. 18. How have you experienced the wonderful power of intercessory prayer? What does Ephesians 3:20-21 tell us?

If the believers were surprised, the surprise in the prison the next morning was even greater! Where was Peter? The chains were still on the guards. How did he get out of the prison? Herod ordered a search for Peter. When they could not find him, he examined the guards and ordered them to be executed. In the Roman world, any time that a prisoner escaped out of the hands of the guards, the guards were punished by death.

Q. 19. Why did God allow one apostle to be killed and another to go free?

Peter's deliverance was an amazing manifestation of God's power. God's instruments in this miracle were: 1) The prayer of the believers--The church was earnestly praying to God for Peter. It doesn't say that they prayed for Peter's release, but they prayed. (See Luke 11:9 and John 15:7) 2) The ministering angels--"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14)

Peter did not realize it was an angel that delivered him until he was out on the street. God's ministering angels continue to serve, although we may not often see or realize that they are present.

Prayer releases God's power. The Lord answers all prayer- some with "yes" answers and some with "no" answers. He grants some prayers, refuses some and tells us to wait for other requests. All are answers, but given in God's perfect timing and only for our good and His glory. We must ask, but not dictate to God as to the way He should answer. We must pray in faith, but listen to know His will as we pray.

Q. 20 Is there something in your life that you have been praying for? Take time now to lift the matter up to your heavenly Father and pray that whatever answer He gives will be used for His glory.

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 12:20-25

After Peter escaped from prison and death, the persecution of the Christians became less. Even though Herod looked for his prisoner, he couldn't find him, so he had the guards put to death. After this, Herod left Judea and went to Caesarea. Herod was proud in his position and power. But he forgot that God is the one who raises up leaders and lowers others. In Caesarea Herod's pride and arrogance brought God's judgement upon him.

Read Acts 12:20-25 and answer these questions. Q. 21. a) Who had been quarreling with Herod? Why did they now seek peace with King Herod? b) What did the people say concerning King Herod? c) What brought God's judgement on King Herod? What was that judgement? d) Describe the condition of the church. e) What were Barnabas and Paul doing? Who accompanied them?

Herod was not successful in bringing Peter to trial because God had delivered him. Then, King Herod went to Caesarea. You will remember, as the prophet, Agabus had predicted, there was a great famine in the land of Canaan. The people of Tyre and Sidon who lived in the northern part of Canaan were very dependent upon the land of Canaan and King Herod for food. There had been some disagreement between

Herod and these two cities. Since they needed food from Galilee, these towns decided to make peace with Herod. They wanted to make sure they got the grain that they needed.

A day was appointed for King Herod to meet with the people of Tyre and Sidon and discuss the matter. These men had even talked with one of the high men in Herod's government to get his help in creating peace. These people decided that the best way to get Herod's favor was by praising him and making him proud. They gathered to give honor to him. Herod dressed in royal robes, sat on his throne and gave a public address to the people. We don't know what Herod said, but the people responded with flattery--probably because they wanted his help. They said, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." (verse 22)

Herod was happy to receive their honor. At that time, kings were honored as gods, and Herod was proud to receive the acclaim of the people. He took the honor for himself and gave no honor to God. God's judgement was sudden and brought death.

The Jewish historian Josephus writing of the death of Herod said that sudden pains attacked Herod, brought on by the sight of an owl. But God's Word says, "an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died." (verse 23)

The Bible teaches that "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18) Any time a man tries to take the glory that only belongs to God he is subject to the severe wrath of God. It is God who determines when a person can rule and for how long. Human leaders, although they have great power, are under the King of kings and Lord of lords. He alone grants them their power. No doubt God also judged Herod for the part he had in persecuting the Christians.

- Q. 22. a) To whom did Peter give the credit for his freedom? b) How does this differ from Herod's reaction to the people's praise?
- Q. 23. a) Why is pride and seeking acclaim so dangerous to our Christian life and witness? b) How do some Christian leaders sometimes fall into this sin?
- Q. 24. Give some examples of how God has judged different leaders either in the church or in government who have become too proud or were enemies of the Gospel.

Even the strong persecution brought upon the church by Herod did not stop the growth of the church. As the Christians remained faithful in their witness to God, God brought more people into the church.

Sometime after Barnabas and Saul had come to Jerusalem and had given the gift of money from the Antioch church, they returned to Antioch. But this time they brought John Mark back with them, who would later go with them on the first missionary journey. We will study this in next week's lesson.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who is a Christian as defined by Acts 11:26?
2. Why was Barnabas sent to Antioch and why was he successful?
3. Explain why Barnabas sought Paul to come and help in Antioch. See Acts 9:10-19,27.
4. What motivated Herod's action against James and Peter?
5. How did the church react to James' death and Peter's imprisonment? What can we learn from this?
6. What lesson can we learn from the account of King Herod?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a) 1) When we face hopeless situations what should be our attitude?
2) Where should we look for help?
3) List ways that God has answered your prayers in ways that you wanted.
4) List ways that God has not answered your prayers as soon as you wanted or in a way you did not expect. What did you learn during these times of waiting?
- b) 1) What part did prayer have in the early church? List some examples of how the early church spent much time in prayer.
2) What part does it have in the life of your church? 3) How can prayer become a more important part of the church worship?
- c) Read Acts 11:19-20.
1) What accounts for the growth of the church at Antioch?
2) What does that teach concerning church growth?
3) List ways that your church can increase its outreach to its community and to the whole of Ethiopia.
- d) Read Acts 11:23-26.
1) What qualifications of a good leader do we see in Barnabas?
2) What can we learn about a good church leader from the life of Barnabas?
3) How are these qualification evident in your church leaders today?
- e) 1) How is your church demonstrating its concern for others who have needs?
2) How can it increase in its concern for its communities?
3) Make a list of different people or churches that your church could demonstrate their love to by helping them.
- f) What warnings should Christian leaders take from the death of Herod?

Lesson Ten

Acts 13:1-42

FIRST DAY

ACTS 13:1-3

In Acts 1-12 we have seen the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Antioch, Syria. Up to this time the record of Acts mostly concerns the Apostles' ministry to the Jews in and around Jerusalem. The next section of the book of Acts, chapter 13-28 tells how the church spread from Antioch to Rome. Whereas in the first section of Acts the major character is Peter, the apostle to the Jews, beginning in chapter 13, the major character is Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. There is only one other mention of Peter in Acts 13-28. This does not mean that Peter and the rest of the Apostles stopped preaching to others about the Gospel. Church history teaches that all of the Apostles were busy taking the Gospel to North Africa and even as far as India. But Luke concentrates his story on how the Gospel reached Rome, the capital city of the Roman empire.

The second part of Acts, beginning with Acts 13 concerns the spread of the gospel to the Gentile world. Paul was the principal messenger or apostle to the Gentiles, as he was commissioned by the Lord on the road to Damascus.

Question 1. What did Jesus say about Paul's ministry in Acts 9:15?

Many years had passed since Paul had been chosen and met with Jesus on the Damascus road. We do not know much of what he did during those years. But we do know that they were not wasted for they were years where God prepared Saul for the work He had for him.

Q. 2. a) Why is preparation for ministry important? b) How are your church leaders and evangelists being prepared for their ministries? c) How could they be better prepared?

We saw last week how Barnabas brought Paul to the city of Antioch to work with him in teaching the Gentile Christians. Now we will see how the church of Antioch became a sending church and was used by God to reach out to the Gentiles throughout the Roman empire.

Q. 3. Read Acts 13:1-52 and answer the following questions. a) Who were the leaders in the church in Antioch? b) List the different places Barnabas and Saul traveled. Look at the map in Appendix C at the end of the book and trace their journey. c) Which verse in Acts 13 does Luke cease speaking of Saul and begin to call him "Paul"?

Q. 4. Read Acts 13:1-3 again and answer these questions. a) What was the leaders' work in the church at Antioch? b) What were the leaders doing when the Holy Spirit spoke to them? c) What did the Holy Spirit say?

When Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem to Syrian Antioch they brought Barnabas' cousin, John Mark with them. (Acts 12:25) Although Barnabas and Saul probably thought they would continue their

ministry in the Antioch church, God had other plans. We will see that Syrian Antioch became the new base for the outreach of the church into the Gentile world. Only once more in the Acts record was the Jerusalem church involved in strategic decisions. (Acts 15)

Some of the believers who were scattered by the persecution after Stephen's death were men from Cyprus and Cyrene. (Acts 11:19-20) They went to Syrian Antioch preaching to the Jews. You will remember, however, that soon the Gospel spread to the Gentiles in Antioch.

The New Testament teaches that God always gives gifts to the church so that it will function properly. Some of the gifts of the Spirit are the leadership gifts. For example, in the church of Antioch, there were leaders gifted as teachers and prophets. In the New Testament, after the apostles, the most important gifts were teaching and the prophecy.

Q. 5. God gives his children gifts today as well. Read Ephesians 4:11-13. a) For what purpose does God give spiritual gifts? b) List the spiritual gifts God has given you. How are you using your spiritual gift(s)?

The Antioch church had five key leaders. They were teachers and prophets who came from different cultures.

First, there was Simeon called Niger. The name Simeon suggests a Jewish background. Niger is Latin for the word black and may indicate his dark complexion.

Second, Lucius was from Cyrene, which was the capital of Libya in North Africa. Perhaps he was one of the first ones to bring the Gospel to Antioch.

Third, Manaen was the foster brother of Herod Antipas.

Fourth Saul was brought up in the Gentile city of Tarsus and was well-trained in the Jewish Law.

Fifth, Barnabas was a Jewish Levite from Cyprus who had been sent by the Jerusalem church to work in Antioch. Some scholars think that the leaders of the church are listed in order of authority- which means that Barnabas was the major leader of the church and Saul, although a leader, was under the authority of others. Most likely all of these leaders were Jews who had grown up among the Gentiles.

The Lord had called into the leadership of the church in Antioch people from several nations. This enabled the leaders of the church to have a wider vision of the needs of the then-known world. This could not have happened in Jerusalem where the leaders were only familiar with their own nation. The Lord gave these men gifts of prophecy and teaching in order to build up the church at Antioch.

Q. 6. a) How should a greater knowledge of our world today increase our vision to reach the whole world with the Gospel? b) What are you doing to increase your knowledge of the world?

As the prophets and teachers in the Antioch church were praying and fasting the Holy Spirit told them to send Barnabas and Saul to the Gentile nations with the gospel. The church was led to confirm their call and sent them out.

Q. 7. a) How are evangelists chosen by your church today? b) What part do the leaders play in choosing who is an evangelist? c) What part do the individual evangelists play in volunteering to go? d) What part does the Holy Spirit play in their choosing and sending?

The Antioch leaders were not in a church planning meeting discussing the needs of the church or the world. They were worshipping the Lord and fasting when the Holy Spirit spoke to them. After the Spirit had spoken, they were united in sending Barnabas and Saul out to do what God had asked them to do. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them. The practice of laying on hands was their cultural way of setting aside Barnabas and Paul for the ministry, designating them for God's special work. The church sent them on their journey.

Q. 8. a) How does God call evangelists today? b) What is the church's responsibility in sending out evangelists?

How did the Spirit speak? We do not know. Perhaps through one of the prophets, but probably to the hearts of these men who were united in prayer. How do we know the leading of the Holy Spirit today? He doesn't usually speak with an audible voice. We do not hear the voice by trying to force ourselves into ecstasies and then imagine we hear a voice. The leading of the Lord usually comes by carefully thinking through a matter with much prayer. We must look for principles in God's Word that apply to our situation. God may use circumstances but always gives a sense of peace in our decision. As we consider and pray, the Lord prepares our minds and hearts to make the right decision. We must do this with a willingness to obey and not have the decision already made and ask God to bless our choice. As we think back over our lives we will recognize how our hearts and minds were prepared and led by God.

Q. 9. Explain how the Lord has led you in making decisions in your life.

Although they would be greatly missed, the church at Antioch released Barnabas and Saul to go as the first missionaries; those sent to work away from their homeland in another culture. Notice whom God chose for the work of spreading the Gospel to the unreached lands. It was not just a common, ordinary member of the church. Rather, God chose and the church sent some of their most qualified leaders. There was Barnabas who was probably the major pastor of the church and Saul who was also a leader in the church. Since the most important ministry of the church is reaching out to the lost, we must always be willing to send the most qualified men and women for the spreading of the Gospel. There is no greater and more important calling by God or responsibility for the church than sharing the Gospel with the people who are lost. We should send our best trained, best qualified members of our church to do this important work.

The Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas out. Some must remain at home in the church, others must go. The Holy Spirit directs some to go and others to pray and provide for those who go. But all must be led by the Holy Spirit. If one hears the call to go, then he should go within the fellowship and under the guidance of the church.

Q. 10. a) Are you sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life? Explain how this is shown in your life. b) How is God using you in His plan for the world? c) How is your church active in reaching out to those who need the Gospel?

SECOND DAY

ACTS 13:4-12

With the sending of the first missionaries from the church of Antioch, the center of church activity in the spread of the gospel shifted from the Jerusalem church to the Gentile church in Antioch. The leaders of the church in Antioch, while fasting and praying were led of the Holy Spirit to release Barnabas and Saul from their responsibilities as leaders, to carry the name of Christ to the Gentile nations. The Antioch leaders placed their hands on the two men and sent them off. The first missionary journey of Paul took place during the years **46-48 A.D.**

Barnabas and Saul took Barnabas' cousin, John Mark with them as they were led by the Holy Spirit into the Roman world. They would encounter new challenges and new opposition as they went into areas where the light of God's Word had not yet shone.

Q. 11. Read Acts 13:4-12 and answer these questions. a) To which country did Barnabas and Saul first go? Look at the map in Appendix C in the back of the book and find the places that are mentioned in this section. b) Describe the opposition which came to Paul and Barnabas. c) Why did Elymas oppose Paul's message? d) What effect did the judgement on Elymas have on the proconsul?

Leaving Antioch, Barnabas, Saul and John Mark went to the port of Seleucia and sailed to the island of Cyprus. Since Cyprus was Barnabas' home area, he would have known the area and some of the people living there. This would have made sharing the Gospel easier than with strangers. Once again, God used the background of His children in the work of His kingdom. There is nothing left to chance for God.

Cyprus was on a popular trade route. Many travelers going from all over the world came through the island. This made it an excellent place to start a missionary journey that would effect the whole world.

There were both Jews and Gentiles on the island of Cyprus. Barnabas and Paul started their work on the eastern tip of the island in the city of Salamis. As became their practice, Barnabas and Saul first proclaimed the gospel in the Jewish synagogue. As Paul said the Gospel was for the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. (Rom. 1:16) It was natural for them to go to the Jews first. The Jews knew the Old Testament and would better understand the Gospel message. Also, in the synagogues, there were many god-fearing Gentiles who were ready to hear the Gospel message that they could receive forgiveness from God by putting their trust in Jesus Christ.

These meeting and worship places of the Jews called "synagogues" became the initial place where Paul and Barnabas preached, and usually from the synagogues people would believe and form the beginning church.

From Salamis the missionaries travelled throughout the whole island. When they reached Paphos, a port on the western end of Cyprus, they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus. He was an attendant of the proconsul who was administrator of the island. This sorcerer soon became an enemy of the Gospel.

The proconsul, Sergius Paulus, was assigned to govern the island as a representative of the Roman government. The Bible says that he was an intelligent man. Upon hearing about Barnabas and Paul and

their witness concerning Jesus Christ, he sent for them. The proconsul wanted to hear the new message that they were proclaiming. It was a wonderful opportunity that God provided for Barnabas and Saul to witness the gospel of salvation to the governor of the whole island.

Q. 12. a) Have you had someone ask you to explain the good news of Jesus Christ? Read 2 Timothy 4:2 and 1 Peter 3:15. What did you share? b) How have you prepared yourself to explain the hope that you have? Pray and ask God to give you an opportunity to witness about Him.

Satan does not rest when the gospel goes into a new area. Opposition arose in the form of Bar-Jesus who is also called Elymas, which is the Jewish name meaning sorcerer. Although a Jew, he had rejected the faith of the Old Testament which forbade any type of sorcery and became a sorcerer. As he listened to Barnabas and Saul witnessing he became frightened. He realized if the governor accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, he would lose his friendship with the governor. Therefore he tried to turn Sergius Paulus away from believing Barnabas and Saul's message. Suddenly Saul, filled with the Holy Spirit, rebuked Elymas for his deceit and trickery and for perverting the right ways of the Lord. Saul realized that Bar-Jesus was a spokesman of Satan. There are times when it appears that evil ones are gaining the victory but we must always be assured that God is in control and will punish those who oppose Him.

Paul said to Elymas, "the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun." Immediately Elymas became blind and groped about for someone to lead him. (verse 11) In this, Paul showed that the power of Christ is greater than the power of Satan. Again, a miracle became a strong witness to the truth of the Gospel and demonstrated to all the power of Jesus over Satan.

Q. 13. a) Why do you think God showed this sign of His power to Sergius Paulus and his attendants? b) What are the purposes of supernatural signs?

When Sergius Paulus saw the judgement on Elymas he believed, and was amazed at the teaching of the Lord. The immediate judgement of the sorcerer confirmed the teaching of Paul, which was the purpose of signs and miracles. We have seen the Holy Spirit judge hypocrisy and deceit in the lives of Ananias and Sapphira within the church. Now we have seen the Holy Spirit bring immediate judgment on one outside the church who was an enemy of the Gospel. God's judgment was certain and severe against those who try to prevent others from believing the Word of God.

Q. 14. Describe how you have seen God judge someone who was not a Christian but stood as an enemy of the church.

From now on in the book of Acts, the name of Saul is changed to Paul. Saul is a Jewish name. But Saul, being a Roman citizen also had a Roman name which was Paul. (Acts 13:9) From now on throughout the book of Acts, Saul is called Paul. This is because Paul was now reaching out into the Gentile world as the apostle to the Gentiles. As we have seen previously, Paul's background, training and zeal prepared him to lead the gospel witness to the Gentile world. Paul was a Jew, trained in Hebrew and the Law, but he was also a Roman citizen who grew up in a Gentile city and culture. All these things prepared him to take up the leadership as he dealt with the governor of Cyprus, who was probably a Roman.

The order in which the names Barnabas and Paul are mentioned now changes as well. Since Paul became the principal speaker in front of the Gentile ruler and was most suited to lead in a ministry among the Gentiles, he took over the place of leadership. Therefore, Luke changes the order of their names to Paul and Barnabas. Later, when back among the Jews, Luke changes back to Barnabas and Paul. (Acts 15:12) It took great humility for Barnabas to lose leadership over the group. But rather than fight, he continued his role of encourager.

Q. 15. a) What part did Barnabas have in preparing Paul for this place of leadership? b) As Barnabas took second place, what does this tell us about Barnabas?

Q. 16. What do Acts 13:4 & 9 tell us concerning the reason that Paul and Barnabas had an effective witness?

Q. 17. When is our witness effective for Christ?

It is very difficult for a leader to step aside from a place of leadership to allow a person more gifted than he to lead. Many times leaders fight against each other over control of the work. But we must remember that it is God who calls leaders and the work is His, not theirs. If God uses another leader to further the kingdom of God, we should praise God and not allow jealousy to overcome us.

Q. 18. a) How have you seen Satan use fighting between church leaders to destroy the work of God? b) What can we learn from Barnabas about the proper attitude when God calls another leader?

The opposition from the powers of darkness is one of the greatest dangers to the Christian faith. Satan is a deceiver who will do everything possible to prevent people from believing. Or he will try to deceive the believers and lead them into false teaching which brings division and judgment. Many times also, he will seek to destroy the unity of the leaders. He will seek to cause divisions, jealousies, and fighting so that the work will stop. Imagine what would have happened if Paul and Barnabas now fought each other. What would have happened to their witness? But they were willing to put God's work above their fame and so the witness went forth and churches were started.

Q. 19. Read Ephesians 6:10-18. List areas of your life or your church where Satan has gained the victory. Pray and ask God to give you victory over the evil one.

THIRD DAY

ACTS 13:13-41

Paul had now become the leader of the evangelistic outreach to the Gentile world. The call of God to Paul's heart was driving him on, and led by the Spirit of God Paul and Barnabas continued on their first missionary journey.

Paul taught in Damascus, in Jerusalem, in Tarsus and in Syrian Antioch, but Acts 13:16-41 is the first record of one of Paul's messages. Perhaps because it is Paul's first sermon to a mainly Jewish audience, it is included here in some detail. In some points, Paul's message resembles those of Peter. However, in some points it is different. As you read this section try to compare it with some of Peter's messages that we studied earlier.

Q. 20. Read Acts 13:13-41 and answer the following questions. a) After leaving Paphos on Cyprus, where did Paul and his companion go? b) What happened to John Mark? c) On the Sabbath, what did the synagogue leaders request that Paul and Barnabas do? d) What specific things did God do for Israel? List the six major things mentioned in Acts 13:17-23. e) In Acts 13:26-31 what is Paul trying to prove to the Jews? f) In Acts 13:34-37 how does Paul show the superiority of Jesus over David? g) In Acts 13:38-39 what was Paul's message for everyone who believes? h) What was Paul's warning in Acts 13:40-41?

Leaving Paphos in Cyprus Paul and his companions sailed across to Perga in Pamphylia. (Look at the map of Paul's first missionary journey in Appendix C.) There, although we are not told the reason, John Mark left Paul and Barnabas and returned to Jerusalem. We will see later how this caused problems between Paul and Barnabas.

From Perga Paul and Barnabas went on to Pisidian Antioch, about 175 kilometers from Perga along a very difficult route. (Some of the perils mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:36 could be referring to this journey.) Probably Paul got sick on this journey for in Galatians 4:13-14 Paul mentioned that he first preached to the Galatian Christians when in sickness.

Antioch was a large Greek city with many Gentiles, but it also had many Jewish citizens. Therefore, there was a Jewish synagogue. (Note- this is not the same Antioch that is mentioned before in Acts. There were two towns called Antioch. One was in Syria and this was where the church was which sent Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey. The other was called Pisidian Antioch and was in the province of Galatia. This is one of the towns Paul and Barnabas minister in on their first missionary journey.) As they usually did, Paul and Barnabas went first to the synagogue to witness. Often, traveling teachers were invited by the Jewish synagogue leaders to teach. Therefore, when the Jewish leaders asked Paul and Barnabas for a message of encouragement, Paul, the leader of the team stood up and preached. He addressed those in the synagogue as "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God." Paul's audience consisted mainly of Jews and therefore his witness is mainly addressed to them. But Paul realized that there were also some Gentiles who had rejected idol worship to follow the God of the Old Testament. As did Peter and Stephen in their messages, Paul reviewed Jewish history telling how 1) God chose their leaders and caused them to prosper in Egypt. 2) God led them out of Egypt and was patient with them for 40 years in the desert. 3) He gave them the land of Canaan after helping them to conquer seven nations. 4) God gave them judges. 5) When they asked, God gave them a king, first Saul and later David. 6) God sent the Lord Jesus Christ to Israel, as He had promised.

The reason Paul reviewed the Old Testament was to show how the Old Testament pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ. These Jews were waiting for their Messiah to come. They knew that he was to come from the line of David. Therefore, after the story of David, Paul came to the main point of his message which was that the Messiah from David's line had come. Even the forerunner prophesied in Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament had come. These Jews had probably heard about John the Baptist who had warned everyone to repent in preparation of the coming kingdom of God. He witnessed that Jesus was so much greater than he that he was not worthy to even untie his sandals which was the job that the lowest slave was supposed to do.

With the mention of Jesus' coming, Paul started the second part of his message which focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ. He again addressed them as brothers, children of Abraham and God-fearing Gentiles. Because these Jews knew their Old Testament, Paul sought to convince them from the Old Testament concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's declaration that their Messiah had come but had been rejected

must have confused these Jews. They had probably heard about Jesus and his death. Paul declared that Jesus was the promised One, the Messiah, that the Jews had been waiting for centuries. But the people of Jerusalem and rulers did not recognize Him. They found no reason to condemn Jesus to death, yet they killed Him. But Paul emphasized that though wrong in their actions, they had fulfilled the Old Testament prophets which the Jews had read every Sabbath. The death of Jesus was no accident but fulfilled the plan of God to take away the sins of the world. God raised Jesus from the dead. Paul emphasized that Jesus was alive, and had shown himself to many disciples for many days. These disciples were witnesses to the truth of the story of the resurrection.

Paul concluded his message with the reference to one of the Old Testament prophecies, Psalm 2:7-9. In this Psalm, David writing by the Holy Spirit foretold the resurrection of the Messiah. First, David quoted the words "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." By this, Paul was saying that by God resurrecting Jesus from the dead, he was declaring to all that Jesus Christ was his Son. This verse is not teaching that Jesus became God's Son when he was born in Bethlehem. Jesus was always the Son of God. Even before he was physically born to Mary, he was the Son of God. The emphasis here is on the fact that with the death and resurrection of Jesus, God openly demonstrated to all the unique relationship Jesus had with him as his Son.

Paul then quoted two other verses which clearly predicted that Jesus, the seed of David would be resurrected. David said his body would not decay in death. These verses could not have referred to David who died and was buried. Rather, they were a prophecy concerning David's Son, Jesus Christ who although he died, was resurrected so as to not see decay.

Finally Paul said, "therefore, ...through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified." This is something the Law of Moses could not do. The law of Moses could only point out their sinfulness. It never provided forgiveness from sins. But now Jesus Christ had died for their sins. As a result two major blessing were possible for man. First, the way to true lasting forgiveness was open through belief in Jesus. Second, true justification was granted to those forgiven of their sins.

Q. 21. What does justification mean? Look this word up in your Bible dictionary.

Paul then gave a final warning that justification is by faith alone, not by keeping the law. Justification is a legal term meaning to be released from the guilt of sin and accepted as righteous. Justification is the declaration by God that the sinner was not guilty. His sins had been paid for and the righteousness of Jesus Christ had been given to him. Although we continue to sin, God declares that we are justified since our sins have been covered by the death of Jesus. Paul quoted Habakkuk 1:5 to urge the people to believe so that the judgment prophesied by the prophets would not come on them.

In summary, this first speech of Paul to the Jews declared that Jesus Christ was the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament to the Jews. He stated that God's purpose was to send Jesus to die for sins and it is by faith in Him that man is justified. Jesus' resurrection from the dead was proof that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that God the Father accepted his sacrifice for the sins of the world. This message was for Jew and Gentile, for only by faith in Jesus is there salvation from sin.

Paul did not say to the Antioch Jews, "You condemned Jesus to death," as Peter had said to the Jerusalem Jews. Peter preached, "Repent and be baptized." Paul preached, "Believe. Justification from sin is by faith alone." (Eph. 2:8-9)

Q. 22. a) Make a list of things from Paul's sermon that should be included when you witness to a non-Christian. b) What are some things that Paul mentioned that is not necessary for non-Christians to know in order to be saved but was good for the Jews?

Q. 23. Have you been justified, or declared righteous in God's eyes? If so explain to someone what that means in your life. If not, pray and ask God to forgive your sins, accepting Jesus' death as a payment for the wages of your sin. As Jesus becomes Lord of your life, remember He paid for you by his death, go and tell someone of the decision you have just made. (Rom. 10:9-10)

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 13:42-52

Paul's first recorded message was a clear presentation of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, based on the predictions of the Old Testament prophets. He urged Jews and Gentiles to believe in the Christ who alone can justify man before a righteous God, and not reject Jesus, as the people in Jerusalem had done.

When the Word of God is glorified, Satan is not pleased. After the message by Paul that justification and salvation were in Christ and for the Gentiles as well as the Jews, the enemy began to work.

Q. 24. Read Acts 13:42-52 and answer these questions. a) How did the people respond after Paul's message? b) What did they request of Paul and Barnabas? c) What was the reaction of the Jews the second time the people gathered? d) How did Paul and Barnabas answer the Jews? e) Why were Paul and Barnabas compelled to leave Pisidian Antioch? Where did they go from Antioch?

Those who heard Paul's message in the synagogue were initially very happy with the message of salvation in Christ. They gathered around Paul, who urged them to continue in the grace of God. Although many of the Jews were attracted to this message, it was especially good for the god-fearing Gentiles. They asked that Paul and Barnabas come back on the following week to explain in more detail about the Lord Jesus Christ.

News of Paul's message spread all over Antioch and on the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear what Paul was teaching. Now rather than having just a few Gentiles present, many Gentiles came crowding into the synagogue to hear Paul. Their hearts were open to the gospel message of forgiveness from sins. The Jews, however, were filled with jealousy. They did not like the fact that so many Gentiles had come. They especially did not like the fact that Paul showed equal concern for the Gentiles' salvation and that he was willing to accept them without their having to become Jews. The Jewish leaders began to talk against Paul and his message. Rather than keep their hearts open to listen to Paul and the Holy Spirit, Satan used their jealousy to harden their hearts.

Q. 25. Why do some leaders become jealous when people from other groups or tribes are more responsive or favored than they are?

When they openly refused to accept the Gospel Paul and Barnabas said, "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles." Because the Jews were the sons of Abraham, the chosen people of God, Paul and Barnabas were obligated to come to them first with the Gospel message. But, as the two missionaries saw that their hearts were hardened like the Jews in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles who were open for the Gospel. Paul warned the Jews that in turning away from his message, they themselves were rejecting eternal life. Their being Jews and obeying the Old Testament laws would not save them. There is only one way to salvation which is through belief in Jesus Christ. Any attempt to follow another religion, or seeking to do good works to get to heaven means that we have chosen the path that leads to hell.

Q. 26. a) What do these verses teach us about the salvation of people who follow other religions, although sincere? b) What does this tell us about our responsibility to share them the Gospel?

Paul quoted Isaiah 42:6-7 where the Jews were told that they would be a light to the Gentiles. God did not chose the Jews just so that they could receive the blessings of God. Rather, God was always concerned about the nations. The major reason God chose the Jews was so that as the chosen people of God they could be a light to the Gentiles. God's plan is for the whole world. Unfortunately, the Jews thought God was only concerned about them. Their light was often corrupted through false worship, evil lifestyles, and pride.

Q. 27. a) In what way are Christians also light to unbelievers? b) How do you demonstrate your light to the unbelievers around you? c) How do many Christians or churches lose their light?

The fact that God was concerned about them greatly pleased the Gentiles. God had already prepared their hearts. They were tired of their old ways of worship. They wanted forgiveness from their sins. Unfortunately, the teaching of the Jews had created barriers for their belief. When they heard that God only asked that they believe in Jesus Christ for their salvation, they honored the Word of the Lord and many believed and received the gift of eternal life. What the Jews refused, the Gentiles received. So often those who think that they are good enough, or think that they are religious refuse to simply accept the gift of eternal life. It is those who realize that they are sinners who are willing to place their faith only in Jesus Christ that readily believe.

Q. 28. How have you seen this in your witnessing to others?

The Word of the Lord spread through the whole region. Gentiles believed, but the Jews refused to believe and began to oppose the truth. They stirred up the God-fearing women, women who still followed the Old Testament rather than accept the free gift of salvation as well as the leading men of the city. They raised up so much opposition against Paul and Barnabas that they were forced to leave the city. Throughout the history of the early church, it was the Jews who brought the greatest persecution to the Christians.

Q. 29. a) Have you seen the gospel witness or teaching stopped because of opposition? b) What does this reveal concerning those who oppose the good news?

When Paul and Barnabas left Pisidian Antioch they performed a symbolic act which placed the responsibility of judgment upon the Jews for their unbelief. It was customary for Jews to shake off the dust

of a pagan town from their feet when they returned to their land. It was a symbol of cleansing themselves from the impurity of sinners who did not worship God. As Paul and Barnabas wiped their feet, it indicated to the Jews that Paul and Barnabas regarded them as pagans- those outside of the children of God and therefore would receive divine judgment.

Though Paul and Barnabas were compelled to go, the new believers who remained behind were joyful in the new faith in Christ.

Paul fulfilled the command he had received to witness to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. Although some Jews did receive the Gospel message, most of them refused. In mercy God continued to try to win His chosen people, the Jews, but we will see that they continued to reject Him.

Notice that Paul and Barnabas continued to work on the assignment that God had given them despite the persecution. They travelled on to another city to preach the good news there. Next week we will see how God continued to work through these two men, in spite of opposition and persecution.

Paul was not discouraged by opposition or hardship. He wanted to be faithful to God and spread the good news of Jesus no matter what it personally cost him. The spreading of the Gospel was more important to him than a good job, a comfortable life, freedom from persecution, or anything else.

Q. 30. How much are you willing to suffer so that the Gospel will spread to those who have not heard it?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe the leaders in the Syrian Antioch Church. a) Where were they from? b) Were they Jews or Gentiles?
2. What part did the Holy Spirit have in sending out Barnabas and Saul?
3. How did the church fulfill its responsibility to send Barnabas and Saul?
4. Why did Paul severely oppose Elymas the sorcerer? What was Elymas trying to do?
5. What qualifications did Paul have which put him into the place of leadership?
6. Peter urged the Jews to repent. What was Paul's plea to the Gentiles?
7. Though Paul and Barnabas were compelled to leave Pisidian Antioch, how do we know their witness was effective?
8. List the places Paul and Barnabas visited on their first missionary journey. Find these places on the map in Appendix C at the back of the book so that you know where they are located.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a) 1) What is the responsibility of the church in sending evangelists to other areas or countries?
- 2) How is your church following the example of the Antioch church?
- 3) How are evangelists being chosen?
- 4) How is the church seeking to reach out past your immediate area?

- b) 1) What qualified Paul as an evangelist to the Gentiles? Look at Acts 13:4,9,47.
- 2) Which was the most important qualification?
- 3) What qualifications are needed today for an evangelists who will go to towns, to the countryside, etc.?
- 4) What qualifications does your church look for when they choose evangelists?
- 5) How can the choosing of evangelists be improved?

- c) 1) What can we learn from Barnabas' example when the leadership was taken up by Paul?
- 2) How is this so different from the attitude of many leaders in the church?

- d) 1) Compare Paul's evangelistic sermon with sermons in your church that seek to bring people to Christ. How are they similar? How are they different?
- 2) Why are they different?
- 3) What truths should be found in all evangelistic sermons?

Lesson Eleven

Acts 14:1-15:35

FIRST DAY

ACTS 14:1-20

Last week we looked at the beginning of the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas which took place in 46 - 48 A.D. We saw the beginning of the spread of the Gospel into the Gentile world, especially into Asia Minor which is now Turkey. We also saw how the leadership of the team changed from Barnabas to Paul who was to become the Apostle to the Gentiles. From now on, the story in the book of Acts centers around Paul and how God used him to spread the Gospel throughout the then known world.

In Pisidian Antioch we have a record of Paul's first message. It was an appeal to the Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue not to reject Jesus as the people and rulers in Jerusalem had done. But when almost the whole city gathered to hear Paul on the next Sabbath, the Jews became jealous and abusive. Then Paul said to the Jews, "Since you reject the word of God, which we had to speak to you first,...we now turn to the Gentiles." This is the beginning of the opposition that Paul would face all throughout his life from his own people, the Jews. The Gentiles were glad that the door of salvation was now open to them and many believed and the gospel spread through the whole area.

When opposition against them became severe, Paul and Barnabas moved on to other cities. Whenever the Word of God is honored, the opposition increases. The angry Jews followed Paul and Barnabas from city to city, but the power of God was evident and people believed. Paul's ministry from city to city followed a pattern. As you read today's scripture portion, look for principles that you can apply to strategy in spreading the gospel today.

Read Acts 14:1-15:35 and answer these questions. Question. 1. a) List the cities that Paul and Barnabas visited. Find them on the map in Appendix C. b) When Paul and Barnabas returned to Syrian Antioch what did they do? c) What was the major question discussed at the Jerusalem council?

Q. 2. Read Acts 14:1-20 again and answer the following questions. a) What were the results of Paul and Barnabas' preaching in Iconium? b) Who caused trouble there? c) What was the crowd's reaction to the miracle of healing the crippled man in Lystra? d) What made their attitude toward Paul and Barnabas change so quickly? e) Where did the two preachers go from Lystra?

Leaving Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas went to Iconium about 100 kilometers away. It was Paul's strategy in the spread of the Gospel to go to the larger cities and plant churches, trusting that these centers would spread the gospel to the surrounding areas.

Q. 3. How could this same strategy be used today for the spread of the Gospel throughout Ethiopia?

In Iconium a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. For a while, Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly and God confirmed their message with signs and miracles. But some Jews who refused to believe turned

many people against Paul and Barnabas. The city became divided, with some Jews and Gentiles, especially the leaders, siding with the Jews in opposition to the apostles. When Paul and Barnabas heard of a plot to kill them, they left the city of Iconium and went on to preach about Jesus in another place. But they left behind a group of new believers.

Q. 4. Think about how you would try to teach the gospel in your home area. Where would you begin to preach? How would you seek to reach all of the people?

Q. 5. When is it right to flee from trouble and when is it not right? How do we decide which action to take?

Leaving Iconium, Paul and Barnabas fled to Lystra and Derbe. Wherever they went, they kept preaching the Gospel.

The first city they went to was Lystra, a city about 35 kilometers south of Iconium. In Lystra as Paul was preaching the Gospel, a crippled man was listening. Paul saw that his heart was hungry for the Gospel, and realized that he had faith, not only for salvation, but for healing. When Paul said, "Stand up on your feet.", the man confidently obeyed. He jumped up completely healed and began to walk.

Q. 6. What possible misunderstanding did this miracle have to the people?

Lystra was a city where the people were Gentiles who believed in many gods. When the people saw the miracle, they immediately understood it based upon their own religious beliefs. Rather than giving the glory to God, they gave it to false gods. They thought Paul and Barnabas were two Greek gods called Zeus and Hermes, who had come down to earth in the likeness of men. Zeus and Hermes were two Greek gods who were especially followed and worshipped by the people in Lystra. Zeus, whom they identified with Barnabas, was the major god. Hermes, whom they identified with Paul, was the spokesman of Zeus. They probably made this identification because Paul did most of the speaking.

When they saw the crippled man healed and walking, the people and the priest from the temple of Zeus brought bulls and wreaths to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, thinking they were gods. Because they were speaking in their own language, it was some time before Paul and Barnabas understood what they were doing. When Barnabas and Paul realized what the people were doing, they tore their clothes which was a sign of great despair, and ran to stop them. They were very concerned that they were going to be worshipped, and not God. They wanted the glory for the miracle to go only to God. Therefore Paul tried to explain the message of Christ.

Q. 7. Give examples of how some church leaders will take credit personally for some act that God has done.

Honor and praise are two of the most enticing temptations for church leaders. Many leaders get proud when they receive honor and praise, forgetting that all praise should go to God and not to them.

Whereas Paul could point the Jews to the message of God in the Old Testament, now before Gentile pagans, Paul had to start by explaining about the true and living God. Paul's message to the pagan audience was to try to turn them to the one living creator God who made heaven and earth. He explained that God is the only one worthy of honor. Paul said, "In the past God let all nations go their own way. Yet,

he has never left himself without testimony. He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." (Verses 16-17)

Q. 8. a) Why would this type of message have been unnecessary to the Jews? b) What does this teach us about our having to adapt our message to the understanding of the people we witness to? c) List some things you need to explain to your neighbors about God before they would be able to understand the Gospel message.

Even though Paul and Barnabas tried to explain about the true God, the people did not understand and they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

As often happens in crowds, the mood of the crowd quickly changed from one of great respect to one of hatred. Before Paul was able to finish his witness about Jesus Christ, some Jews came from Iconium and turned the crowd against Paul and Barnabas. Their desire to sacrifice to the two apostles quickly changed to wanting to stone them. The crowd did not want to hear more from Paul. They only wanted to continue their superstitious practices and worship their pagan gods.

Q. 9. Paul faced opposition time and time again. How have you experienced rejection of your witness for Christ?

Paul, probably because he was the main leader was stoned and dragged out of the city and left as dead. This is only one of the many times that the witness of Paul brought him persecution from people. But persecution did not deter Paul from his call to share the Gospel to all people.

Q. 10. How has persecution sometimes caused different Christians to stop their witness for Christ?

Having stoned Paul, the crowd, thinking that he was dead left him. No doubt the disciples also thought that he was dead. But as the disciples gathered around Paul, he got up and returned to Lystra. The next day Paul and Barnabas traveled on to Derbe, a town about 100 kilometers away from Lystra.

The witness of Paul and Barnabas was not without fruit. Paul and Barnabas had been in Lystra long enough to start a small church. In fact, one of Paul's latter companions came from the church in Lystra. Lystra was probably the home of Timothy. It was probably during this time that he and some of the members of his family came to Christ. Later in the second missionary journey, Paul would take Timothy with him as a partner in the spread of the Gospel.

Paul was willing to pay a great personal price to spread the Gospel. For him, the sharing of the Gospel and the building up of the church of God was the most important thing he could do. Although he suffered greatly, he continued on in his work. Are we willing to pay such a price to share the Gospel to millions in Ethiopia who do not know about Jesus?

Paul addressed his audiences according to their needs. The Jews already knew that there was only one God, and that He is the living and true God. The pagans first had to be taught that God is one and that creation and provision of rain and crops for food are a witness of His presence. Although the nations had gone their own way, God in His mercy, continued to reveal Himself to them.

Q. 11. a) Describe different groups of people in Ethiopia that need to hear the gospel. b) What are differences in their religion and culture that means the message of the Gospel has to be shared in a different way? c) What do people need to know in your community so that they can become children of God?

SECOND DAY

ACTS 14:21-28

The cost of preaching the Gospel was great for Paul and Barnabas. Before Paul could finish his message the people of Lystra, rose up and stoned Paul. But God spared his life. The next day Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe.

During this first journey Paul set a pattern for his future work. He was not intimidated by threats or stoning. His purpose was to establish churches and he pressed on whatever the cost. Wherever he went, God gave him fruit and a church was planted.

Q. 12. Read Acts 14:21-28 and answer these questions. a) What did Paul and Barnabas do in Derbe and what was the result? b) After they left Derbe, where did Paul and Barnabas go? c) What are two things that they stressed to the believers? d) How did they strengthen the churches in the cities when they returned? e) Why did Paul and Barnabas return to Assyrian Antioch?

We know very little about Paul's ministry in Derbe, a town 100 kilometers away from Lystra. There is no mention of opposition in Derbe. Large numbers were won to the Lord and Paul and Barnabas taught them in the Word. This is the town where later a great leader called Gaius was chosen to take the offering with Paul for the poor in the Jerusalem church. (See Acts 20:4) Derbe was a city on the eastern border of Galatia. The towns of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe were all within the province of Galatia.

From Derbe, Paul and Barnabas returned through the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. The purpose of their visit this time was not to preach the Gospel to the lost as much as to visit and encourage the new believers.

Q. 13. Read Matthew 28:19-20. From these verses what are the two major jobs of the evangelist? How did Paul fulfill the great commission?

Paul was not just concerned with people professing their belief in Jesus Christ. The Great Commission not only includes preaching the Gospel, but the ultimate goal is for everyone who professes belief in Jesus Christ to be taught all of the commands of Jesus, and to become disciples of Jesus. Paul always visited those who believed, encouraged them, and sought to teach them all of the commands of God. He was concerned that they live holy lives for God. All of the letters Paul wrote were to Christians encouraging them to grow in Christ. (Col. 1:25)

Q. 14. a) How does your church help new Christians mature in their faith? b) How could they better teach new Christians so that their faith in Jesus grows?

Paul also taught them what it would cost them to follow Jesus Christ. The way of salvation and the path to heaven is not easy. Many Christians teach that once we are saved we will have no problems, but will be rich, happy, successful, etc. But this is not what the Bible teaches. Paul clearly taught the Galatian Christians "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22)

Q. 15. List different people whom you have heard say that once we are God's children we will have no problems, no sickness, but will be rich. How do you answer them from God's Word?

Not only did Paul visit and encourage the believers, but he formalized the churches. It is not enough just to have believers meet and fellowship, they must be established into churches. And to have good churches there must be leaders. And so, in each city that they visited, Paul and Barnabas chose elders to oversee the church. Since the choosing of elders was a very serious task, Paul, Barnabas, and the Christians spent time in prayer and fasting seeking God's will in their choice.

Q. 16. a) Describe how elders are chosen in your church. What qualifications must they have? b) Are those who are the most spiritual always elected? If not, what are their qualifications that got them elected? c) How can your church improve in their election of leaders?

Q. 17. How well do you think the church today teaches and trains new believers?

Q. 18. What happens to many new Christians when they are not given further teaching and encouragement?

When Paul and Barnabas were sure that the leaders were trained and established in the faith, they began the long journey back to Syrian Antioch. They preached in Perga and went on to Attalia from which they sailed again to Seleucia.

Paul's later letter to the Galatians was to the believers in these cities in Asia Minor. Not long after Paul and Barnabas left, other Jewish Christians came and began to teach false doctrines. They taught that Paul was not an apostle and that it was necessary to be circumcised and keep after Jewish laws in order to have salvation. Paul's letter to the Galatians written after this first missionary journey and before the second missionary journey gave a rebuke to the Christians and warned them not to turn away from the freedom they had in Christ, but to stand fast in their liberty in Christ.

Q. 19. What does Paul's example teach about the follow-up of new believers?

Q. 20. What effect did opposition, hardship, sickness and stoning have on the continuation of Paul's outreach?

We saw before that the home church of Paul and Barnabas was Antioch. It was the Syrian Antioch church that has been led by God to choose and send Paul and Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas were therefore accountable for their work to this church. Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas arrived back in Syrian Antioch they gathered all the church together and reported all that God had done. They told how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Q. 21. a) Why is it important that evangelists be accountable of their work to the churches that pay them and send them? b) How does your church hold the elders, evangelists, and pastors accountable for what they do and how they serve? c) How can this be improved?

After giving their report, Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch teaching the disciples for about a year.

We have looked at the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. Although the journey was filled with opposition, God had used them to start churches. They started in the island of Cyprus, the home of Barnabas, then went into the province of Galatia in what is now Turkey. In the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe churches were planted. This first missionary journey took place during the years 46-48 A.D.

Q. 22. Think back over Paul's first missionary journey and make a list of different things he did to help the spread of the Gospel. How can these be applied to your churches goal of spreading the Gospel?

Not all are able go to another country, but you can pray and support others if that is the part God calls you to. And we can all witness to our neighbors and family member who have not yet believed.

THIRD DAY

ACTS 15:1-35

Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey took them through the island of Cyprus and into Asia Minor, into the province of Galatia. Along the way, churches were started. After about two years of ministry, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, the church that had sent them.

After the conversion of Cornelius, salvation for the Gentiles without circumcision and the Mosaic law, seemed to be assured. Even the Jerusalem church had been convinced that God was truly saving the Gentiles. (Acts 11:18) However, many more Gentile converts were added to the church during Paul's travels. Outside of Jerusalem, many of the churches were predominately Gentile. No sooner had Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch than false Jewish teachers began to visit all of the Gentile churches and began to cause disagreements throughout the churches by demanding that the Gentiles be circumcised in order to be true believers. In other words, they still wanted to teach that Gentiles had to become Jews before they could be accepted in God's eyes.

Throughout the history of the church, when disagreements over doctrine arose, the church called a major council to determine what was the truth. Today we will be looking at the first major council of the Church, the Jerusalem council. The issue was concerning the salvation of the Gentiles. Were the Gentiles able to become true believers without becoming circumcised and following the Law of Moses? An even more important issue was at stake which was what did a person have to do in order to be saved? Were there external requirements that had to be kept apart from belief in Jesus? With such an important issue at stake, a decision had to be made. If the decision was that Gentiles still had to become Jews and there were external requirements on top of faith in order to be saved, then Christianity would have remained a sect of Judaism, and it would not have spread to the Gentiles. A decision had to be made and it would change the Christian church and bring them into a greater fellowship.

Q. 23. a) Why do you think it was important that the leaders of the church decide this issue? b) What are some issues in the church of Ethiopia that a church council might be used to help solve?

Q. 24. Read Acts 15:1-35 and answer these questions. a) Who were the men who came to Antioch? What were they teaching and who disputed their teaching? b) Where were Paul and Barnabas appointed to go? What did they report as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria? c) What were some of the believers in Jerusalem teaching? d) How did the apostles and elders settle the dispute? Who spoke in defense of salvation by grace in Christ? Who summarized the defense? e) What was the decision of the council of elders and apostles? f) Who were chosen to take the decision of the council back to Antioch?

In the early church, the controversy over circumcision of Gentiles and keeping the Old Testament laws continued among the Jewish believers. There were some Christians in Jerusalem who felt strongly that a Gentile Christian had to be circumcised and obey all of the laws of Moses in order to be saved. Therefore they went from Judea to Antioch and even on to the Galatian churches and taught the Gentile believers that without circumcision they were not saved.

This caused a great disagreement in the churches. In Antioch, Paul and Barnabas who had seen many Gentile converts, debated with these Jewish teachers. The church was in danger of splitting into two factions, the Jews on one side and the Gentiles on the other. So serious was the matter that the Antioch church decided to send Paul and Barnabas with some others to Jerusalem to discuss the problem with the church leaders. It could have been on this trip that Paul took Titus, a Gentile as proof of the fact that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised. (See Gal. 2:1-5)

Paul and Barnabas knew that the decision of the Jerusalem church leaders would affect Christians everywhere. Since the issue had been raised by men from Jerusalem, it was fitting to have the two churches discuss the problem.

As the delegates from Antioch traveled to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas reported to the Christians along the way. Phoenicia, a city to the south of Syria and Samaria had heard the gospel about the same time as Antioch. The Christians rejoiced as they heard of the conversion of the Gentiles without circumcision. Because they too were considered Gentiles and not equal with the Jews, the issue of the necessity of circumcision was very important to them.

Q. 25. What can we learn from the example of the Antioch church concerning the settlement of church conflicts?

Upon arrival in Jerusalem, Paul, Barnabas, and those with him reported to the church leaders (the apostles and James, the brother of Jesus.) While they were reporting to the Jerusalem leaders, the debate arose. Jewish Christians who were still Pharisees began to challenge Paul and demand the circumcision of Gentiles and the obeying of the Old Testament laws. You will remember that the Pharisees were the conservative sect of the Jewish leaders. They not only closely kept the laws of the Old Testament, but they added their own laws to make sure that the Old Testament laws were kept. These Christians, who believed that Jesus was the Messiah still believed that the Old Testament laws were necessary for salvation. No doubt the accusations between this group and Paul's group became very heated. It was probably this group who had sent their representatives throughout the Gentile churches trying to correct what they saw was heresy.

Circumcision was not the only requirement which they wanted to place upon the Gentiles. However, it was the most important. If one demand of the law was necessary for the Gentiles to be saved then all of the Mosaic law would be necessary. After hearing the Jews argument, the Apostles and elders met to

consider the question. (Acts 15:6) After much discussion, they seemed to have returned to the whole assembly. The whole assembly which probably consisted of all of the Jerusalem leaders, and members from all parties like the Pharisee group and Paul and Barnabas had open discussions concerning the way that God, through the Holy Spirit had worked.

First, Peter arose. He reminded them of the story of Cornelius. Upon hearing the Gospel, even though Cornelius and his family had not been circumcised, he and the other Gentiles believed and received the Holy Spirit. In the house of Cornelius, the Lord made no distinction between the Jew and Gentiles. Both had their hearts purified by faith in Jesus Christ. If God had accepted the Gentiles because of their faith, then it was wrong to put added burdens upon them.

Peter also looked at the Jews and their ability to keep the laws of Moses. All throughout the history of the Jews, rather than obey the law, they had lived in disobedience. The law became a yoke, a burden that they could not bear because they did not have the ability to obey. But then, the purpose of the law was to cause people to turn to God in faith, not seek to work out their own salvation by keeping the laws.

Peter concluded his talk by outlining the heart of the Gospel. The Gospel is not one that is worked for. There are no special regulations or actions that one does in order to be saved. Rather, as he said "We believe it is through the grace of the Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." (Acts 15:11)

Q. 26. a) List some different religions that believe that people can be saved by keeping certain laws. b) List some church groups that make new Christians keep special laws in order to make them good Christians. c) How does the speech of Peter warn against adding law to the truth that salvation is only by faith in Jesus Christ?

After Peter finished, Barnabas and Paul shared about the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles on their first missionary journey. Notice that Barnabas is again named before Paul. This is because, back among the Jews, Barnabas was the leader and the spokesman and not Paul. How did Barnabas and Paul prove that Gentiles did not need to keep the Old Testament Jewish laws? They pointed to the fact that the Holy Spirit had demonstrated his power among the Gentiles even though they were not circumcised. If God the Holy Spirit had accepted the Gentiles and worked through them, other believers should not require the Gentiles to take on Jewish practices.

Finally, James, the brother of Jesus, who was respected by all of the conservative Jews and who was the leader of the Jerusalem church, made a concluding speech. He explained how Peter had been used of God in accepting Cornelius into the church. From the Gentiles, God was gathering a people for himself, just like he had called the Israelites of old his people. James also pointed out that this was in agreement to the Old Testament Scriptures by quoting Amos 9:11-12. Amos, who prophesied to Israel between 760-750 B.C. looked forward to the end times when God would again visit his people Israel. God promised to rebuild David's fallen tent- meaning the kingly line of David. God would also restore a remnant from the Jews who would worship God. But God would also work among the Gentiles so that they too would bear God's name. James, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit realized that the belief of the Gentiles in the Lord Jesus Christ was the beginning of the fulfillment of prophecy.

James then made some recommendations: First, he stated that they should not make it difficult for Gentiles to trust in Jesus Christ. By this he meant that it is wrong to make added requirements to belief in

Jesus Christ that would create unnecessary barriers to faith in Jesus Christ. Gentiles did not have to become Jews through circumcision or follow the Jewish laws in order to be saved.

But James added that the Gentiles should be asked to observe three major rules: 1) They were to refrain from eating meat offered to idols; 2) They were to keep morally pure and have no sexual immorality; 3) They were not to eat meat of strangled animals which still contained the blood.

Notice the reason that James gave for asking the Gentiles to follow these rules. It was because the Jews living throughout the Roman empire had grown up obeying the laws of Moses and without these rules it would be especially difficult for Jews and Gentiles in one church to worship together or fellowship together.

By a careful study of Scripture, we see that there are two types of rules listed here. First there are the universal laws that God demands of all people in all times. The law against sexual immorality is an example of this. Fornication was widely practiced by the Gentiles at that time, even in the name of religion. But God demands sexual purity of all his people. Both in the Old Testament and New Testament God's people are commanded to be sexually pure.

Q. 27. Make a list of other laws found both in the Old and New Testament that are binding on all people at all times.

But there are also other rules that are more temporary in nature that a church can ask its members to keep. There are two reasons why these laws should be made. First, there are laws that are given for the sake of maintaining one's testimony among the unsaved. These are not Scriptural rules for all people at all times, but are determined more by the culture of the people one lives among.

Q. 28. Make a list of this type of law that your church asks its members to keep.

Second, there are temporary laws that come into being to help people from different cultures live together in better harmony. This was the purpose of the laws concerning meat offered to idols. This practice was a matter of great offense to the Jews who would not eat with anyone who ate meat that was offered to idols. They considered this as participation in idol worship. And so the Gentile Christians should respect the convictions of the Jews and refrain in this matter. Later in writing to the Corinthian Christians who were mainly Gentiles, Paul seems to set aside this law giving other guidelines instead. See 1 Corinthians 8 which was Paul's counsel concerning meat offered to idols.

Q. 29. Make a list of this type of law that your church asks its members to keep.

It is important to understand these different types of laws and understand which laws belong to which category. It is very wrong to look at the last two types of laws as being necessary for all Christians. This can lead to a religion of works. Rather, the last two types of laws are kept out of a desire to maintain ones witness to unbelievers and fellowship with other Christians. These are a reflection of the law of love for our neighbors. As cultures and times change, so can these rules.

James' recommendation was accepted by the other leaders and by the whole assembly. They decided to write a letter explaining the decision of the council. This letter was a circular letter to be read by all of

the churches in the Gentile lands. They also sent along several respected men from the Jerusalem church to officially give the decision to the churches. One of the representatives was called Judas and the other was called Silas. Both were leaders in the Jerusalem church and were prophets. Silas later became the traveling companion of Paul on his second and third missionary journeys. When the decision of the Jerusalem church was given to the Antioch church it was accepted with great joy.

Q. 30. Why was this a good method of informing the Antioch church?

Judas and Silas, who were prophets encouraged and strengthened the believers in Antioch before they returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas continued to preach and teach the Word in Antioch.

Q. 31. Name one or two practices which you believe you should not do personally but are not necessarily wrong for another Christian.

Unfortunately, this issue did not quickly die down in the early church. All throughout the ministry of Paul, Jewish Christians continually sought to add the Old Testament laws on the Gentiles. We see this reflected in almost all of Paul's letters to the churches. In fact, sometime after this, Peter himself fell into this trap. In the book of Galatians Paul refers to a time when he had to remind Peter of the place of law and that God only demanded faith in order to be saved, not the keeping of laws. (See Galatians 2:11-16)

Just as this issue plagued the Old Testament church, it has plagued the church down throughout the centuries. One thing that Satan loves to do is to corrupt the Gospel by turning it into a list of laws that people have to keep in order to be saved or to seem spiritual. It takes great wisdom to know when laws are kept out of good purposes and when they turn into hindrances of the Gospel. This is especially true for evangelists, especially those who work in another culture that is different from their own. It is very easy to add on one's cultural beliefs to the Gospel and demand things of the other people before they come into faith in Jesus Christ. Some have even gone as far as saying that nomadic people had to get rid of their clothes, put on modern clothes, etc. to become Christians. These, like the Jewish Christians of old have then added to the Gospel and made others seek to become Christians through keeping laws, not by faith in Jesus alone. They are making them change their culture in order to gain fellowship with God.

Q. 32. What can we learn about the need to carefully train evangelists from this chapter?

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 15:36-41

The decision of the Jerusalem council clearly opened the door for the Gentiles to enter the church without having unnecessary laws demanded of them. They did not have to become Jews just to be saved. This decision also enabled closer fellowship between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. This decision allowed the Gospel to spread unhindered by barriers among the Gentiles. In fact, within a few years, the center of Christianity would shift from Jerusalem to Rome, from the Jews to the Gentiles.

Paul had not forgotten his call to take the Word of the Lord to the Gentiles. After teaching in the Antioch church for some time, he felt the call of God to again reach out to new areas with the Gospel. But

he soon ran into problems. One of the problems in Christian work is lack of harmony between Christian workers. A problem arose between Paul and Barnabas.

Q. 33. Describe a situation where problems between church workers has hindered the work of God.
Q. 34. Read Acts 15:36-41 and answer the following questions. a) Where did Paul suggest that he and Barnabas go? Why did he want to go? b) What did they disagree about and what was the result? c) Who became Paul's traveling companion and where did they go? d) Where have we heard of Silas before? (See Acts 15:22, 27)

One day as Paul and Barnabas were teaching in Antioch, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back to visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Paul never forgot those whom he had helped lead to faith in Christ and wanted to revisit the churches planted on the first missionary journey.

Barnabas agreed but wanted to take John Mark, his relative, with them. But Paul disagreed, because in their previous journey Mark had turned back in Pamphilia. The Bible does not tell us why John Mark left Paul and Barnabas but it would seem that he left without permission. Paul thought he was unfit then to go on the second journey and he refused to allow John Mark to come.

Barnabas who was more gentle and sympathetic believed that John Mark should have another opportunity to accompany them. Paul, who was zealous for the work thought that Mark would hinder their progress and ministry. Whereas Barnabas' gifts enabled him to help and encourage individuals, Paul was more impatient and intolerant.

The Lord used both types of personalities. We have seen previously how Barnabas' gift of encouragement helped the churches. Paul himself was taken under Barnabas' care to be introduced to the Apostles and to start his teaching ministry in Antioch. Paul had a very strong personality. We have seen him take over the leadership from Barnabas but it was his strong personality which drove him on and was a great cause for the gospel being preached in areas that had never before heard the good news. It is often differences in personalities which bring conflict between believers.

Q. 35. a) How have you seen or experienced conflicts between Christians? b) Can disagreements be settled by agreeing to accept the opinion of the other person?

Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement. It probably caused grief among the believers. Even though leaders in the church, the two could not reconcile their differences. Finally, Barnabas took John Mark and sailed for Cyprus. Paul chose Silas and started overland to Cilicia to revisit the churches in Asia Minor. (See the map of Paul's second missionary journey in Appendix D)

God's work is not stopped because of the disagreements and weaknesses of his people. He can even turn the disagreements and use them for His glory. The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas resulted in two evangelistic teams going out instead of one. We do not know what happened to Barnabas and Mark on this trip because Luke turns his attention to Paul and Silas and their second missionary journey.

The church approved of Paul's new journey and Paul and Silas went with their prayer and support. There is nothing said concerning Barnabas and Mark's journey but that does not mean the church did not

agree to their going. This is the last time we read about Barnabas or John Mark in the book of Acts. This does not mean that they did not continue to work. Rather, the author, Luke continues his focus on recording Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

Remember that when Paul returned from Jerusalem with the council's decision, two men from Jerusalem had accompanied him. Silas was one of those men. (Acts 15:23-27) Silas' name was also mentioned in the letter from Jerusalem. Since Paul was sent by the Antioch church and Silas was originally from the Jerusalem church, it was appropriate that both churches were represented in the second missionary outreach.

Both Paul and Silas were Roman citizens which gave them more acceptance in the Roman world (see Acts 16:37-38.) Next week we will study the opposition which arose in response to their message and the mighty way God worked in their lives. As they traveled through Syria and Cilicia, God used their individual gifts to strengthen the churches. Paul seemed to have a clearer understanding of salvation by grace, apart from the law, than Peter and Barnabas who were influenced by the Judaizers. (See Galatians 2:11-13)

Q. 36. The Lord gives different abilities and gifts. What were Paul's special gifts? What were Barnabas and Silas' gifts? What are your gifts?

The disagreement concerning Mark was not a long lasting problem. In the letter of 1 Corinthians Paul seems to commend Barnabas who was still working as an evangelist. (1 Corinthians 9:6) Paul's dislike of John Mark did not last for a long time. By the time Paul was a prisoner in Rome, John Mark was with him. In fact, almost the last words that Paul wrote were a call for John Mark to come to him before he died. (Colossians 4:10 and 2 Timothy 4:11)

There will always be disagreements between Christian workers. The important thing is to work through these differences so that the work of God is not hindered. We must not allow Satan to cause bitterness and division to work in the church.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where did Paul first go to witness, when he entered a new city?
2. Why was it necessary that Paul's message to the pagans be different than that to the Jews?
3. What are Paul's characteristics that helped him in the very great and difficult task of reaching the Gentiles with the gospel?
4. a) List several difficulties that could have discouraged Paul in his first journey.
b) How did they affect his ministry?
5. Review Paul's strategy in establishing and encouraging churches.
6. a) Why was the Jerusalem church council necessary? b) How did it effect the church?
7. Explain the good which resulted from the conflict between Paul and Barnabas.

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a. Discuss the strategy of Paul in establishing churches and how your church's strategy compares with it.
- b.
 - 1) Why are there often disagreements between Christian leaders?
 - 2) Do these disagreements always have bad results?
 - 3) When are disagreements harmful to the church?
 - 4) What are ways Christians should use to settle their differences?
- c.
 - 1) In what way is it possible for older established churches to impose on new believers of a different culture certain customs or behavior that are not essential to Christianity?
 - 2) List some things that have been required by the established churches in new areas.
 - 3) How has this caused problems?
 - 4) How is your church training its evangelists so that these mistakes will not be made by them in their work?
- d.
 - 1) What can we learn from the example of the Jerusalem Council about how to combat false teachings in the church?
 - 2) How have the evangelical churches in Ethiopia worked together to combat cults?
 - 3) How can the evangelical churches do this better?

Lesson Twelve

Acts 16:1-40

FIRST DAY

ACTS 16:1-5

Paul's second missionary journey did not get off to a smooth start. Rather, it started with a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. This resulted in a split in the first missionary team. Paul took Silas and traveled through Syria and Cilecia. Barnabas and John Mark returned to Cyprus. It was Paul's purpose to return to the cities already visited to strengthen and encourage the believers. Paul was concerned that these churches would reach out to others.

When the gospel spreads from one culture to another there is danger that cultural practices are taught as essential to salvation. The practices may be good, but we can add nothing to salvation in Christ. When entering a new area, care should be taken not to offend unnecessarily. Paul said, "I have become all things to all men; so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Cor. 9:22)

Question 1. What should be our attitude toward the practices of those in another culture?

Q. 2. Read Acts 16:1-40. Make a list of all the places Paul visited. Find these places on the map in Appendix D at the back of the book.

Q. 3. Read Acts 16:1-10 and answer the following questions: a) 1) Who was the disciple that Paul found in Lystra? 2) Who was his mother? His father? 3) What was his reputation? b) 1) Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised? 2) Did it in any way add to his salvation? c) 1) To whom were Paul and Silas especially ministering in Derbe and Lystra? 2) What message did they deliver? 3) What were the results in the churches? d) 1) Where did the Holy Spirit prevent Paul and Silas from entering? (two places) 2) Where was Paul when he had a vision? 3) What was the vision?

Paul's second missionary journey took place between the years **49-52 A.D.** His journey took him by land across Asia Minor, visiting the churches he started on the first missionary journey. He then went into Europe, ministering in the Greek provinces of Macedonia and Achaia before returning to Jerusalem and then Antioch.

When Paul reached the churches in Galatia, one of the first things he did was to read the letter written by the church leaders in Jerusalem. This is because he wanted to put a stop as soon as possible to the false teaching that was affecting the churches. The letter also reinforced the letter of Galatians which Paul had written to the Galatians and had sent just before or after the Jerusalem Council.

At Lystra, Paul found Timothy, a young disciple who had a good reputation among the believers. He had probably believed on Paul's first missionary journey. Timothy's mother, Eunice, was a Jewess and a believer. (2 Tim. 1:5) His father was a Greek, and probably because of his father's influence, Timothy had not been circumcised according to the custom of the Jews.

Paul wanted to take Timothy with them on their travels. Because Timothy was not circumcised Paul felt it would cause the Jews to reject him. It would therefore act as a barrier to the spread of the Gospel. And so, Timothy was circumcised. It is important to realize Timothy was not circumcised in order to become acceptable to God. It was only done so that there would be no unnecessary hindrances to the Gospel. Earlier, Paul refused to circumcise Titus who was a full Gentile because this was being demanded by some Jews to complete his salvation. (Gal. 2:1-3)

Paul has been criticized for having Timothy circumcised. The letter from the Council said circumcision was not necessary for the Gentiles. However, it was not done for salvation, but to make Timothy accepted in the synagogue audiences, as Timothy was considered a Jew. It was not done to reconcile differences with the Judaizing Christians, but to increase Timothy's usefulness.

Q. 4. List examples of when we should conform to the culture of a people in order to have a more effective witness?

Timothy played an important role in the spread of the Gospel in the early church. He started off as a helper to Paul and Silas as John Mark had served with Paul and Barnabas before. It was important for Paul to have dependable and loyal co-workers. Timothy became a very dear friend and helper to Paul all through Paul's life.

Q. 5. For what reasons is it wise and helpful for evangelists to go out in teams?

Timothy's ministry was confirmed by prophecies (1 Tim. 1:18); and by the laying on of hands by the elders. (1 Tim. 4:14) He then travelled with Paul on his second and third missionary journeys and even on to Rome. In fact, when Paul was close to death, he asked that Timothy come to be with him in the last months of his life. In six of Paul's letters, Timothy is included in the opening greeting.

Timothy was an important member of Paul's team. Often he was asked to remain behind and teach the new Christians the deep truths of the Gospel and help establish the churches so that they could function on their own. Paul obviously spent much time teaching and training him. In the New Testament we see he was sent to Thessalonica to encourage the believers and again was sent to Ephesus to deal with false teaching and appoint church elders. He was also sent to Corinth (1 Cor. 6:10-11) and to Macedonia. Later Timothy was imprisoned for his faith. (Heb. 13:23)

Q. 6. a) Why is it important for existing church leaders to train others to take over their responsibilities?
b) Describe what your church is doing to train leaders to assume leadership responsibilities in your church.

Timothy was young and timid, and had to be admonished and encouraged by Paul, who was as a father to him. (See 2 Tim 1:7) But Paul commended Timothy for his loyalty more than any other companion. (1 Cor 16:10; Phil 2:19-20) Paul's last letter, 2 Timothy, was written to him.

God used Paul's gifts of reaching out into new areas with the Gospel. But God also used Timothy to help establish and build up the churches. The process of building the church requires many different types of people. As Paul said "I planted the seed. Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.... The man who plants

and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor." (1 Cor. 3:6-9)

Q. 7. How is God using your gifts to work to the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the church?

Through the ministry of Paul and his companions, the churches "were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers." A healthy church grows in two ways.

First, there is numerical growth. By this we mean that there should always be new believers being added to the church. If there are no new Christians coming to church, if the church is only growing at the same rate that the Christian families have children who grow up in the church, then that church is weak.

Second, a healthy church must also grow in their faith. Christians must grow in their depth of knowledge. It was always Paul's prayer for the Christians to be "rooted and built up in him (Christ), strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." (Col. 2:7)

Q. 8. Describe how these two types of growth are taking place in your church.

SECOND DAY

ACTS 16:6-10

When Paul began his second journey, it was his initial purpose to visit the previously established churches. However, he also wanted to continue to spread the Gospel into unreached areas. Therefore, Paul, Silas and Timothy went on hoping to go into Asia, Bithynia, and Mysia. But the Holy Spirit directed them on to other areas. The Holy Spirit had His own time and ways for getting the gospel to those provinces.

Q. 9. How have you learned to determine the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Q. 10. Read Acts 16:6-10 and answer these questions: a) Study the map of Paul's second journey (see Appendix D). Notice where Phrygia, Galatia, Asia, Bithynia and Mysia are located. b) What happened in Troas? c) In which present continent was Macedonia? d) Why does the pronoun change from "they" in Acts 16:8 to "we" in 16:9?

Leaving the churches of Galatia, Paul and his companions travelled throughout Phrygia and Galatia which were two provinces to the west of where the previous churches were started. There is no record in Acts of churches being established at that time, but they were no doubt preaching the gospel message as they travelled. They had wanted to go into the province of Asia which was on the coast, but the Holy Spirit had other plans and stopped them. It was not until the third missionary journey that they were allowed to go back into Asia to work at Ephesus. Without really knowing where they were supposed to go next, they continued westward until they got to the end of the continent of Asia. When they got to the border of Mysia again the "Spirit of Jesus", the Holy Spirit, prevented them from going north into Bithynia. No doubt they were confused, not knowing why God was closing the doors of service on them. So they went down to Troas which is a city on the coast of the Aegean Sea. They could go no further without specific guidance from God.

That night in the city of Troas, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Macedonia was one of the provinces in modern Greece. It was the

province from which the great leader Alexander the Great had conquered the world. It was also in another continent- Europe. This was a major step in the spread of the Gospel. God, who knows the future realized that the light of the Gospel would remain lit in Europe whereas it would almost be snuffed out by Islam in Asia and Africa in the centuries to come.

After Paul saw this vision he and his companions immediately got ready and sailed by ship to Macedonia.

At this point in Luke's record in Acts he says "**We** got ready ... concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." It is here in the second missionary journey that the author Luke joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy in Troas and sailed with them to Macedonia. From this time on, he would become a part-time travelling companion of Paul. Whenever you see the word "we" or "us" in the Acts, it is because Luke is travelling with Paul.

It is not clear as to how the Holy Spirit led Paul, stopping him from going into Asia and Bithynia. Was it by a vision, an audible voice, or some circumstance that showed them that it was not God's will? We do not know. God can lead in many different ways. But they were sensitive to the prompting hand of the Spirit and Paul and his companions were quick to obey. We can be assured of the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit as we obey what we know to be His will. Most of what God wants from us is clearly taught in the Scriptures. Unless we are fully obeying what He has already revealed to be his will through the Scriptures, we cannot expect God to guide in other details of our lives.

Q. 11. Describe an instance that God clearly guided you to do something you had not expected.

God's timing is not always according to our thoughts. Though Paul was prevented from entering Asia at that time, later he spent 2 years in Ephesus and the gospel spread out from there, until "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." (See Acts 19:10)

Waiting on the Lord and then to go guided by His Spirit is the way to have a fruitful ministry. The Holy Spirit must point out the way, the places, and the time that the Word is to be spoken. Today we place more emphasis on organization, advertising, and financial support than on the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit as much today as the apostles did in the beginning of the Church age. Jesus is still working here on this earth in the person of the Holy Spirit. The time was right for the gospel in Macedonia (Europe) and the Lord had other plans for Asia and Bithynia. Peter addressed his first letter to God's elect strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia so we know that the Gospel did eventually reach into all of the areas Paul had planned to go. Perhaps Peter visited some of these areas with the message of Jesus Christ.

Q. 12. List ways that Christians today sometimes put more emphasis on physical organization, budget proposals, etc. than seeking the specific guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Q. 13. List ways that you use to determine God's will for your life. What scriptures do you use to base your methods of knowing the will of God on.

THIRD DAY

HOW TO LEARN THE WILL OF GOD

The plans of Paul and his companions to take the message of Jesus Christ into Asia, Bithynia, and Mysia were all prevented by the Holy Spirit. But in Troas Paul received the vision which gave them a call to come to Macedonia.

Except for the vision, we are not told by what means the Holy Spirit guided Paul and prevented him from going to these places. God may have used several means to guide, even as He does today. In our study today we will look at certain principles that we can use to determine the guidance of God in our lives.

Q. 14. What are ways God has guided you?

Here are some suggestions to follow in seeking to know God's will.

1. Study the Word of God. The clearest place that God reveals his will is in the Word of God. God will always direct in a way that agrees with what is taught in his Word. If we feel we have God's direction, but it is not according to what God has clearly taught in Scripture, we can be certain that it is not God's will for we know that God does not change his mind or lie. For example, if you want to know whether it is God's will to marry someone who is an unbeliever, God has already told you in His Word for He has commanded us not to marry unbelievers. If the things we ask in prayer are not in agreement with the Word of God. He will not answer. If we do not know the Word our prayer may be in vain. (See Ps. 118 (119):105) As we obey God's Word, He can reveal more of His will to us. The first step in seeking the will of God is to study carefully what God has already revealed in Scripture to be his will and obey what is written there.

Q. 15. a) How has the knowledge of God's Word enabled you to determine what God wants from you?
b) List some things that are clearly revealed to be God's will.

Not only must we know God's Word to determine his will, but we must know God's Word in order to know what is not the truth. Scripture acts as a balance by which we can measure all teachings and all who claim to know God's will. If the teachings and opinions of anyone conflicts with the clear teaching of God's Word we can be certain that it is not from God.

2. Yield- God reveals His will to those who are willing and yielded to obey. (See Ps. 25:9; Acts 9:6) Often God reveals his will in stages. He first reveals a part of his will. As we obey and begin to act upon what he has revealed, he reveals more of his will to us. God's Holy Spirit can guide us only when we are obedient. When Paul knew the Holy Spirit did not want him to go into Asia and Bithynia, he did not argue or disobey. As Paul obeyed what he knew God wanted, God led him on step by step to the point where God revealed more fully what he wanted Paul to do.

3. Confess- In order for the Holy Spirit to speak to us and direct us and show us His will, we must confess and forsake all known sin in our lives. (See Ps 65 (66):18-19; 138 (139):23-24) This is why the Holy Spirit is called "holy." He hates sin and will not work with those who allow sin to reign in their lives. If we know we have unconfessed sin in our lives, we should not ask God to show us his will. Rather, we must first confess our sins.

Q. 16. Take time now to examine your lives to make sure that you are not hiding unconfessed sin.

4. Pray- We are commanded to pray. (See 1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Chron. 16:11; Jn. 16:24) Read Col. 1:9-10 and make a list of the things for which we can pray. (Ps. 142 (143):8,10) When we pray, we prepare our hearts to listen to God and accept his commands. Too often we bring to God our plans and ask God to bless them rather than ask God to reveal to us what he wants. We have already made up our minds what we are going to do. This is why we must always pray like Jesus "Not my will, but yours be done." We must allow God as our Lord to have complete control over our plans and not seek to get him to bless what we have already decided.

5. Do not be in a hurry- If God does not answer immediately, wait! If you are trusting, you will not be in a hurry. God has reasons to delay answers, as His time is not always according to our time. (See Ps 27:14; 129 (130):5)

6. Start doing what you know is God's will- Because God sometimes reveals his will in stages, if you know that God wants you to do something start with that. We see this in the life of Paul. Paul knew that God had called him to witness to the Gentiles. God had not told him yet where, but he started to obey. As he was moving in obedience, God closed some doors and opened others so that Paul knew where God wanted him to go. Don't expect God to reveal the whole plan to you at once. But start obeying what you know God wants. Then it is easy for God to direct you as you go.

Q. 17. Describe how you or others you know have used some of these suggestions in determining God's will in their lives.

After we have taken these steps so that God can answer our prayer, He may use one or several means to reveal His answer:

- a. He may use His Word; a verse or a message from the Word.
- b. He may give peace of heart when we make a decision or no peace if its a wrong decision. God has given us minds to make wise decisions, if we have followed the previous five steps. It is the Holy Spirit who gives the peace so we must be sensitive to His direction.
- c. God also uses circumstances in our lives. Perhaps by providing something needed or withholding it. God who controls the universe can remove hindrances if we pray according to His will. He can also allow hindrances to prevent a thing which is not His will. Perhaps this is the way He led Paul. However, circumstances alone are not always adequate guidance.
- d. For those new Christians who cannot read or have not yet had opportunity to hear the Word, God can lead, sometimes by a vision, a dream, or by some sign. Do not expect God to always lead this way. Rather, the normal instrument that God uses to show us his will is his written Word.

When God gives light, be quick to obey. As we obey, He gives more light and understanding as to what his will is. (See Ps. 31 (32):8-9)

God desires to lead us and show us His will but we must ask Him with willing and open minds. We must not ask Him to agree to a decision we have already made. We must be willing to let Him change our plans, even as Paul, when he wanted to go into Asia, Bithynia, and Mysia.

Christ desires our fellowship in prayer and in His Word. We are often too hurried and busy to spend the time with Him that we should. This is why so many of our churches and Christians do not sense the leading of God today.

Q. 18. Make a list of things you are asking God to do for you or show you. How are you making use of the suggestions of today's lesson?

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 16:11-40

The Lord wants us to know His will and to guide us. We have seen that we learn to know His will when we take time to know Him, through the study of His Word and prayer. When we are willing to confess and forsake sin and yield to His will, He can reveal His will to us. God leads by various means and He does not always lead in the same way. Sometimes circumstances seem very favorable, but alone they are not a certain guide, because Satan can also use circumstances to hinder or oppose God's work. When we are in God's will it doesn't mean that our circumstances will always be favorable or pleasant. We will see this in Paul's ministry.

Q. 19. Read Acts 16:11-40 and answer the following questions: a) 1) How did Paul and his companions travel from Troas to Philippi? 2) Describe the city of Philippi. b) 1) Where did Paul go on the Sabbath. 2) Who were gathered there? c) 1) Who was Lydia? 2) What was her trade? 3) What was her response to Paul's message? d) 1) How was the slave girl able to tell fortunes? 2) As she followed Paul, what did she shout? 3) What caused her to lose her fortune-talking power? e) 1) Who started the persecution against Paul and Silas? 2) What did they do in prison? 3) Why did the jailer want to kill himself? f) Why did Paul insist on his rights as a Roman citizen?

Immediately after receiving the vision, Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke (who joined them at Troas) set sail for Philippi. (Follow their journey on the Map in Appendix D of Paul's second journey.) It took only two days to cross from Asia to Europe because the wind was favorable.

Philippi, the first European city in which the gospel of Christ was preached, was the chief city of that part of Macedonia and a Roman colony. This means it was mostly inhabited by Roman citizens and ruled directly by Rome.

On the Sabbath, Paul and his companions went to the riverside to worship. This indicated that in this Roman colony, there were so few Jews that there was no synagogue. Otherwise Paul would have gone there to worship. At the river they found a group of women and began to speak to them. One of the women was called Lydia, a worshipper of God. In some way she had heard about the God of the Old Testament and had forsaken her worship of many gods. Most likely she had heard about God while she was in her home area of Thyatira. She was a very important, influential woman.

While listening to the Gospel message, God opened her heart to the Word and she and her whole household believed and were baptized. The first person to become a Christian in Europe was a woman. It was also in her home that the first European church formed. God is no respecter of persons. He looks equally at men as he does at women. God used this godly woman to open the door of the Gospel in Philippi

to start what was perhaps Paul's favorite church. So also today, God gives women an important part in the spread of the Gospel. It is wrong when churches say that only the men are important in the spread of the Gospel. In the past and even now God is using women greatly for His kingdom.

Q. 20. What part do women play in the evangelism of your church? How could they play a more important role?

In Philippi there was a slave girl who, by the power of an evil spirit, was a fortune-teller. She followed Paul and Silas shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Even Satan recognizes those chosen by God. Although a follower of Satan, she was used to openly confess the authority of Paul and his companions as the messengers of God.

One day Paul rebuked the spirit telling it to come out of the girl in the name of Christ. The demon left the woman and she was no longer able to prophecy. When the owners of the slave girl saw that she was no longer able to bring them profit, they accused Paul and Silas of bringing an unlawful religion into the city. During those days, any religion that was not authorized by the government of Rome was illegal. The people in Philippi accused Paul and his companions of introducing a new and therefore illegal religion. Paul and Silas were dragged to the market place, where the crowd turned against them and the rulers ordered that Paul and Silas be flogged. Then they were put into the inner cell of the prison in leg-irons. We do not know why Timothy and Luke were not imprisoned at this time.

Q. 21. If the Holy Spirit lead Paul and Silas to Philippi why do you think God allowed this persecution?

Humanly it would seem that this was a disaster for the Christians. The church had just been formed. The casting out of a demon had probably opened the door to greater witness. But, instead, Paul and Silas found themselves in prison. They could have questioned God. They could have been afraid and despaired. But, although sore from the flogging, all night long Paul and Silas prayed and sang songs of praise to God. They based their faith in God, not in the immediate circumstances that seemed so bad. They trusted that God had a special purpose by allowing them to be imprisoned.

Suddenly, there was a violent earthquake and the foundations of the prison were shaken, and all the prisoners' chains were loosened. The jailer was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. According to Roman custom, if a jailer allowed the prisoners to escape, he would be tortured, and eventually killed. Usually when this happened, rather than face torture and ridicule, the jailers would kill themselves.

When Paul saw that the jailer was about to kill himself, he shouted to stop the jailer. When Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" the jailer realized that the Lord had freed the prisoners. God had also kept the other prisoners from escaping. Satan would have rejoiced if the jailer had killed himself, but God had other plans. The jailer had heard the prayers and praise to God of Paul and Silas. He realized that there was something unique in the life their lives. This is why he asked "what must I do to be saved?"

Q. 22. How have you seen God take what seemed like an unfortunate circumstance and use it for his glory and the salvation of others?

Paul and Silas' answer "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" is the message of eternal salvation in brief. One does not have to work in order to be saved. There are no special people whom God allows to be saved and excludes others. God's promise of salvation is open to all people. Upon the true inner belief of any sinner no matter how evil, God promises to forgive them and save them and give them eternal life.

Q. 23. How is this verse describe the heart of the gospel message?

God's grace had opened the heart of the jailer and he believed in Christ and all those in his house. This does not mean that the faith of the jailer saved all of the members of his family. Rather, as he shared the story to his family, all of them listened and believed as a family unit. If a husband believes, this does not make his wife a Christian. It does not make the children Christians. Faith is not inherited. Rather, each member of the family must personally trust in Jesus Christ for the salvation of his own life and become a part of God's family.

Q. 24. a) Why do some people in the church think that since their parents are Christians they are Christians? b) What is your church doing to teach all of its youth that they too must make a personal choice to believe in Jesus Christ and not trust in the faith of their parents?

Q. 25. What were the results of the persecution against Paul and Silas?

When the rulers in Philippi sent word to release Paul and Silas, Paul demanded that because they were Roman citizens and had been flogged and condemned without being judged that the rulers themselves should come and release them. It was a crime to scourge a Roman citizen or be imprisoned without trial. Since they had transgressed the law, the rulers were afraid. They came and escorted Paul and Silas from the prison, asking them to leave the city.

Q. 26. What do you think claiming their Roman citizenship did for the status of Paul and Silas in Philippi? The Church?

We do not know why Paul and Silas did not claim their Roman citizenship at the beginning of the imprisonment before they were beaten. Perhaps it was to keep the other non-Roman members of their group from facing imprisonment instead. Perhaps it was to leave an example of suffering for the sake of Christ for the new believers to follow. Paul and Silas did not ask for an escort to appease their injured pride but to establish their innocence before the rulers for the sake of the church in Philippi.

Paul and Silas did not leave Philippi immediately. They went to the home of Lydia, where they met with the believers and encouraged them before they left.

Q. 27. a) Were Paul's circumstances always pleasant? b) How do we know that the Lord was with him in the circumstances? c) What was gained by his imprisonment?

The first church in Europe had been started in the Roman colony of Philippi. Although small, it became one of Paul's favorite churches. We read in the letter to the Philippians that it was the only church that Paul allowed to support him in his ministry of reaching out with the Gospel.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the letter which Paul and Silas carried with them and shared with the believers?
2. Who was the young disciple who became a life-time companion and helper to Paul?
3. Why was Timothy circumcised?
4. Describe Timothy's personality. Does God use all type of personalities?
5. Which three countries were Paul and Silas prevented from entering?
6. What guidance did Paul receive in Troas?
7. Who joined Paul, Silas and Timothy in Troas? How is it evident, since his name is not mentioned?
8. Of which present-day continent was Macedonia a part?
9. Why do you think God prevented Paul from going into some areas?
10. What are the five steps needed in order to know the will and guidance of God?
11. Why is fellowship with Christ in prayer and the Word important?
12. Who was the first convert to Christ in Macedonia?
13. Why did Paul insist that the rulers come and release Silas and himself from prison?
14. a) What caused the jailer to believe? b) How did his life show that his decision was real?
15. Does your salvation give you the joy of the Lord?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a. 1) Why is it important for older church leaders to train younger church leaders?
 - 2) How is this being done in your church?
 - 3) Why are some leaders afraid of younger better educated leaders?
 - 4) How can your church better train its future leaders?
- b. How do you determine the will of God in making decisions, such as choosing church leaders, sending out evangelists, and planning the church ministries?
- c. 1) Why was the first European believer a woman?
 - 2) What part do women have in the ministry of your church?
 - 3) How can their ministry be increased and yet be within the guidelines of Scripture?

Lesson Thirteen

Acts 17:1-18:17

FIRST DAY

Acts 17:1-9

Paul's second missionary journey during the years 49-52 A.D. was very important step in the spread of the Gospel. For the first time the Gospel spread into Europe with the first convert being a woman called Lydia. Europe would later be used by God to preserve and spread Christianity to the rest of the world. But it also brought opposition as Paul and Silas were arrested and put in prison. But flogging, arrest, and imprisonment did not stop the gospel witness. As a result of their testimony the jailer and his whole household believed in Christ. Paul and Silas were forced to leave the city but they left behind a small group of Christians.

Wherever Paul went he was persecuted, but it did not prevent him from continuing on his ministry until he was compelled to leave a city. Opposition by unbelieving pagans was often very direct and severe, but it was probably more bearable than that which Paul received from his own Jewish people. Though Paul was in a Gentile country, he still looked for his Jewish people and went first to a synagogue if there was one in the city.

Question 1. Read Acts 17-18:17. Make a list of all of the cities Paul visited and the major things that happened in each city.

Q. 2. Read Acts 17:1-9 and answer these questions: a) In Thessalonica, where did Paul first preach? b) What was the content of Paul's message? c) Who opposed Paul and why?

When Paul and his companions left Philippi they travelled west along a famous Roman highway until they reached Thessalonica. Since Luke no longer includes himself in the narration, it seems that for some reason he stayed behind in Philippi. We know this because from Acts 17:17 on he again says "they" and not "we." Perhaps he stayed to help the new church get founded and established in its faith.

We don't know why Paul and his companions passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia without stopping, but perhaps it was because there were no Jewish synagogues in them. When he reached Thessalonica, Paul stopped to minister there. He went first to the Jewish synagogue for three consecutive Sabbaths and reasoned with the Jews from the Old Testament Scriptures. On the basis of the Old Testament he explained that Jesus was the Christ and that it was necessary that He should suffer and rise from the dead.

Q. 3. What Old Testament verses do you think he used to prove this? (Try looking at Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Can you name some others?)

We need to remember in our witness to the unsaved that we do not use our own words or arguments. It is the Word of God which has power for salvation, not our words. We need to know the Scriptures so that we can use them in sharing the Gospel.

Q. 4. Make a list of Scriptures that should be quoted when witnessing to an unsaved person. How many of these have you memorized? You should learn the most important ones to always be ready to share with people about Jesus.

Paul stayed for some time in Thessalonica. In his later letter to the Thessalonians, which was probably written soon after he left, he reminded them that he had worked with his own hands so he would not be dependent on them. (1 Thes. 2:9) By this Paul meant that rather than ask them to feed him, cloth him, pay him money, he worked probably at his trade, which was tent making, and used the money to support himself and his companions. Paul was not ashamed to work with his hands.

When some of the Jews, a large number of God-fearing Greeks, and some prominent women (those who were rich or were wives of key leaders of the city and who were respected by the people) and believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Jews became jealous. Again, they instigated persecution against the Christians.

At this time, Paul was staying in the home of Jason who was most likely a Christian. Perhaps Jason's house had become a meeting place for believers also. The jealous Jews gathered together some evil men who started a riot in the city, hoping they could accuse Paul and his companions of being disturbers of the peace. They rushed to Jason's house, but Paul was not there. When they didn't find Paul they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials. Jason was accused of welcoming into his house Paul and Silas who caused trouble all over the Roman world. They accused Paul and Silas of defying the decrees of Caesar saying there was another king called Jesus. This was a very serious accusation and could have resulted to the imprisonment and death of Paul and all of the followers if it had been proven. But, the city officials obviously recognized it as false. In order that no more disturbances be made, however, the officials made Jason and the other Christians leave money as a guarantee against any more trouble and then released them.

Again it was his own people, the Jews, who forced Paul to leave Thessalonica. Flogging by pagan Gentiles was probably easier for Paul to accept than the continued rejection by the Jews of their own Messiah. To this day, very few of the Jews are willing to search the Scriptures. Many have rejected their own Old Testament Scriptures and even many Orthodox Jews are ignorant of the Scripture. The oral traditions of the elders have blinded many to the truth of the Word. Only when the spiritual blindness is taken away, will they be able to understand. (See 2 Cor. 3:13-16)

Often it is the close family members and relatives of new Christians who bring the greatest opposition to those who want to believe.

The ministry of Paul, Silas, and Timothy had not been in vain. A strong group of Christians remained behind. In the letter which Paul wrote back to the church at Thessalonica not long afterward, he commended them saying, "The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere." (1 Thess. 1:8)

Q. 5. Why is it more difficult being rejected by our own people, than by others?

Q. 6. a) Who are the people who usually oppose the gospel witness in your country? b) Why do you think they oppose it?

Paul had a great desire to return to Thessalonica but he said in his letter, "Satan stopped us." (1 Thess. 2:18) Perhaps it was because his friends in Thessalonica had given bond for him, so he was unable to return.

Q. 7. How was 1 Cor. 15:58 true in Paul's ministry in Thessalonica?

Q. 8. Since the opportunities to give a Christian witness are often for only a short time, what ought we to do?

The doors for the gospel were opening in Europe. A small group of believers formed in Philippi and Thessalonica and became the nucleus of the church. Soon the Gospel spread into the surrounding areas. Paul must have been discouraged, when he had only begun a work to be forced to move on. This happened over and over again, but it proved that the power of the Gospel was of God and not of Paul or of any other man. It is God who causes a church to grow, not just the work of people.

Q. 9. How is this an important lesson for Christian leaders to learn in the work?

SECOND DAY

ACTS 17:10-15

In his witness to the Jews, Paul always turned to the Old Testament to demonstrate to them God's eternal plans of salvation which were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Usually, they would refuse to accept the fact that Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. However, Paul found one group of Jews who were willing to examine the Scripture to see if what Paul taught was true.

Q. 10. Read Acts 17:10-15 and answer these questions: a) 1) Where did the Christians send Paul and Silas? 2) Where did they first go? b) 1) How were the Berean Jews different from those Paul had previously taught? 2) Who believed? c) From where did the opposition arise in Berea? d) 1) What happened to Paul? 2) To Silas and Timothy?

When the turmoil arose in Thessalonica, the Christian brothers sent Paul and Silas away in the night. They left the main highway and travelled southwest about 80 kilometers to the city of Berea.

Berea had a Jewish community and so Paul again went to the Jewish synagogue first to witness to his people. There, he found the Jews more open to his message of Christ than those in other cities. They listened to what he was saying but they also compared what he said to the Old Testament Scriptures to see if what Paul taught them was true. This was a very unique response for Paul. In fact Luke commends the Berean Christians because they did not just listen to what someone said and accept it, but they made sure that the teaching of Paul agreed with Scripture.

Q. 11. Why is this trait necessary for us today also?

Too often Christians just accept what is said by evangelists or other church leaders without comparing it with the Bible. This is why false cults so easily steal believers from the church. Anything that sounds good they believe whether it is true or not. We need to be students of the Word of God so that we can differentiate between truth and falsehood when people stand up and teach. (See Heb. 5:14)

Q. 12. a) Describe how you study the Scriptures, comparing and examining it to understand the truth. b) How do you use this to examine the teachings of evangelists and those who teach in your church? c) What false teachings have you found by doing this? d) If you hear falsehood being taught, what do you do?

The Bereans were so hungry for the word of God that they met daily to listen to what Paul had to say. Some of the Jews and also some Greek women and men believed. The seed was planted in another European city and a church was started. The Gospel was spreading.

Among the Jews in Berea, who did not believe, there didn't seem to be any hostility to Paul and Silas. Trouble began when the Jews from Thessalonica found out that Paul was teaching in Berea. They followed him there and stirred up the crowds as they had previously done Thessalonica.

Since the attack was again directed against Paul, the believers immediately sent Paul to the Aegean sea coast where he probably boarded a ship to Athens. (See the Map in Appendix D of Paul's second journey.) He was escorted to Athens by some of the Berean brothers.

Silas and Timothy remained in Berea, most likely to continue to teach and establish the Christians in the faith. Paul became very lonely while he waited in Athens and so he sent instructions back with those who had escorted him, for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

It seems that Silas and Timothy came to Athens and then were sent back to Macedonia- perhaps to Philippi and Thessalonica, then they joined Paul when he reached Corinth. (Acts 18:5 and 1 Thes. 3:1-6)

It is interesting to note how in the cities where there was the greatest opposition, some of the strongest churches were established. It is almost as if the church grows best and strongest during times of persecution and not in times of peace. The Holy Spirit's leading does not always mean there will be ease and no conflict.

Q. 13. How have you seen this truth demonstrated in the church in Ethiopia?

Why were the Gentiles so eager to accept the Gospel? God had been preparing the Gentiles for the Gospel. For many centuries the Greeks and the Gentiles had been taught that there were many gods who were no better than common man. The gods were pictured as weak and carnal, in fact they often had worse lives than did the people. As a result, many Gentiles began to question the truth of their religion. Hearing about the one God of the Jews who was holy, just, righteous, and loving, they realized that here was the true God. However, they were repelled by the heavy legalism that the Jews forced upon them if they were to worship God. When Paul brought the Gospel of salvation by grace alone without the necessity of following all of the legalistic practices of the Jews, they listened to the Word of God and believed. The Greek women especially were so degraded by their culture that the love and liberty of the gospel caused them to quickly accept the Gospel. Within a few years, the church spread from Jerusalem to Rome and beyond.

One of the works of the Holy Spirit is to prepare the hearts of people for the Gospel. Unless men's hearts are softened and opened, no amount of witness will convince them of the truth. The Holy Spirit often softens people's hearts by creating dissatisfaction in their existing religion, in taking away their inner

peace, or in bringing calamity into their lives. We need to be sensitive to the work of the Spirit in others lives so that we can witness to those whom God has prepared.

Q. 14. How have you seen the Holy Spirit prepare an unbeliever for the Gospel even before they were witnessed to?

The hardest place for the gospel to be victorious is in a group of people, or a church, who are satisfied with their external forms of religion. This can happen in any church when there is no obedience to the Word of God and fellowship with Him in prayer. Or it can be where people are proud of their education or culture as we will see in our lesson tomorrow.

Q. 15. Examine your worship and fellowship with the Lord. Is it only external ritual or practice? How is the spiritual life of your church?

THIRD DAY

ACTS 17:16-34

Having left a fruitful ministry in Thessalonica and Berea because of persecution, Paul arrived in the city of Athens. Although alone, Paul did not remain idle. He looked for people to witness to of the Gospel. There in Athens we have recorded Paul's address to the educated Greeks. In it we see reflected Paul's great learning which he tried to use to convince the educated people of the truth of the Gospel.

Pagan gods were numerous in the Roman Empire. Many Gentiles turned to the Jewish religion, because they worshipped one God. These were the first to believe when Paul presented the message of Jesus and the resurrection. In the city of Athens we will see Paul's witness to the educated people of the ancient world. We will see Paul's response to this city and its practices.

Q. 16. Read Acts 17:16-34 and answer these questions: a) 1) For whom was Paul waiting in Athens? 2) What did Paul see that distressed him? b) 1) What did Paul do in the synagogue? 2) In the market place? c) 1) What was the name of the two philosophies that Paul encountered? 2) Where did the philosophers take Paul? d) 1) How did Paul begin his message? 2) Who did Paul say that he came to proclaim? 3) Give 3 major points of Paul's message. 4) At what point did some ridicule Paul and others want to hear more?

Having arrived in Athens from Berea, as Paul was waiting for the arrival of Timothy and Silas, he continued to witness to the Jews and Gentiles. In the synagogue, he witnessed to the Jews and some Gentiles who worshipped with the Jews in the synagogue. But he also witnessed in the marketplace to all who were willing to listen.

Athens was one of the most famous cities in the ancient world. During the times of the Greek empire, it was the major political and religious center of the ancient world. Although since the coming of the Roman empire its political influence was not as great, it still was a major cultural and religious center for the Roman empire. In Paul's day it was a religious capital as it was the center of Greek religion. There were many beautiful temples to many different gods. In fact, in case they had forgotten any of the known gods, they even erected a statue to "The Unknown God." Athens also had the most famous university in the ancient world and was the intellectual center of the ancient world. It was a city of free speech and there

were many schools of philosophy. Like some countries today, it was proud of its heritage, its culture, its education, etc. But spiritually, because of their pride, the city was not hungry for the gospel.

Q. 17. Why do you think countries with a great history, much education, and much pride have a hard time accepting the Gospel message today?

In the marketplace groups of philosophers called Epicurean and Stoic philosophers questioned Paul's message. The **Epicurean** was one school of philosophy who taught atheism and did not believe in God. They taught that pleasure was the real aim for existence. Pleasure was the only good and pain was the only evil. Therefore anything that brought pleasure was good and anything that brought pain was bad. They taught that the universe was not created, but was the result of a chance combination of atoms. Since there was no future life, and no judgment, they said, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." They were very proud and self-righteous.

Q. 18. Do you know some people in Ethiopia who have this same philosophy? Describe them.

The **Stoics** believed that God was in everything and everything was God. By this they meant that God was everywhere, in the stones, trees, stars, etc. All things were then also part of God. They taught that God was the soul of the universe. Since man was part of the universe, man is part of God. They made no distinction between the human and the divine. Since all was part of God, there was no difference between sin and good. They were resigned to whatever circumstances came into their lives. This type of belief is reflected in some of the Eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism.

As these philosophers listened to Paul, because his teaching was so different, they called him a babbler (vs 18) and accused him of teaching about strange gods. One day they took Paul to the Areopagus, which was a meeting place in the city of Athens and a gathering place for intellectual people to discuss religion and judge whether a teaching was truthful or not. Paul was brought there so that his teachings could be heard, debated, and judged to be true or false. It was not out of a desire to hear and believe. Paul was told to defend himself of the accusation brought against him. They said, "You are bringing strange ideas... and we want to know what they mean."

Paul's address at Areopagus was given with tact and wisdom. You will remember that Paul had grown up in the city of Tarsus which also had a university. No doubt there he became familiar with the teachings of the Stoics and Epicurean. Now he became to the philosophers as a philosopher and even used some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophy as an instrument to explain the mysteries of the Gospel to people who had a difficult time understanding.

Paul's message can be divided into three parts:

a) The introduction (Acts 17:20-23) Rather than accuse them of false worship, Paul began by commending them for their religiousness. He called them a very religious people because he saw the many idols of many gods. Then he said that he found an idol to an unknown God, and he would make that unknown God known to them.

Paul did not want to unnecessarily create rejection to the Gospel. Therefore, rather than attack them and their false ideas, he began by commending them. This is a good principle to remember when

witnessing to people of other beliefs. We should not accuse or attack their beliefs initially but seek to gain their interest and acceptance by sharing good things that we have seen concerning their religion and lives.

Q. 19. What good things could you use in your witness to Orthodox or Muslim people which you could then use to introduce the gospel?

b) Revealing who the unknown God is (Acts 17:24-29) Because "the unknown god" did not have a specific name, this became a natural bridge for Paul to explain the true God of the Bible. Notice, Paul did not begin with Jesus Christ for these people were not even aware of the truth of the only God. Paul had to start his witness from the beginning by explaining who God is. Paul presented the unknown God as a personal God who made the world and everything in it. Because God is the creator, He does not dwell in temples made with hands. He cannot be worshipped by human hands, as though He needed anything. God is the creator and controller of every nation. He sets their boundaries and the exact places and times that they should live. God did this so people would seek Him and reach out for Him.

In this teaching Paul was going against the teaching of both the Stoics and the Epicureans. By making God separate from creation and greater than all created things, he was going against the Stoic belief that all things were part of God. By showing how they were all accountable to God for their actions, Paul was also refuting the teaching of the Epicureans that there was no God.

To prove his teaching, Paul quoted from two ancient Gentile poets who said, "We are his offspring." One of the poets who said this was Aratus, who was a Stoic. So, Paul used the words of their own poets against them. He showed that man is the creation of God, created in the image of God, but He is not found in images of silver and gold made by the hands of men. This is pagan idolatry.

Q. 20. Why do you think Paul began his presentation of the Gospel in this way?

c) The Message from God. (17:30-34) Paul calls their previous times of belief as ignorance. This must have been a great insult to the Athens people. They were the cultural and educational center of the world. They were proud of their education and knowledge but Paul called all of it as being part of the time of ignorance. By this Paul meant that since they did not have the Word of God to guide their philosophies, they were not accountable for their misunderstandings. God therefore had overlooked these years of no knowledge of God's Word. But now, since the truth had been explained, they were accountable for their beliefs and actions. This does not mean that God would not judge them. To the letter of Romans, Paul demonstrates that all people have creation and their consciences as a witness to God. Since these are knowingly rejected, all men are responsible before God. But God did not hold them responsible to understand things that could only be understood by God's special revelation through his Word. "But now God commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice, by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." Once they heard the truth, they became morally responsible to accept the truth. Only after having explained the true character of God did Paul begin to explain the Lord Jesus Christ.

As soon as they heard of the resurrection from the dead, most people began to mock Paul. The Greeks did not believe that there was a resurrection from the dead. They especially did not believe that a man could rise from the dead in this life. However, some said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."

Why didn't Paul present the gospel and forgiveness of sins? Athenians were obviously not ready for it. Too much of it was new to them. Paul was seeking to lay a foundation which he could later build upon and explain in more detail about Jesus Christ. Although they mocked Paul, he had given them much to think about.

Q. 21. What can we learn about witnessing to people who have no understanding of God and His Word from this sermon of Paul?

Paul's message was not in vain. A few men became followers of God and believed. One, Dionysius, was a member of the Areopagus, the court in the city of Athens. (Tradition says that he became the leader of the church in Athens.) Also a woman named Demaris believed. Paul probably gave these new Christians more teaching before he went on to Corinth.

Some scholars think that Paul realized the futility of trying to argue the Gospel with philosophers using philosophy. When he came to Corinth he said "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel - not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." (1 Cor. 1:17-18)

Q. 22. Read 1 Cor. 1:17-2:5. What can we learn from these verses about trying to depend upon human wisdom in our gospel witness?

FOURTH DAY

Acts 18:1-17

Paul's address to the court in Athens was an example of Paul being all things to all men that he might win some. He became as a philosopher to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, turning the words of their own poets against them. When he spoke of judgment and the resurrection many turned against him. Paul left Athens but the Word of God bore fruit in the lives of a few men and women. The crowds mocked, but a witness remained in Athens. However, it seems that the church in Athens never grew into a strong center for Christianity like the churches in other places did.

In the Acts record, the writer's purpose was to show the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem out into the then known world, in obedience to Jesus' last command. (Acts 1:8) Luke especially follows the life of two key men, Peter and Paul in this outreach. Because of a vision Peter was convinced that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. His special ministry was to convince the Jews of this. Paul, because of a vision of the risen Christ, received his call to make Christ known to the Gentiles. But, we will see that Paul had a team of co-workers who shared his ministry.

Q. 23. Read Acts 18:1-17 and answer the following questions: a) 1) Who did Paul meet in Corinth? 2) Why did he come to Corinth? 3) What trade did Paul share with them? b) 1) Where did Paul minister every Sabbath? 2) What was the response of the Jews? c) 1) Who was Titus Justus? 2) Who was Crispus? d) 1) What was Paul told in a vision? 2) Who defended Paul from the Jews? 3) How did he deal with the accusation against Paul?

Before Timothy and Silas arrived in the city of Athens, Paul decided to go on to Corinth, a city about 80 kilometers to the south of Athens.

Corinth was a large city in the southern part of modern Greece, in the province of Achaia. It was a large merchant city with many people coming to the city for trade. It was on a major trade route between Asia Minor and Rome. As is usual in major trade cities, Corinth was very corrupt- with many temples and much idolatry. In the city was a pagan temple of Aphrodite which had more than one thousand prostitutes used in worship. In fact, the city became so well known for its corruption, that when people were evil, they were compared to the Corinthians. It is against this corruption that we can understand the difficulties that the Corinthian church had maintaining its purity.

When Paul arrived in Corinth he met Aquila and Priscilla. These two were Jewish Christians who were originally from Rome. We do not know how they had heard about Christ, but perhaps some Christians returning to Rome after Pentecost witnessed to them. Although they were not full time church workers, they were greatly used of God in the church in Corinth and Ephesus. They had been expelled from Rome when Emperor Claudius made a decree that all Jews must leave the city. Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers. Since they had the same trade as Paul, Paul worked with them. It was the custom of the Jews to teach their sons a special trade. Even the religious leaders like the Pharisees were required to have a special trade so that they could work and make a living. Paul would often make use of his ability on his missionary journeys. He practiced this trade to support himself so that he would not be dependent on those to whom he was witnessing. However, when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, they brought Paul a gift which was most likely from the Philippian Christians. (See Acts 18:5 and 2 Cor. 11:8-9, Phil. 4:15) After Paul received the gift he was able to use all of his time to preach.

Q. 24. What does this teach concerning the support of evangelists?

All of the ministry of Silas and Timothy is not recorded in Acts. We learn more about them from Paul's letters. It is important to see that they worked with him in the ministry to the churches. Notice the following:

1. Silas and Timothy remained in Berea when Paul went to Athens. (Acts 17:14-15)
2. They joined Paul in Athens and then he sent them back to Thessalonica to establish and comfort the believers in the faith. (1 Thess. 3:1-2)
3. Both Silas and Timothy returned to Paul at Corinth and brought a report from Thessalonica and a gift from Philippi. (1 Thes 3:6) In Phil. 4:15-16 Paul thanked the church in Philippi for their gifts and reminded the Corinthians that he took nothing from them. It was the churches in Macedonia that supported him. (2 Cor. 11:8-9) As we see the ministry of Timothy and Silas, we realize that they were united in their ministry to the churches.

Q. 25. What does the ministry of Silas and Timothy show about the importance of people and team work in God's word?

At crucial periods in Paul's life the Lord appeared to him in a vision. We don't know why Paul needed a vision at this time. However, Paul had suffered wherever he went and in 1 Cor. 2:3 he said that he arrived

in Corinth with much fear and trembling. The Lord knew Paul's need and appeared to him, saying, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." (Acts 18:9-10).

Q. 26. How has the Lord given you encouragement when you needed it?

Paul remained in Corinth for a year and a half teaching the Word of God. Initially he concentrated on the Jews seeking to win them to the Lord. But when the Jews rejected the Gospel, Paul used a solemn Jewish curse on them. When Paul shook off his clothes, he used a common practice used by Jews against the Gentiles which they did when they left a Gentile home. It symbolized the fact that they did not want to be corrupted by the evil of the Gentiles. Paul used this to show the Jews that in their rejection of the Gospel, they were unclean like Gentiles, and they were responsible to their unbelief and eternal judgment by God. (Matt. 10:14) Paul then turned his focus to the Gentiles. However, some of the Jews, like Crispus, who was the ruler of the synagogue did believe in Jesus.

When Paul left the synagogue, he began meeting in the home of Titus Justus, who was a Gentile who was attracted to Judaism. For 1 1/2 years Paul ministered in Corinth and many Gentiles believed and a church was started. During Paul's second missionary journey, most of his time was spent here in Corinth.

Finally the Jews again rose up against Paul and brought him into the court. They accused Paul of persuading people to worship God contrary to the Roman law. You will remember that whereas Judaism was a legal religion, Christianity, if separated from Judaism was illegal. The ruler of the province Achaia, called Gallio, realized that this accusation was out of jealousy. He told the Jews that their accusation was not a misdemeanor nor crime. If it concerned their own law, they should settle it themselves. Gallio refused to judge it. The Christian faith was considered a part of the Jewish faith not a separate religion at that time. He ordered the accusers out of the court.

Q. 27. How does this reveal God's protection?

Because of the mention of Gallio, historians are able to accurately date this story. Gallio ruled in Corinth only in the years 51-52 A.D. Therefore these events as well as the writing of 1 and 2 Thessalonians which was written from Corinth at this time must have taken place during these years.

Rather than beat the Christians, the unbelieving Greeks turned against Sosthenes the ruler of the synagogue. They beat him but Gallio said nothing. It could be that after this Sosthenes also became a Christian for a Sosthenes is mentioned as a brother in the first verse of 1 Corinthians.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How were the Bereans different from the Thessalonians?
2. To this present time, why are the Jews so opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 3:13-16)
3. In the Roman empire, why did so many Gentiles turn to the Jewish and later Christian faith?
4. Describe the city and life of Athens.
5. Describe the team work of Paul with his co-workers.
6. a) How was Paul's message in Athens relevant to his audience?
b) What does this teach about the messages we give?

7. In his message to the Areopagus, at what point did they ridicule Paul?
8. Why do you think God gave Paul a vision in Corinth?
9. How was God's protection revealed when he was accused and brought into the court in Corinth?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a. Make a list of Old Testament Scriptures that could be used to prove Jesus is the Messiah.
- b.
 - 1) What important lesson can we learn from the Bereans?
 - 2) List how you and others can be prepared so they will use God's Word to judge the teaching of others.
 - 3) Describe situations where you have heard false teachings taught in your church.
 - 4) What is your responsibility when you do hear falsehood in the church?
- c.
 - 1) What does Paul's sermon in Athens teach us about making sermons relevant to the audience?
 - 2) Describe ways we can use the world's wisdom to defend the Christian witness.
 - 3) When can this be dangerous for our witness?
 - 4) What does Paul say about the world's wisdom and the wisdom of God? (1 Cor. 1:18-2:7)

Lesson Fourteen

Acts 18:18-20:12

FIRST DAY

Acts 18:18-28

On his second journey, Paul was used by God to open up new areas to the Gospel. Having revisited the churches in Galatia, he went into Europe ministering to churches in the modern day nation of Greece. Wherever he went he was persecuted by Jews and Gentiles. But he remained faithful in his witness and churches were started. After about a year and 1/2 ministry in the city of Corinth Paul's second missionary journey was nearing it's end.

Question 1. Read Acts 18:18 - 20:12. a) Describe the growth of the Gospel in Ephesus. b) Looking at the map in Appendix E, list the places that Paul visited on his third missionary journey.

Q. 2. Read Acts 18:18-28 and answer these questions: a) 1) After Corinth, where did Paul go? 2) Who accompanied him? 3) Why did Paul have his hair cut off? b) 1) Where did Priscilla and Aquila remain? 2) When the Jews begged Paul to remain in Ephesus, what did he promise? c) Upon landing back in Caesarea, which two cities did Paul visit? d) As Paul began his third journey, where did he go? e) 1) Who was Apollos? 2) What knowledge did he lack? 3) Who taught him more fully?

Most of Paul's second missionary journey was spent in the city of Corinth. As the Lord had promised, Paul was able to continue his ministry in Corinth for some time. As a result the Corinthian church became well established. After his long ministry there Paul felt that it was time to return to the home church at Antioch and give a report of his ministry.

Before he and those with him sailed from the port of Corinth which was called Cenchræa, Paul had his hair cut off because of a vow he had taken. We do not really know what the vow was about. Some think that this was a Nazarine vow. In a Nazarine vow (Numbers 6:1-21) the one taking this temporary vow was not allowed to drink any fermented drink or any drink made from grapes. He was not allowed to cut his hair or go near a dead person. The person would especially dedicate himself to God for a specific period. At the end of this period, the person would shave his hair. Sometimes vows were used to express thanks to God for special deliverance. Perhaps Paul was thanking the Lord for His protection in Corinth, or perhaps for his time in Europe. By shaving his head Paul marked the end of the vow.

Q. 3. How do you express thanks to God? (Heb. 13:15)

Accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila, Paul and his companions went by boat to Ephesus, the major city in the province of Asia where Priscilla and Aquila remained behind. You will remember that Priscilla and Aquila were originally from Rome but had been expelled from that city by the Roman emperor. They had then gone to Corinth where they met Paul and became leaders in the Corinthian church. We do not know why, but when Paul left to go back to Antioch, they travelled with him to the city of Ephesus. We will see how they were used there to organize the small church.

When they arrived in Ephesus, Paul went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews concerning the Gospel. Because the Jews were interested in Paul's message they asked him to stay for a time. Although Paul refused he promised that he would return to Ephesus if it was God's will. One translation says the reason Paul refused to stay was because he wanted to get to Jerusalem for a Jewish feast. Paul then boarded a ship for Caesarea.

When Paul reached Caesarea, he first went up to greet the church in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is called "up" because it was on top of a mountain. Then he went down to Antioch, to the church which had sent him on his missionary journey. We are not sure how long he stayed there this time, but it was probably only for a short time. This ended Paul's second journey.

Q. 4. Look at the map in Appendix D of Paul's second journey and review all countries he had visited during the years 49-52 A.D.

After just a short time in Antioch, Paul started on his third missionary journey. This took place during the years **53-57 A.D.** On the third missionary journey, much of the time Paul spent visiting the previous churches. He revisited the churches in Galatia which he had started on his first missionary journey. Then he went to Ephesus where he spent two years ministering. Finally, he revisited the churches in Macedonia and Achaia before he returned to Jerusalem.

Sometime after Paul left Ephesus, a very gifted Jew from Alexandria named Apollos, arrived in the city of Antioch. Alexandria was the second greatest city in the Roman Empire. Found in Egypt it was known for its university which was a center of great knowledge. Apollos was not a Jew from Palestine and therefore probably had not met John the Baptist or Jesus. Most likely the word of the ministry of John and Jesus had come down into Alexandria and he had heard, believed, and was witnessing concerning what he heard. However, his information was only partial. The only baptism he knew was that of John the Baptist. Baptism in the name of Jesus was not known to him. He had not heard about the beginning of the church and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Christians. His message was therefore only partially correct.

Apollos witnessed about the truth that he did know. He knew the Old Testament Scriptures and convinced the people that Jesus was the Messiah that they were expecting. Apollos was a great speaker and spoke very convincingly in the synagogue.

Q. 5. a) Why is it sometimes dangerous for untrained evangelist to go out preaching the Gospel? b) What can happen if what they teach is not correct?

Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos talking in the synagogue. (Note: Some think that because Priscilla's name is mentioned first it shows she had a more important ministry to the church that Aquila had.) They did not condemn him for his inaccuracy in teaching. Realizing his lack of knowledge concerning the way of God, they invited him to their home and explained the Gospel more fully to him. But it seems from the story in Acts 19:1-7 that Apollos still did not have all of the information, for his disciples did not know about the Holy Spirit.

Apollos became another strong witness for the Lord. Probably having heard about the church of Corinth, he wanted to go to Achaia and minister there. Since Priscilla and Aquila were known by the Christians there they gave him a letter of invitation. He had a very fruitful ministry to the believers in

Corinth. He was able to refute the Jews in public debate. Unfortunately, the Corinthian Christians began to look at his abilities more than at the Lord. In Paul's letter to the Corinthian church, it is clear that some of the Christians boasted of being Apollos' disciples and some of being Paul's disciples. Paul rebuked them saying, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." (1 Cor. 3:3-7; 1 Cor. 16:12) We must be careful to not place too great of honor on man. It is Jesus who saves us and whom we are to follow, not any man no matter how gifted.

Q. 6. Why is it dangerous to boast in leaders or follow certain leaders, rather than keep our eyes on the Lord?

Paul's preaching may never have been as great in speech as that of Apollos, but because it was in the power of the Spirit, it was effective and convincing to the salvation of many souls. Paul said to the Corinthians, "I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom... For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:1-2)

Paul planted the seed of God's Word in cities all across the then-known world. Then God raised up people like Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila, and Timothy to continue to water the seed of His Word. We cannot comprehend how far-reaching the Word of God might be from a faithful witness. Our part is to be faithful. Most who believe in Christ have had a witness or teaching from a number of people before the Holy Spirit brings them to make the decision. However, each one has probably been used by the Holy Spirit in bringing that person to faith in Christ. We are only instruments in the hand of God.

Q. 7. Are you faithfully sowing the seed or watering the Word in lives as God gives opportunity?

SECOND DAY

ACTS 19:1-7

After spending some time in Antioch, Paul started his third missionary journey by returning to the regions of Galatia and Phrygia strengthening the disciples. (Acts 18:23) He never forgot the churches which had been established by his prayer, and he visited them whenever it was possible. From there he travelled on to Ephesus.

God's timing is often not man's timing. Several years before Paul had wanted to work in the province of Asia and in Ephesus its capital. However, the Holy Spirit would not let him. Perhaps the people's hearts were not yet ready for the Gospel. When hearts are ready, the Spirit works in power. Satan also works to hinder the Word of God from spreading. One indication that God is at work in hearts and lives of people is the opposition of the enemy. This conflict is evident in this portion of Paul's ministry in Ephesus.

Q. 8. Read Acts 19:1-7 and answer these questions: a) What did Paul ask the disciples at Ephesus? b) What was the baptism of John?

Q. 9. Read 1 Cor. 11-14. a) What is the purpose of speaking in tongues? b) What is greater than speaking in tongues? c) Make a list of the rules that Paul gives for using tongues in a church service.

Paul's third journey began from Syrian Antioch. No travelling companion is mentioned- but most likely Timothy and Silas were with him. In his letters written during this third missionary journey we read of Paul's

concern for the Galatian churches and Christians. Error had entered the churches and many were questioning Paul's apostleship. (See Gal. 1:6-12)

Paul was eager to return to Ephesus and continue the ministry there as he had promised. Rather than following the longer trade route he took a more direct road through Galatia. In the few months that passed between the end of the second and the beginning of the third missionary journey, Apollos had visited Ephesus and most likely a small church started there.

When Paul arrived in Ephesus he found 12 disciples who had not been instructed concerning the Holy Spirit. Most likely these were disciples of Apollos. They had been baptized in the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance, and which looked forward to Jesus, who would make possible forgiveness of sins. When Paul asked if they had received the Holy Spirit they said they had not heard about the Holy Spirit. After Paul had explained it to them, they were baptized in Jesus' name. They received the Holy Spirit in an unusual way, much like the first Samaritan believers and the first Gentile in Caesarea. They spoke in tongues and prophesied. Again, the Holy Spirit was manifested with signs in an area where His coming was not known. This is the last time in Acts that we read about the Holy Spirit given in a separate experience from belief in Jesus Christ and accompanied with speaking in tongues.

Some believe that speaking in tongues is necessary today as evidence that they have received the Holy Spirit. Others believe that laying on of hands is also necessary, but if we study the conversions in Acts, there is no definite pattern. Only the apostles, Peter, John, and Paul laid on hands when some received the Holy Spirit. However, on Pentecost Day there was no laying on of hands. Let's review the four recorded occasions in Acts when the Holy Spirit came upon believers.

1) On the Day of Pentecost 120 were filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke in the tongues of the people who gathered to see what had happened. They were all Jews. There was no laying on of hands. (Acts 2:1-13)

2) Believers in Samaria had believed and been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, but they had not received the Holy Spirit. Peter and John laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. There is no mention of them speaking in tongues. (Acts 8:14-17) This was proof to the apostles and the Jews that those Samaritans who believed were equal with them in the family of God for they received the Holy Spirit the same as the Jews.

3) Cornelius and his house of Gentiles. As Peter preached the gospel to them the Holy Spirit fell on them and they spoke with tongues and praised God. (Acts 10:1-6) There was no laying on of hands, neither was the experience of faith and baptism of the Spirit separated. It happened at the same time. This confirmed to the Apostles and Jews that Gentiles as well as Samaritans were equal in the church since they also received the Holy Spirit in similar fashion to the Jews.

In the first three occasions we can see the Holy Spirit demonstrating the oneness of all people and tribal groups by the three unique instances of the giving of the Holy Spirit. Let us look again at Acts 1:8 in light of these three occasions. The final command of Jesus to the disciples was to take the Gospel to all the world- following three stages:

a. To Jerusalem and Judea- These were the true Jews, the physical children of Abraham, the covenant people of God in the Old Testament. They received the Holy Spirit and its proof was seen in the speaking of tongues. There is no evidence that other Jews in Jerusalem and Judea went through the same

experience of tongues of fire, speaking in tongues, etc. when they believed. Rather, it became an automatic work of God in giving the Holy Spirit to all Jews when they believed.

b. To Samaria- The Samaritans were the enemies of the Jews who were half Jewish and half Gentile. Although they followed the first five books of Moses, they did not believe the rest of the Old Testament. But, by giving the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the apostles Peter and John, God clearly demonstrated that the Samaritans were equal to the Jews in the family of God. We do not read again of Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit in the same way as the initial group of believers did.

c. To the ends of the earth which is the world of the Gentiles. Even more than the Samaritans, the Gentiles were pictured by the Jews as being separate from any hope of salvation. And so when God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles without any help from Peter other than he witnessed the event, he demonstrated to all, both the Jews and Samaritans, that the Gentiles were also accepted equally by God into his family. There is no evidence in the New Testament that other Gentiles having to go through the same experience of receiving the Holy Spirit together with tongues as did the initial Gentiles in Cornelius' house.

4) The 12 Hellenistic Jews in Ephesus received the Holy Spirit when Paul laid hands on them. (Acts 19:1-7) This final group is very unique. In a sense they were living in the Old Testament era. They did not know about baptism in Jesus name. This means that they had had no contact with Christians or a church before. They had only heard about the ministry of John the Baptist. And yet they believed in the message of John the Baptist which was to repent and await the Messiah Jesus Christ. God used Paul to bring this remnant of the Old Testament era (like left over grain at the end of harvest) into the church and put a close to the time of change between the Old Testament and New Testament era.

Perhaps there was a second reason that this event took place. Some in Galatia and possibly Asia were questioning Paul's apostleship. But, even as with Peter and John, when Paul laid on hands they received the Holy Spirit. He was therefore equal to the 12 apostles in Jerusalem.

In each group the important thing was faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. The baptism of John was not adequate, it looked forward to Christ's coming. The coming of the Holy Spirit was confirmation of their faith in Christ. These four occasions confirmed that the Holy Spirit was a gift to all who believed Jesus Christ whether they were Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, or Hellenistic Jews.

As we study all the conversions in Acts we see that there is no evidence that the laying on of hands or speaking in tongues was present in every instance. The laying on of hands was done only by the apostles.

The Bible never says that Christians must pray in order to receive the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Bible shows that the Holy Spirit is given as a gift to all Christians when they believe. Nor does the Bible say that the gift of tongues is the only evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. There are many gifts that the Holy Spirit gives as he desires to different individuals. To speak in tongues does not mean that one is any holier than a Christian who does not speak in tongues. Although the Bible allows the speaking in tongues, it is very clear that it is considered to be one of the lesser gifts, and needs to be controlled and used according to the guidelines in the Bible. Rather than emphasize the gift of tongues, how much better to emphasize the fruit of the Spirit, especially love.

Q. 10. Read 1 Cor. 12-14. Make a list of all the things Paul has to say there about the speaking in tongues.
Q. 11. Read Gal. 5:22-23. How are these fruit of the Spirit in many ways more important than speaking in tongues?

Although Christians differ as to the necessity of speaking in tongues, we need to be sure that we base our beliefs on the clear teaching of Scripture and not on emotions. Also we need to be tolerant with Christians who disagree with what we think is the truth in this matter. As Paul said "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 Cor. 13:12) Let us hold strongly to what the Bible clearly teaches concerning Jesus and the way of salvation. But some things are not yet clear to us. Let us be tolerant in these differences. Beware of spiritual pride that makes you or others think that they are better than other Christians. This is the sin of the Pharisees.

THIRD DAY

ACTS 19:8-41

Q. 12. Read Acts 19:8-41 and answer the following questions: a) 1) How did the Jews in the synagogue in Ephesus respond to the gospel? 2) Where did Paul go to continue teaching? 3) How far did the gospel spread as a result of Paul's teaching in Ephesus? b) 1) Describe Paul's healing ministry in Ephesus. 2) What happened to the sons of Scava? 3) How did this affect the name of Jesus? c) 1) What did Paul teach the 12 believers he found in Ephesus? 2) What evidence was there that they had true faith? d) 1) How long did Paul continue to teach in the synagogue in Ephesus? 2) Why did he leave the synagogue? 3) Where did he continue to preach? 4) How long was Paul in Ephesus? e) 1) What brought fear on the Jews and Greeks? 2) Who were his helpers, that he sent ahead to Macedonia? f) 1) What caused the riot in Ephesus? 2) How was the riot quieted? Explain. g) 1) Who stirred up the people in Ephesus against Paul? 2) Why were they angry? 3) What did they shout? h) 1) Who did the people seize? 2) Why didn't Paul speak to the people? i) 1) Who quieted the crowd? 2) What did he tell the rioters? 3) Where did he tell them to take their accusations?

After Paul returned to Ephesus he went into the synagogue and was able to teach there for three months. Like Apollos he argued and reasoned from the Old Testament that Jesus was the promised Messiah. As usual this teaching caused a division among the Jews. Some were convinced that Paul's message was true and believed. But others refused to believe and began to slander Paul and Christianity, or as it was called in the first century "The Way." Rather than cause a sharp division, Paul took the disciples and went to the lecture hall of Tyrannus. We do not know who Tyrannus was. He could have been a well-known philosopher or the owner of the school. It seems that he or other teachers used it early in the morning when it was cool. They allowed Paul to use it in the middle of the day when it was hot. Paul may have worked as a tentmaker in the early hours and gathered the people to hear the Word in mid-day and afternoons. Paul continued to teach there for two years. These were very profitable years as "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in Asia heard the Word of the Lord." They probably did not all hear the Word from Paul, but from many of those who sat under his teaching who in turn shared it with others.

Q. 13. What does this teach us about the responsibility of all Christians to share the Gospel and not just the evangelists of the church?

It was during those years that the churches of Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea as well as all of the seven churches mentioned in Rev. 2 and 3 were founded. (Col. 2:1 and 4:13) So effective was the ministry of Paul that for several hundred years Ephesus was a great center of Christianity.

As we have often seen in the book of Acts, God authenticated the message of Paul by working many miracles through Paul as he continued his ministry in Ephesus. The healing of the sick by touching clothing which had touched Paul is similar to the woman who was healed by touching the hem of Jesus' robe. (Mark 5:27-29, 6:56) The name of Jesus was so powerful in casting out demons that others who cast out demons also began to use "the name of Jesus, whom Paul preached" when they cast out demons.

Some of these whose work was to cast out demons were the seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva. Most likely he was a Jew who claimed to be a priest but used magic to cast out demons. This was how he made his living. Having seen the power that the name of Jesus had in driving out demons, Sceva's sons began to use "the name of Jesus" in their attempts to drive out demons. One day the evil spirit turned on them saying, "Jesus I know and I know about Paul, but who are you?" The man who had the evil spirit jumped on the seven sons of Sceva, beat them and tore off their clothes, and they escaped naked and bleeding.

Q. 14. a) Why do you think the evil spirit attacked them? b) What can this story teach us about false teachers also using the name of Jesus?

This news of Sceva's sons caused both the Jews and Greeks to have great fear, and they honored and respected the name of Jesus. A great movement to God spread throughout the city. Many believed in Jesus and demonstrated the reality of their faith by turning their backs on their old practices. There was open confession of sin. Those who were involved in evil practices like sorcery brought all of their expensive scrolls on sorcery and burned them in public. It is estimated that these books were worth thousands of dollars. (A drachma was a silver coin which was equal to one day's wage.) Notice that the glory for all of these great things did not go to Paul. He was careful to make sure the glory went to Jesus Christ. People were amazed at the power of Jesus name, and the Word of God grew in power and spread through the city and country of Asia.

This is a good example of what happens when God's Spirit works in a mighty way in an area. We could list several things that are evidences of the working of God's Spirit:

1. There is a fear and honor of the name of God and Jesus Christ.
2. There is open confession of sin.
3. There is a clear demonstration of repentance by renouncing old lifestyles and ways of worship.
4. There is boldness in witness so that the Word of God spreads to all people.

When these four things happen, it is called a time of revival. Two other ingredient are necessary for a great working of God's Spirit. First, there is the bold, clear presentation of God's Word. Second, there is a commitment to prayer by the people of God. When these times of revival come, they change a city, a province, even a nation. Don't you think we should pray for a revival in Ethiopia?

Q. 15. How is this revival been demonstrated at least in a little way in your church or city? If it hasn't, don't you think you and your church should start praying for God to work like he did in Ephesus?

Paul ministered in Ephesus for two years. Not only was he preaching, but it was during these times that the books of 1 and 2 Corinthians, were written. But now Paul was ready to move on to new areas. Above all, he wanted to go to Rome, the capital of the Roman empire. He also wanted to go on to Spain, one of the far places in the Roman empire. (Rom. 16:19-29) As he said to the people of Rome his desire was to preach Christ where no one had preached before. But before he went to Rome, Paul planned to go through Macedonia and Achaia visiting the churches and then return to Jerusalem.

Paul sent Timothy and Erastus ahead to Macedonia while he continued for a time in Asia. They probably took with them the 2 Corinthian letter so that the churches there would collect their promised financial help for the Jerusalem churches before Paul came to visit.

When the power of God is displayed in a community, Satan's resistance often becomes very strong. The teaching of Paul in Ephesus had turned many to faith in Christ. As a result they no longer worshipped their old god called Artemis, the Greek name for the Roman god, Diana. Suddenly, quite unexpectedly a riot broke out against Paul and the church.

In Ephesus there was a man called Demetrius who was a silver craftsman. The major way that he made money was by making and selling silver images used in worshipping the god Artemis. When so many people in Ephesus and Asia turned to Jesus Christ, he was afraid that the trade of the silversmiths was threatened. He called together the silversmiths and told them that the preaching of Paul was destroying their businesses. This stirred the silversmiths who began to shout, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" This soon developed into a great riot in the city.

Q. 16. How was Satan working using the greed of certain individuals to disrupt the spread of the Gospel?

As they shouted through the city, most of the people didn't know why they were shouting but got caught up in the excitement. They seized Paul's companions, Aristarchus and Gaius, who were from the churches in Macedonia and rushed into the theater, probably to hold court and decide what to do with them. Paul had somehow escaped, but wanted to speak to the crowd. The believers in Ephesus however, prevented him from going. Even some of the officials sent him word not to come.

Even the Jews who hated Paul got involved in trying to accuse Paul and his followers. The Jews pushed Alexander who was one of their orators, forward to address the mob. But the Jews were hated by the Gentiles because they too opposed the idolatry and so the mob would not listen to a Jew.

For two hours the unruly crowd shouted, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Finally the city clerk was able to quiet the crowd. He appeased the people by agreeing with them, but he warned them that they should not do anything violent or they would be accused of rioting. This was a serious offense to the Romans and could bring the Roman army down upon the city. He said the Christians had not robbed or blasphemed the goddess. If the silversmiths had a charge against anybody, they should take their accusations to court. The people were quieted and dispersed and went home.

Paul had again been protected to continue his ministry. God used friends and city officials to protect Paul from a very serious threat on his life.

Q. 17. How has the gospel changed any practices in your culture?

When the Word of God is contrary to the cultural practices or moral standards, a choice must be made. When a child of God listens to the Holy Spirit and obeys the Word, he will be convicted and some of the habits and practices which dishonor the Lord will change. It will affect some trades or business as it did in Ephesus. Satan has held cultures under his grip for many centuries. When the Gospel begins to bring changes, he resists strongly. Often there is opposition. And yet, the power of the Gospel is stronger than Satan.

Q. 18. Describe how the Holy Spirit has convicted you and asked you to change some of your practices, even though other Christians may still be doing them?

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 20:1-12

After two years of ministry in Ephesus the Gospel spread across the land and many churches were planted. However, opposition also arose. But God overruled and the church was spared persecution.

Though Paul suffered many times physically in his travels, the greatest concern he had was for the churches. (2 Cor. 11:23-28) As Paul said, "Besides everything else, I face the daily pressure of my concern for all the churches." False accusations, which questioned his authority as an apostle, brought doubt to others concerning the gospel of Christ. At times it was necessary to defend his apostleship because of this. In Corinth (2 Cor. 11:1-3) and in Galatia (Gal. 1:6-12) especially, Paul was compelled to defend the gospel he preached.

Q. 19. Read Acts 20:1-12 and answer these questions: a) What was Paul's message as he travelled through Macedonia? b) 1) Where did Paul stay for three months? 2) Why did he decide to return through Macedonia? c) 1) Who were Paul's companions? 2) Where did they wait for Paul? 3) Who joined Paul in his travel from Philippi to Troas? Notice the pronoun in Acts 20:6. d) 1) In Troas, how long did Paul preach? 2) What happened to one man, as Paul preached?

After the riot, Paul gave final words of encouragement to the believers in Ephesus and then went to Macedonia and Achaia. It was perhaps at this time that he travelled to the borders of Illyricum (now Albania and Yugoslavia.) (Romans 15:19)

Leaving Ephesus, Paul traveled overland to Macedonia and Achaia. Although he wanted to visit the churches, especially the church of Corinth where there were some problems, his main purpose was to collect an offering from the Gentile churches for the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. He stayed about three months in Corinth. It was probably from here that he sent the letter to the Romans telling them of his plans to visit them.

Finally Paul was ready to leave for Jerusalem. Rather than take all of the money by himself, representatives from the churches joined Paul to take their gifts to Jerusalem. Notice the names of these delegates in Acts 20:4- Sopater from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius and Timothy from Derbe, and Trophimus from Asia. (1 Cor. 16:1-5) Luke the writer of Acts, joined Paul and the other delegates, who waited for them in Troas.

Q. 20. Why do you think it was a good practice for Paul to take representatives with him to Jerusalem with the money.

One of the ways that Satan corrupts the image of a church leader is through the improper handling of the church's money. Even if the leader does not steal the money from the church, questions can often arise that cast doubt upon the leader. Paul knew this. Therefore, he insisted that representatives come with him and present the money to the Jerusalem church. This had two purposes. First, in this way no one could accuse him of using the money for his own purposes. Second, Paul wanted to have the Gentile church leaders meet with their Jewish brothers so that by seeing each other face to face their unity might be increased.

Q. 21. a) How has the improper handling of money destroyed some church leaders that you know? b) What are things that the church leaders in your church should do to give everyone confidence that the money is being handled and spent correctly so that there will not be any room for temptation for the leaders or accusation by others.

Finally, Paul and his traveling companions who were many reached Troas where they stayed for seven days. On the last evening Paul held his final meeting with the church. Together they partook of the Lord's supper (This is what is meant by breaking bread.) Then Paul began to preach a long sermon- probably because he realized he might never see them again. He talked until midnight, and one man sitting in the window went to sleep and fell from the third floor and was killed. Paul went down and said, "Don't be alarmed, he's alive!" and raised him to life. Paul went upstairs, again broke bread and talked until daylight. Then he left to continue his journey.

Paul's third missionary journey was almost completed. From the years 53-57 A.D. Paul had been ministering, mainly in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor, today called Turkey. Now, on his way back to Jerusalem, Paul was concerned to visit and encourage the churches. Soon we will see that Paul realized that something was soon about to happen to him that made his return to these churches uncertain. We will study more of this next week.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. a) Where was Paul when he received a vision?
b) What did God tell him in the vision?
2. a) Who were Aquila and Priscilla?
b) How did they serve with Paul?
3. a) Who was Apollos?
b) What made his ministry in Corinth effective?
4. a) Why had the disciples at Ephesus not received the Holy Spirit?
b) When did they receive the Holy Spirit?
5. What happened in Ephesus that brought fear and respect for the name of Jesus?
6. What were the spiritual results of Paul's two years in Ephesus?
7. a) Where did Paul aim to go, after visiting Macedonia and Achaia?
b) Who would accompany him?
8. What happened on Paul's last night in Troas?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a. 1) What can we learn from Apollos' and Paul's ministry about how God used different people to start and develop churches.
2) How has God used different people with different gifts in your church?
3) What can we learn from this about leaders not being jealous or envious of each other?
- b. 1) What can we learn about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and tongues from our study in Acts?
2) How is this different from what some Christians teach?
3) Read 1 Cor. 12-14 and make a list of principles and guidelines for the use of tongues in churches.
- c. 1) How does the Christian faith affect certain trades or businesses in Ethiopia as it did the trade of the silversmiths in Ephesus?
2) Give examples of how being a Christian changes how you work, what you buy, how you live, etc.
3) What are ways Christians could have a greater impact on society in Ethiopia if they would change their lifestyle?

Lesson Fifteen

Acts 20:13-21:26

FIRST DAY

ACTS 20:13-38

We have been studying Paul's third missionary journey during the years 53-57 A.D. Paul spent more time on his third missionary journey than on any of the other missionary journeys that he previously made. Most of the time was spent in the city of Ephesus. Ephesus became the center of Christianity in the province of Asia and later was the center of the church in Asia. It was from Ephesus that the Gospel spread throughout all of Asia Minor through the witness of Christians. It was during this third missionary journey that many of Paul's letters were written. From Ephesus, Paul probably wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians, and from the city of Corinth he wrote the letter to the Romans. After two years of witnessing and teaching, the Lord lead Paul to other places. He especially had the desire to go to Rome and then on to Spain where the Gospel had not yet reached.

Leaving Ephesus, Paul made a final journey through Macedonia and Greece where he spent three months, probably at Corinth. At the end of that time just as he was ready to sail to Syria, he learned of a plot to kill him. Therefore he started his journey to Jerusalem by traveling by foot through Macedonia. In Troas he was joined by the delegation of men from the Gentile churches who were sent to help Paul take relief money to the Christians in Jerusalem. After counselling the Christians all night in Troas Paul and his companions continued their journey to Jerusalem.

Question 1. Read Acts 20:13- 21:26. Look at the map in Appendix D in the back of the book. List the different places Paul stopped on his way to Jerusalem.

Q. 2. Read Acts 20:13-38 and answer these questions: a) 1) How did Paul travel to Assos? 2) How did his companions travel? b) 1) Why did Paul decide to pass by Ephesus? 2) How was he able to meet with the Ephesian elders? c) 1) How did Paul describe his ministry in Ephesus? 2) What was his message to both Jews and Greeks? 3) Why was Paul going to Jerusalem? 4) What was more important to Paul than his life? 5) Why was Paul innocent of the blood of all men? d) What warning did Paul give to the elders? e) 1) Were Paul and his companions dependent on the Ephesians for their living? 2) How did they get their food? f) What did Paul say about giving? g) What did Paul say that caused grief to the Ephesian elders? h) 1) What can we learn about how a leader should live and work among his church from these verses? 2) What can we learn about how false teachers work from these verses?

Upon leaving Corinth, Paul and his companions began their journey back to Jerusalem. Paul went a shorter road by foot and met Luke and the delegation from the churches who were taking relief money to the poor Christians in Jerusalem who had travelled by ship to Assas. Together they continued by ship to Mitylene, Kiss (Chios), Samos and on to Miletus. (See the map in Appendix E of Paul's third journey.) Paul decided not to go into the city of Ephesus, knowing if he stopped he would be detained and not reach Jerusalem by Pentecost. However, since the ship stopped at Miletus, a city about 50 kilometers south of Ephesus, Paul sent a message for the Ephesian church elders to come to him there.

At Miletus, Paul gave his final words of counsel to the Ephesian church leaders. All of the other messages of Paul recorded in Acts are to unbelieving Jews or Gentiles. His message to the Ephesian elders resembles his letters to the churches. It is important for church leaders to know this section of Scripture well. In it they will find principles on how they are to live as leaders in the church. It also gives warning about false teachers, where they come from, and how they seek to destroy the church.

Because Paul did not expect to see the Ephesian elders again, he gave them a message of encouragement and warning. Paul had two major purposes in his words to the elders. First, he wanted to defend himself to them. All throughout Asia, his enemies had been trying to destroy the reputation of Paul. Therefore Paul wanted to remind the elders of his ministry among them for the three years. Second, he wanted to defend the Gospel that he taught. He knew that false teachers would come among them like wolves to distort the truth and deceive the flock. Some of the deceivers would even arise from their own church.

Q. 3. How is this similar to how Satan seeks to destroy the church today?

Paul's message was first a defense of his ministry among the Ephesian church. Notice the following things about Paul which serves as an example of how we are to lead in the church.

1. Paul did not hide his life from the people, but lived openly and honestly before them. Paul allowed himself to be seen, examined, and followed by others.

Q. 4. Why is this good for church leaders to follow?

2. Paul did not come to lead but to serve. He came in humility. Although an apostle and a great leader, he did not come to them as a leader, but as a servant. Paul had been a faithful and humble leader.

Q. 5. How is this different from the attitude of many church leaders today?

3. Paul gave himself totally to the work of the Gospel. He served with tears. He said that night and day he worked among them so that the church might be established.

4. Paul was willing to suffer many dangers for the sake of the Gospel. This persecution especially came from the Jews. In fact, Paul had been told by God that there was more persecution ahead of him. However, he continued to proclaim the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles in public and in their homes. A few months before this meeting with the Ephesian elders, a letter which Paul wrote to the church in Rome described his burden and concern for his Jewish people. (Rom 9-11)

5. Paul was not greedy for money. He reminded the elders that he had not asked any money from them. He had labored to support himself and his companions. By example he had shown the believers that they must work to help the weak as Jesus taught, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." He did not work for money, but in order to please God. Whether he received pay or not was not important to him. In fact, he preferred not to be paid so that no one could accuse him of working just to receive money.

Q. 6. How is this a good warning for leaders today?

6. Paul was careful to not only witness to others and lead them to Christ, but to help them grow in their faith. Paul said that he proclaimed the "whole will of God."

Q. 7. Make a list of what you think is included in this statement "the whole will of God."

7. Paul had a major purpose for his life that guided him. He said "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." (Acts 20:24)

Q. 8. Write down what you think is the major goal of your life. How is the goal of Paul a good one for all of us to follow?

The second part of Paul's farewell message was a word of warning to the leaders concerning false teachers. The greatest danger for the church is not external persecution, but internal false teachings. More churches are destroyed by false teachings than by persecution. We can learn several things about false teachers from Paul's message.

a. False teachers often seek to destroy the reputation of the leaders of the church or the church itself.

Q. 9. Give examples of how you have seen this happen in your church.

b. False teachers often arise from within the church or the Christian community, not from those who do not claim to be Christian.

c. False teachers are like wolves who seek to destroy and not build up.

d. False teachers succeed by distorting the truth. It is not total false teachings that cause Christians to fall. Rather, we fall into false teaching when falsehood is combined with truth. The only way to tell the difference is by knowing the truth. The only way to combat false teachings in our church is by clearly teaching the truth to the members of our churches.

Q. 10. a) What are some of the false teachings that are harming your church. b) What methods is your church using to keep people from falling?

e. False teachers seek to take away Christians and not those who are unsaved already. They focus their attention on Christians from other churches, not on those who have not heard the Gospel already.

How is a church to protect itself from false teachings? Paul places the major work upon the shoulders of the church leaders.

First, Paul warned the leaders that they needed to be careful first of their own selves. When a leader falls into falsehood, he will take many with him. As leaders we need to make sure that we know the truth, and guard ourselves against falsehood.

Second, Paul gave a charge to the elders to care for the believers as shepherds care for their flock. This means that they were to be concerned about all of the needs of the believers. Especially they were to protect them from false teachers.

Finally, Paul committed them to God and the Word of His grace, which would strengthen them and give them an inheritance with those He has sanctified.

After Paul had commissioned the Ephesian elders with the responsibility to lead and guard the believers, they knelt in prayer. As they told Paul goodbye, they wept, because Paul said that they would not see him again.

Paul's one desire and purpose was to finish the race and complete the task that the Lord gave him which was the task of witnessing the gospel of God's grace to Jews and Gentiles. From the time of his conversion on the Damascus Road, Paul committed himself completely to the Lord to complete this work. It was this commitment that kept Paul through beatings, imprisonments, rejection, false accusations, and concern for the churches.

Q. 11. How is your commitment to Christ similar or different?

Paul's love and concern for the churches was like a father's love for his children. It was painful leaving them knowing that danger and suffering were coming, but the time had come for others to take up the leadership.

Q. 12. There comes a time when Christian leaders need to turn their leadership over to others who are perhaps to better trained people. Are you prepared to do this, keeping the welfare of the Church as priority?

SECOND DAY

Acts 21:1-16

Toward the close of the third missionary journey, Paul's active ministry to the churches was almost at an end. From now on, he would continue to remember them with prayer and letters. Saying farewell to the churches and elders was a difficult time for Paul and for the leaders who had been taught and trained by Paul. However, Paul was constrained by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem, even though he was warned that suffering was ahead.

Q. 13. Read Acts 21:1-16 and answer these questions: a) On the map in Appendix E of Paul's third journey, trace his return to Jerusalem. What contacts did Paul make that have not been previously mentioned in his three journeys? List them. b) What was Paul's answer to those who pleaded that he not go to Jerusalem? c) For what was Paul willing to die?

Leaving the Ephesian elders Paul and his companions boarded the ship again and continued on their way to Jerusalem. They sailed south down the coast to Cos, an island, and the next day they arrived at the city of Rhodes on the island called Rhodes. Then they sailed east to Patara where they found a ship going over to Phoenicia. From there the ship sailed to the south of Cyprus and then to Tyre in Syria. As their ship unloaded cargo, Paul and his companions found the Christians in Tyre and stayed with them seven days. This church had been founded when the Christians were scattered at Stephen's death. (Acts 11:19)

In Tyre, some of the disciples, had been told by the Holy Spirit of the coming imprisonment of Paul. They warned Paul of the dangers that awaited him in Jerusalem. Hearing this, all of the believers urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. But Paul wanted to go on. When the seven days ended Paul went on to Ptolemais. There they greeted the believers, stayed one day, and then went on to Caesarea, where they ended their journey by ship.

In Caesarea they stayed in the house of Philip the evangelist. You will remember that Philip was one of the seven chosen to serve in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 6:3), who shared the Gospel with the Samaritans, and who led the Ethiopian to the Lord. Twenty years or more had passed since Philip first came to Caesarea. He now had four daughters who were prophetesses. This means that they had an important ministry in the Ceasarean church. They proclaimed the message from God to the people. Part of this message consisted of prophecies concerning events in the future.

Q. 14. What does this say about the ability of women to work in the church?

While Paul's group were in Caesarea a prophet from Judea came to Caesarea. We heard of Agabus in Acts 11:27 when he predicted the famine of 46 A.D. He now predicted that in Jerusalem, Paul would be bound and given over to the Gentiles. Agabus demonstrated this by tying his own hands and feet with Paul's belt. When Paul's companions heard this, they and the people again pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.

Q. 15. Why do you think that the Holy Spirit kept warning Paul of his future imprisonment?

Paul was not persuaded to stay away from Jerusalem by the pleas of the friends all along the way or even the prediction of Agabus the prophet. We do not really know why the Holy Spirit kept warning Paul of future imprisonment. Some think that Paul was outside of the will of God when he went and the result was many unnecessary years of imprisonment for Paul. If this was so, we know that God overruled and used the time of imprisonment to witness to Gentile rulers. Perhaps God was just preparing Paul for long years of imprisonment. Paul's answer was, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die ... for the name of the Lord Jesus."

Since the disciples were unable to prevent Paul from going, Paul and his traveling companions got ready and went to Jerusalem. They went to the home of Mnason, a man from Cyprus who was one of the early disciples.

Q. 16. Why do you think Paul went on to Jerusalem even though he was warned all along the way that he would be imprisoned?

Agabus did not tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem, he only told him what would happen. Paul went knowing what would happen and knew from the beginning of his journey, but he was persuaded he should go and he let nothing deter him from going. He was warned and prepared to face trouble, but trusted that he was doing what the Holy Spirit directed him to do.

Q. 17. Do you allow people or difficulties to prevent you from doing the Lord's will?

THIRD DAY

ACTS 21:17-26

As Paul and his companions travelled to Jerusalem, Paul met with the Christians in each place that the ship stopped. At this time, Christianity was still considered a sect of the Jewish religion. Paul tried to be a Jew to the Jews and not offend them. (1 Cor. 9:20-21) When with the Jews, he adjusted the approach of teaching the Gospel so that they could understand it better. However, Paul would not compromise the gospel message in order to please the Jews. In Jerusalem we will see what all Paul was willing to do in order to not cause unnecessary divisions between the Jews and the Gentiles.

Q. 18. Read Acts 21:17-26 and answer these questions. a) 1) How did the brothers in Jerusalem receive Paul? 2) To whom did Paul make a report? b) 1) What were the Jewish believers saying about Paul? 2) Why were James and the elders concerned for Paul? c) What was Paul asked to do? Why? d) 1) What was the advice to the Gentile believers? 2) When had this decision been made? (Acts 15) e) What was the purification rite supposed to prove to the Jews concerning Paul?

When Paul and his delegates from Asia, Macedonia and Achaia arrived in Jerusalem, they were warmly received by James and the church elders. There Paul and the others described how the church continued to spread among the Gentile nations. This caused all to praise God. Paul gave a detailed report and the delegates presented their gifts to the Jerusalem church. (Luke doesn't mention this until Acts 24:7)

The leaders in Jerusalem found themselves in a difficult situation. Many years earlier, after Paul's first missionary journey, they had decided that the Gentiles did not have to become full Jews through circumcision or obey all of the laws of Moses in order to be saved. But many of the strict Jewish Christians still did not like this decision. All during the missionary journeys of Paul, Jews who claimed to be Christians followed Paul around and tried to teach the Gentile Christians that they needed to obey the Mosaic laws. These same Jews also spread rumors among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem against Paul.

Though the elders agreed with Paul's ministry, they were concerned because of strong opposition against him by the Jewish Christians. These Jews were Christians, but were also zealous for the Jewish land and their traditions. Some had spread rumors that Paul had not been satisfied with the Jerusalem Council's decision not to force Gentiles to be circumcised. They claimed that Paul now taught the Jews to turn away from the law of Moses and that circumcision and other Jewish customs were not necessary for Jews. This is something that Paul had never taught.

Q. 19. a) How have you seen false rumors or gossip destroy a person in your church or cause difficulty for your church? b) What problems did it cause to the church? c) What did you do to find out the truth and put a stop to the rumors?

With Paul in Jerusalem, the elders knew that problems would arise between the Jewish Christians and Paul. Therefore, they made a plan which they thought would confirm to the Jews that Paul was loyal to the Jewish faith. In Jerusalem, there were four Jewish Christians who had to go to the temple and perform purification ritual. These four had probably taken Nazarite vows. A Nazarite vow was one of separation in order to set themselves apart for God's service for a set period of time. (The requirements of the vow are found in Numbers 6:1-24). It is not stated why these four men who had taken the bow. For some reason,

while they were still in the period of their vow, they became ritually unclean before their vow was completed (perhaps from contact with the dead.)

In order to prove to the Jewish Christians that Paul was not against the Jews following the Jewish traditions, Paul was asked to enter into the conclusion of the ceremonial rites of the four Jews. He was to pay for their expenses (the cost of purification from breaking the Nazarite vow was very expensive) and joining them in the purification rites which included the animal sacrifices in the Temple. When the days of purification were completed, a sacrifice would be made for each of the four men.

Paul, as a believer in Christ, clearly taught that he was no longer under the law. By this he meant that in order to have a right relationship with God he did not have to keep the Old Testament ritualistic laws. He did keep the moral laws- like do not kill, steal, commit adultery, etc. It was not wrong for the Jews to keep these Old Testament ritualistic laws as long as it was not kept out of a desire to earn one's salvation by keeping the laws or demanded of the Gentiles. Salvation was only a gift of God to the sinner upon belief in Jesus Christ's death on behalf of the sinner. Since the keeping of the Old Testament laws did not add to or take away from his salvation, Paul agreed to the request of the church elders. He wrote in 1 Cor. 9:20 "To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law."

Q. 20. a) What principle can we see here about obedience to those in authority in the church? b) What principle can we see concerning those adjusting our lifestyle to fit into the practices of others in order to maintain peace or to further the cause of the Gospel? Give illustrations of how this is being done by people in your church.

Paul, by paying for the sacrifices, became the sponsor of the four Jewish Christians. In doing this, the church leaders in Jerusalem hoped it would convince the Jews that Paul as loyal to the Law. Paul was able to do this without compromising his loyalty to Christ, so he did as the elders requested. Paul took the men and purified himself with them. Then he went to the Temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

Q. 21. Read 1 Cor. 9:20-23 and 10:32-33. How might these verses affect your attitude toward others?

We should be tolerant and understanding of the convictions of others. However, we must be careful in doing it that we do not compromise our faith. Pleasing people should not come before obedience to the Word of God.

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 21:27-40

The warnings that Paul had received that trouble awaited him in Jerusalem began to develop as soon as Paul arrived. The church elders rejoiced at what God had done through Paul. However, they knew the intense feeling against Paul by the Jews- both Christians and unbelievers. Fearing for Paul and hoping to keep the peace, the church elders asked him to go through the purification rites with four other Jews. By doing this they hoped this public demonstration would convince the Jews that Paul was still loyal to the

Jewish law. This may have convinced some of the Christian Jews but it did not change the mind of the Jewish zealots.

Sometimes an effort to avoid trouble is the beginning of greater problems. Paul submitted to the plan of the elders, but there is no evidence that doing it brought any help or protection to Paul. We will see that when Paul went to the Temple, it was the beginning of his trouble in Jerusalem.

Q. 22. Read Acts 21:27-40 and answer these questions: a) 1) Who started the trouble against Paul? 2) What were the accusations against Paul? 3) Who was Trophimus? b) 1) What did the crowd do to Paul? 2) Who rescued Paul from the mob? 3) Who did they think Paul was? 4) Where did they take Paul? c) 1) What did Paul request of the Roman Commander? 2) Who did the Roman Commander think Paul was? 3) In what language did Paul speak to the people?

One day before the purification process was completed, Paul was in the Temple, perhaps to worship. He had along with him some other Jews. It seems that these men knew that Paul was in the city, and had previously seen him with an Ephesian Gentile called Trophimus. In order to understand the feelings of the Jerusalem Jews at this time, we need to understand the placement of the Temple. Look at the following map in Appendix F of the Temple.

The Temple during the time of Jesus and Paul was not only a building, but a large compound. Around the large compound was a wall and inside was a large court yard. This was called the Court of the Gentiles. It was called this because this is as far as Gentiles were allowed to go. Inside the large compound yard was a smaller compound in which was the actual Temple. Inside the compound were two courts. First there was the Court of Women and next the Court of Men. No Gentiles were allowed in either the Court of Women and Court of Men. On the door between the Court of Gentiles and the inner compound were large signs warning all Gentiles not to enter the inner compound. There were notices in Greek and Latin at the steps into the "Court of Israel" which warned that entrance by a gentile was punishable with death.

It could be that Paul had brought Trophimus into the court of the Gentiles and was seen. In the Temple were some Jews from Asia who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. When they saw Paul in the Temple with some other people, they immediately assumed that Paul had brought Gentiles into the inner court. They began to shout that there were Gentiles in the inner court. They blamed Paul. They also accused him of teaching people everywhere in the Roman empire against their people and the law. This caused a major uproar in the Temple and soon people were seeking to kill Paul. The word spread throughout the city and people came to see what was happening.

The people dragged Paul out of the Temple planning to kill him, perhaps by stoning him to death like Stephen. Next door to the Temple was the fortress where all of the Roman troops lived. The commander of the Roman troops heard that the whole city was in an uproar. He took some officers and soldiers and ran to the crowd. When the people saw the Roman commander, they stopped beating Paul. The commander arrested Paul and bound him with chains. The accusations against Paul were so confused that the commander could not learn the truth, so he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. The mob was so great that the soldiers had to carry Paul.

When they reached the barracks, Paul said to the commander in Greek, "May I speak to you?" The commander was surprised to hear Paul speak in Greek, because he thought Paul was an Egyptian who had led 4000 terrorists in a revolt. The Egyptian terrorist was wanted by the Roman authorities as a dangerous

political prisoner. When Paul said he was a Jew, the commander allowed him to speak to the crowd of Jews. When the people heard Paul speak in the Aramaic language, they became quiet and listened.

Preaching Christ to his enemies was more important to Paul than his own safety. The Lord again gave Paul courage to speak of Him to a dangerous crowd. We will look at Paul's message to the Jews next week.

Q. 23. What does this experience of Paul reveal about his commitment to Christ?

Q. 24. Compare the treatment of Paul with that of Christ. List several parallels of treatment.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. As Paul said farewell to the elders of the churches along the way, what commission and warning did he give them? What does this tell us of our responsibility to those we teach?
2. a) Was Paul tempted not to go to Jerusalem?
b) What motivated him to go?
c) Who tried to prevent him from going?
3. Explain Paul's willingness to enter into the Jewish purification rites even though he was no longer under law.
4. a) How did the riot against Paul begin?
b) Were their actions and accusations legal?
5. How did James and the elders support Paul in the danger that was ahead of him?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a. 1) List principles from Paul's speech to the Ephesian church elders about what a good church leader should be like.
2) How are these seen in the leaders of your church?
3) What are weak areas and what are strong areas?
4) How does our cultural understanding of what a good leader is compare to what Paul demonstrated Christian leadership to be like?
- b. 1) From Paul's speech to the Ephesian church elders, what can we learn about false teachers.
2) What are some of the false teachings that are harming your church?
3) In what way is the warning given to the Ephesian elders similar to what is happening to your church?
4) What are some of the things you and other church leaders should do so that people from your church will not fall into false teachings.
- c. What were the things in Paul's character and commitment that made him willing to go to Jerusalem, though warned and discouraged from going?
- d. Does the Lord's will mean that everything will work out happily? If not, how do we know we are in his will?
- e. How can our own fear to obey God cause us to discourage someone else's desire to do the Lord's will?

Lesson Sixteen

Acts 22:1-23:11

FIRST DAY

ACTS 22:1-21

The plans of the Jerusalem church elders to appease the Jews, especially the Jewish Christians failed and ended up with the arrest of Paul by the Roman soldiers. But Paul wanted to defend himself before his own people. Therefore, he asked permission of the head of the Roman guard to speak to the Jews. From now to the end of the book of Acts, Luke records different accounts of Paul giving his testimony to different people. In this chapter, we will see his testimony before the Jews. Later, we will see his testimony before different Gentile leaders. Although similar, each time Paul adjusted his testimony to his audience.

Paul's most effective defense of his work was to explain his call and commission from the Lord and how God had changed his life despite his previous hatred for Christianity. The change that Jesus makes in a life is a Christian's most convincing witness. However, the Jews' prejudice against Paul and the Gentiles blinded them to the truth of the message.

Question 1. Read Acts 22:1-23:22. a) What are the two groups of people that Paul stood before to defend himself in these verses? b) What was the response of the listeners in both times? How were they similar or different?

Q. 2. Read Acts 22:1-21 and answer these questions. a) 1) What did Paul call the people in the crowd? 2) Why did the crowd become quiet? b) 1) Briefly describe Paul's birthplace and training. 2) What was his first attitude toward the Christians? 3) What changed Paul's dislike for the Christians? c) 1) Why did Paul especially mention Ananias? 2) Where did Paul see the Lord a second time? 3) What command did the Lord give him?

Having obtained permission from the commander of the Roman troops to speak to the crowd, Paul began to address the crowd in Aramaic. Aramaic was the language spoken by the common Jewish people in Judea. When he spoke in Aramaic a great silence came over the crowd.

Paul's address to the crowd was basically a personal testimony of his life. He did not try to convince them concerning Jesus; they had no doubt already heard about Jesus from others and had refused to believe. But Paul wanted all of the Jews there in the Temple, those from the land of Palestine and those who had come from many countries throughout the world, to understand who he was, and why he taught as he did.

Paul started his testimony by sharing about his Jewish heritage. The Jews took great pride in their family heritage. They wanted to prove their purity as Jews by tracing their family line back to one of the 12 founding fathers. For those who were conservative, it was also important to prove one's obedience to the strict party of the Jews, the Pharisees. Therefore Paul told of his birthplace and his training as a Jew.

Q. 3. How is this similar to the emphasis of many religious people in Ethiopia?

Like many of those who were listening to him, Paul was not a Jew from Judea, but a Jew who grew up in the Roman empire outside of Judea. Since there was enmity between those who grew up in Judea and those who grew up in Gentile lands, this could have gained him acceptance with some of the Hellenistic Jews.

Although he was born in a Gentile land, Paul followed closely the most conservative party of the Jewish religion. He was a Pharisee. While still a child he came to Jerusalem and studied under the greatest Jewish teacher of that time, Gamaliel. He told of his zeal for the laws and traditions of the Jews. His zeal was as great as the zeal of those standing there before him.

As proof of his zeal, he shared how he had persecuted the Christians. No doubt there were people in the crowd who would remember the great Saul who had led the attempt to destroy the early church. In order for them to understand the change that had come over him, Paul had to share about the vision on the Damascus road. He was on his way to Damascus with permission from the high priest to bring the Christians back to Jerusalem to be punished. Suddenly a bright light from heaven caused him to fall to the ground. He heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He realized that for all of his zeal, he was fighting against God whom he claimed to believe in. He realized that the witness of the apostles concerning the resurrected Lord was true. It was the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth whom he saw and talked to. All of his zeal for the Jewish traditions had not saved him from fighting against God.

Q. 4. Describe how people today can have great religious zeal and yet fight against God.

Jesus told Paul to go into Damascus where he would be told all that he was to do. He was blinded by God and was led into the city. Helpless and humbled, he had to wait until God delivered him from his blindness.

Q. 5. Why do you think God humbled Paul by making him blind and making him wait three days for healing?

Paul shared how God used a man called Ananias to help him. No doubt some of the crowd knew of Ananias. Ananias was a deeply religious man who kept the law and was respected by the Jews. He came to Paul and told him to receive his sight. Then he told Paul that the God of his fathers had chosen him to see the Righteous One, the Messiah, and to hear him speak because he was to be a witness to all men. Ananias told him to get up and be baptized as a sign of his cleansing from sin.

Q. 6. a) Why do you think Paul always returned to the meeting of Jesus on the Damascus road when he witnessed to people? b) Why is it good to share how God first met us and we believed in Jesus? c) Describe situations where you have used your testimony to witness to others of Jesus.

Some time later, Paul had returned to Jerusalem. He was in the very Temple he was now giving his defense in when Jesus met him again. Rather than reject the Temple, Paul had continued his worship in the temple and had even met God there. He heard the Lord say, "Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me."

Paul began to reason with the Lord. He thought that the Jews would accept him since he had been a leader in Judaism. He had developed a reputation of being against the church. The Jews knew that he had gone from synagogue to synagogue, beating the Christians and how he had approved of Stephen's death.

Now that he was a Christian, surely they would listen since he had been so radically changed, he thought. But this was not the case and God had other plans for Paul. Then the Lord said to Paul "Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles." Paul again received his commission to go to the Gentiles with the Gospel.

The crowd had listened quietly until Paul mentioned the Gentiles but then they began to shout that Paul was not fit to live.

Q. 7. From your study in Acts, give an explanation of why the Jews were so prejudiced against Paul and the Gentiles.

Paul had tried to emphasize that Ananias a Jew who kept the law, was God's messenger to restore his sight and give him God's command to go to all people with the gospel message. God's acceptance of Paul was confirmed when his sight was restored.

Paul tried to connect the Old Testament revelation to the new revelation of Jesus Christ, but the Jews refused to accept the evidence when they heard it. He also mentioned that he had gone to the Temple to pray when the Lord appeared to him in a trance. He was showing the Jews that he still worshipped in the Temple, and it was there that he again saw Christ. The Jews also refused this evidence. As soon as Paul mentioned the Gentiles they again rose up in anger.

This is the second time in Acts that Paul's conversion is narrated. Luke told it the first time in Acts 9. The change that Christ makes in a life like Paul's is one of our greatest witnesses for the Lord.

Q. 8. a) In what way is a changed life a strong witness to the Lord Jesus Christ? b) Describe how your life changed and how that has increased your ability to witness to unbelievers.

SECOND DAY

ACTS 22:22-29

In his sermon to the Jews, Paul tried to prove to the Jews in Jerusalem that he was not against the Temple or its laws, but that like an Old Testament prophet God had met him and sent him to witness to the Gentiles.

Q. 9. List an Old Testament prophet whom God called from Israel to sent to the Gentile.

Paul's defense to the mob of Jews who wanted to kill him was rejected as soon as he mentioned the Gentiles. Their hatred of the Gentiles had so blinded them from the truth just like hatred and prejudice today blinds men from the truth of Scriptures. They listened to his testimony of his call and commission from the Lord, but their prejudice against the Gentiles closed their minds to what Paul was telling them.

The Lord has different ways of protecting his people. Sometimes in miraculous ways. At other times he uses circumstances. Paul was spared from a life-threatening situation, because he was a Roman citizen, a privilege he had because he was born into a special family.

Q. 10. Read Acts 22:22-29 and answer these questions: a) How did the Jewish mob demonstrate their fury against Paul? b) 1) What command did the Roman commander give concerning Paul? 2) Describe the

method of questioning to be used. c) 1) What prevented the flogging of Paul which was ordered by the Roman commander? 2) Why did this alarm the Romans?

The anger of the crowd again erupted when they heard the word "Gentile." You will remember that it was the accusation that Paul had brought a Gentile into the Temple which had started the initial riot. Upon hearing Paul say that the Lord sent him to the Gentiles, the crowd immediately shouted, tore off their cloaks and threw dust in the air as a demonstration of their rejection of Paul and his message, and their deep anger at Paul.

With the crowd again out of control, the commander ordered the soldiers to take Paul into the barracks. Then he ordered them to flog Paul, which was the cruel almost life-threatening method of questioning by torture. Paul was stretched out and tied to receive the flogging by leather thongs weighted with pieces of metal or bone which lacerated the flesh. If the punished man did not die, it would cripple him. You will remember that Paul had already received this type of lashing in Philippi as well as other times in his life.

Although Paul was not afraid to die, it was of no use to be flogged unnecessarily. Therefore, as the centurion, the leader of the soldiers who was assigned to whip Paul stretched Paul out to flog him, Paul asked, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen, who hasn't even been found guilty?"

In the Roman law, it was illegal to torture or examine a Roman citizen by this method. Roman citizens had special rights that allowed them to a proper trial before they could be so punished. Any abuse of this right by another political official could bring the anger of Rome against that leader. (Remember the fear in the officials at Philippi when Paul told them that they had whipped a Roman citizen without a fair trial.)

The centurion who was about to flog Paul immediately stopped and went to inform the commander. The commander had Paul brought before him to question him concerning his citizenship. There were three ways to become a Roman citizen: The best way was to be born a Roman citizen. After special people were granted citizenship, they and their offspring were automatically Romans citizens. Second, one could receive citizenship when one did a great act for the Roman empire. Roman citizenship was given very carefully to those who were seen to be the best people in Rome. It was given to those who especially helped the spread of the Roman empire. Third, one could sometimes purchase one's citizenship by giving large amounts of money.

Paul was born in Tarsus, but that did not make him a Roman citizen. Tarsus was a free city, not a Roman colony. Probably Paul's father was awarded Roman citizenship because of some service to the Emperor. Paul was a citizen because his father, though a Hebrew, was a citizen. Paul inherited the status which now spared him from the cruel flogging. Later this citizenship would allow Paul to go to Rome for trial.

God had worked in Paul's past to allow him to be born into a family that had Roman citizenship. This helped qualify him to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. God uses everything in our past for the furtherance of the Gospel, even before we were saved. God uses our education, our family heritage, our church experiences, even all of the sorrows we go through, to develop us to serve him better.

Q. 11. a) What seemingly unrelated experience in your life has God used for the Gospel? b) How are you preparing yourself to better serve God?

THIRD DAY

ACTS 22:30 - 23:11

Yesterday we saw how Paul's Roman citizenship saved him from scourging and gained the respect of a Roman commander. Today we will see that his knowledge of the Jewish sects rescued him from judgment by the Jewish Sanhedrin. Again, Paul made use of past experiences to defeat the plans of the enemy.

Q. 12. Read Acts 22:30 - 23:11 and answer the following questions: a) Why did the Roman commander order the Sanhedrin to assemble? b) 1) Why did the High Priest order that Paul be hit in the mouth? 2) Why did Paul apologize to the priest? c) 1) Who were the two Jewish sects in the Sanhedrin? 2) To which did Paul claim to belong? d) 1) Who defended Paul? 2) What did they say? 3) Why were the troops sent in to rescue Paul again? e) What message did Paul receive from the Lord?

The Roman commander, being a Roman and a pagan, did not understand why the Jews were so furious with Paul. And so the next day he ordered the high priests and all the Jewish Sanhedrin which was the Jewish supreme court to gather. The Roman commander wanted to hear accusations against Paul so that he would know what to do with Paul and what to accuse him of.

When the Sanhedrin met, Paul opened his defense by saying that he had fulfilled his duty to God and had a clear conscience. This was a very bold statement to make. Since Paul had given his life over to Jesus and used his zeal for God to spread the Gospel rather than try to destroy Christianity, Paul had the peace that all things were right between him and God. Paul was able to do this because of his hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul could say he had a clear conscience not because of his own righteousness; but because of the justification in Christ.

Q. 13. Are you able to make such a statement in clear conscience? If not, make a list of things that you are ashamed of and confess them before God.

Since this was such an unusual statement, and since this statement no doubt pricked at the consciences of the high priest and other members of the Sanhedrin, the high priest, Ananias, ordered that those standing near strike Paul in the mouth. Ananias was known for his cruelty. Although the religious leader of the Jews, he served only to increase his own wealth. In fact, about 10 years later, when the Jews rebelled against Rome, one of the first things they did was kill Ananias.

Paul denounced the cowardly action against him. In a prophetic speech, he foretold the coming punishment of God upon him. He accused the high priest of being like a whitewashed wall. Although the whitewash looked good from the outside it covered over the weakness or dirt of the wall. So also the high priest looked impressive with all of his fine clothes but on the inside he was dirty, evil, and ready to collapse. In other words, the high priest was a hypocrite. The very fact that the high priest had Paul slapped was in violation of the Old Testament law which the high priest claimed to uphold.

Q. 14. Give illustrations of some religious leaders that you know put on an impressive front but really are evil.

We do not know why Paul did not recognize the high priest. Some say it could have been because of his poor eyesight. But whatever the reason, when someone pointed out to Paul that he had shown disrespect to the high priest, he was quick to apologize. No matter how evil the high priest was, Paul realized that he could rule only by the authority of God. Therefore, he was worthy of respect, not dishonor.

Paul's defense was not only of himself but for His Master, the Lord. He called the priest a whitewashed wall. It was a rebuke not only to Ananias, but against the whole ceremonial law. Striking Paul in the mouth was illegal, and Paul was saying to the high priest that he was not judging according to the law. The rights of the defendant were carefully guarded in Jewish law and the accused presumed innocent until found guilty.

If Paul's answer was given in anger, he was very quick and willing to admit that he was wrong in denouncing the ruler of the people. We all make errors but are we as willing and humble to confess and make them right?

Q. 15. a) Why is it a strength and not a weakness to admit when we are wrong and ask forgiveness?
b) Describe a situation where you had to ask forgiveness of someone for wronging them.

Pride causes us to defend our mistakes and failures. It takes humility is to admit we are wrong and apologize.

In Paul's argument before the Sanhedrin he claimed to be still a faithful member of his Jewish faith and that Christianity was a development of ancient Judaism. He pointed to the great difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He turned to the heart of Christianity and claimed that the reason he was on trial was because of his belief in the resurrection of the dead.

Because Paul believed in the resurrection of the dead he was similar to the Pharisees. In fact, he declared that he was still a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee, and he was saying that a Pharisee could be a Christian. In fact, Paul would probably say that one could only be a true Pharisee spiritually if he was a Christian. The Sadducees which was the party that the high priest came from did not believe in angels or spirits, nor in the resurrection of the dead. So Paul's statement caused an argument between the Sadducees and the Pharisees to develop in the court. Some of the Pharisees said, "We find nothing wrong with this man." The debate became so violent that the commander was afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces. He ordered the troops to take Paul back to the barracks. It was impossible to learn the charges against Paul. Once again God used a Roman pagan to rescue Paul.

Why did Paul point to the hope of the resurrection as the basis of his defense? He explained this further in 1 Cor. 15 where he said that the basis for the resurrection of believers is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul had seen the resurrected Lord on the road to Damascus. Having seen the resurrected Lord, he knew that all who believed in Jesus would also be resurrected. To deny the resurrection of the dead is to deny that Jesus rose from the dead. Without Jesus raising from the dead, there is no Christianity, only an empty human religion. It is therefore the resurrection of the dead that provides the foundation of Christianity.

Q. 16. Why is the hope of the resurrection a great encouragement to you?

The Jews were not concerned about a proper examination of Paul. They only wanted to condemn Paul and stop his message which convicted them and made them jealous of their traditional laws and customs.

All the warnings and predictions that Paul had received were being fulfilled in Jerusalem. It looked like his plans to go to Rome and then on to Spain were to be defeated. However, in the night, the Lord again appeared to Paul and said to him, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." This gave Paul courage to go on and face the trials still to come.

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 23:12-22

Although the Roman commander was hoping to understand what the charges were against Paul and to either free him or formally accuse him, the Sanhedrin was not able to agree on any charges. Some wanted to free Paul, but others wanted to try him. Probably discouraged at the added delay and the seemingly waste of time, Paul returned to prison. But the Lord knew when Paul needed encouragement and so told him to be patient and courageous, for eventually he would go to Rome. Little did Paul realize that it would be over two years until he arrived in Rome.

Though Paul had assurance from the Lord that he would go to Rome, his trials in getting there had only begun. If adversity indicated a person was not in the Lord's will, Paul could have doubted the Lord. However, trouble and opposition were always with Paul. They seemed rather to indicate that he was in the will of the Lord.

Q. 17. Read Acts 23:12-22 and answer these questions: a) 1) What was the next plan of the Jews against Paul? 2) How many were involved in the plot? 3) How did they confirm their resolution to carry out their plan? b) 1) Who heard of the plot of the Jews? 2) How was the plot of the Jews revealed to the Roman commander? c) What did the commander say to Paul's nephew?

Because the Jews had not been able to agree on what the charges should be against Paul, Paul was not formally accused. Therefore, the Jews devised another way to get rid of Paul. The depth of the hatred of the Jews toward Paul is shown by the plot they planned against Paul's life. More than forty Jews took an oath that they would neither eat nor drink until Paul was killed. This meant that within a few days, they were planning to kill Paul. To the Jew, a vow was sacred and had to be fulfilled no matter what the personal cost. Those making the vow went to the Sanhedrin and explained their plan. The Sanhedrin was to request that Paul be brought before them for more accurate questioning. As Paul was being brought to court, the radical Jews planned to kill him. The Sanhedrin realized that their arguing had prevented their purpose of accusing Paul and they agreed to the plot.

God has His ways of defeating the plots of evil men. Somehow Paul's nephew heard about the plot to kill Paul. He went and warned Paul. Paul sent his nephew to tell the Roman commander. When he heard of the plan, he ordered Paul's nephew not to tell anyone that he had reported the plot to him.

Q. 18. How has God used similar ways to save his people in Ethiopia from the enemies plans?

This is the first we have heard of Paul's relatives in Jerusalem. We don't know if his sister and nephew were Christians or loyal Jews who came for the celebration of Pentecost. His nephew may have been a student in Jerusalem and overheard those who plotted against Paul. We do not know how the nephew heard, but we know that God intervened in the plot against Paul. God puts his people or those who are sympathetic in high places, to help fulfill His purposes.

Q. 19. Have you experienced or observed God's intervention in a trial?

The promise from the Lord that he would get to Rome did not mean that Paul would reach Rome without trouble. Often, the Lord's will in a life is accomplished through many testings and much opposition. God uses adverse circumstances to strengthen the faith and trust of His children. He can also use the victory in troubles to speak to the unsaved and reveal His power to them.

Q. 20. Describe how God strengthened your faith by taking you through testing or temptation?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. From where did the Jews come who first started the attack against Paul in Jerusalem?
2. Why did Paul often relate his conversion experience in his message?
3. What did Paul hope to show the Jews when he declared he was a Pharisee and kept the law?
4. What saved Paul from a flogging in Jerusalem?
5. What saved Paul's life when brought before the Sanhedrin?
6. On which vital issue did the Sadducees and Pharisees disagree?
7. Why did Paul apologize for his condemnation of the high priest's action?
8. Who was able to rescue Paul from the Jews plot to ambush him?
9. a) What quieted the mob to listen to Paul?
b) What did Paul say that again started the riot?
10. Until Paul spoke to the Roman soldiers in Greek, who did they think Paul was?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a. Read 1 Cor. 9:19-23.
 - 1) Discuss ways you can be all things to all people without compromising your testimony for Christ.
 - 2) How can this principle apply to your work in your church or community?
 - 3) List ways that you can make better use of this to enhance your witness to the Gospel.
- b.
 - 1) Share occasions that you have experienced or have observed when a trial was used to strengthen your faith or that of others.
 - 2) God allow trials for what purpose? (See James 1:12-14)
 - 3) How has God shown you His special protection?
- c.
 - 1) Why do you think God chose for Paul to go through imprisonment at this time?
 - 2) Why does God often allow Christians to suffer?
- d. How was the commission to Paul in Acts 9:15-16 being fulfilled in Paul's experience at this time?

Lesson Seventeen

Acts 23:23-25:12

FIRST DAY

ACTS 23:23-35

One of the purposes of Luke in writing Acts was to show how the Gospel reached from Jerusalem to the capital of the ancient world, Rome. Paul had a desire to go to Rome to meet the Christians there and then go on to the outermost parts of the Roman empire which was Spain, to witness of Jesus. But he did not realize that in God's plan he would reach Rome only by becoming a prisoner and after a long delay. This week we will look at the beginning of the long period of imprisonment that Paul went through before his desire to get to Rome was fulfilled. Even in the delays, however, we can see the hand of God at work, protecting Paul, encouraging him, and allowing him to witness to high government officials. Even unbelieving rulers are instruments in God's hand to fulfill His purposes. "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established." (Rom. 13:1) God continued use those in authority to protect Paul, all the way to Rome.

Question 1. Read Acts 23:23 - 25:12. List the different government officials that Paul was able to witness to in these verses and how they responded to his witness.

Q. 2. Read Acts 23:23-35 and answer these questions: a) 1) When the Roman commander learned of the plot against Paul what order did he give? 2) How many troops were sent? 3) To whom did the commander write a letter? b) 1) In this letter, what did the commander not report concerning his treatment of Paul? 2) In Caesarea, what happened to Paul? c) How did God use unbelievers to protect Paul?

Because the Sanhedrin could not agree as to what was the basis for the accusations against Paul, a group of Jews made a vow before God to kill Paul. The Sanhedrin agreed to cooperate with the Jews in the plan. However, Paul's nephew heard the plot and brought the news to the Roman official. After hearing of the plot against Paul, the commander quickly ordered his troops to prepare to take Paul to Caesarea which was the Roman headquarters in the land of Judea. Caesarea was about 100 kilometers away from Jerusalem on the coast of the Mediterranean. Two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two-hundred spearman were to escort Paul on his way to Caesarea that same night. They provided Paul with a horse to ride and left at nine o'clock, after it was dark.

The escort took a letter from the Roman commander in Jerusalem to Felix who was the Roman governor in charge of all of Judea and Samaria. In the letter the commander explained why he was sending Paul to the governor for judgment. The letter told how Paul was seized by the Jews in the Temple who were about to kill him, and how his troops had rescued Paul from the mob. Then the commander said that although he had asked the Sanhedrin to state their accusations against Paul, there was no charge or punishment worthy of death. When he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen he sent him to Felix the governor, to be judged. (He did not tell Felix how he had learned that Paul was a Roman citizen.) The commander wrote that he had ordered the accusers to come to Caesarea to present their accusations to Felix.

That night Paul's escort took him as far as Antipatris about 50 kilometers from Jerusalem. The next day the foot soldiers returned to Jerusalem and the cavalry took Paul on to Caesarea, and delivered the letter Felix and Paul into Felix's custody. The governor asked Paul the province from which he had come. When Paul said he was from Cilicia, he was put under guard in Herod's palace until his accusers came.

God sets up and puts down rulers and He used them for Paul's protection. Notice how He used Paul's nephew, the Roman commander, 470 soldiers, and Felix the governor of Judea to protect Paul from his enemies.

Q. 3. a) How have you or someone you know been protected by unexpected people? b) Who was actually behind the protection?

This was the beginning of Paul's much-delayed journey to Rome. But God had other plans for Paul in Caesarea. In His commission to Paul, God had said, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel." (Acts 9:15) These times of imprisonment gave Paul opportunities to witness to Roman commanders, governors, and to many soldiers and others along the way.

Q. 4. a) Why was it important that government officials also hear the Gospel and have the opportunity to believe in Jesus? b) How has God used Christians in government in Ethiopia for the spread of the Gospel?

Rulers and officials may be in control of countries and situations, but often they do not realize that God is controlling their decisions and using them to fulfill His plans and purposes. Paul realized that when leaders believe, a great opportunity is created for the spread of the Gospel.

Q. 5. a) Why is it important to pray for those in authority? b) Why is it important to submit to their authority as from God?

SECOND DAY

ACTS 24:1-21

Having arrived in Caesarea, Paul had to wait for in the prison for two whole years before God allowed him to go on to Rome and continue his ministry there. Paul was initially kept under guard in Herod's palace, waiting for his accusers to come from Jerusalem. There were no criminal charges against Paul, but the Roman officials could not give Paul over to the Jews to settle their theological differences because he was a Roman citizen.

Five days after Paul arrived in Caesarea, Paul's accusers, the Jewish religious leaders arrived from Jerusalem. In the group was Ananias the high priest and a famous Jewish orator and lawyer called Tertullus. It was unusual that the high priest would travel that distance, but this shows us the hatred that the Jewish religious leaders had against Paul. They came to state their case against Paul, hoping to win the favor of Felix with flattery. However, their flattery and accusations against Paul did not concern Felix, and the Roman government.

Q. 6. Read Acts 24:1-27 and answer the following questions: a) 1) Who was Tertullus? 2) What flattery did Tertullus use to gain Felix's favor? b) What were the three accusations made against Paul? c) In his defense, how did Paul answer the three accusations? d) 1) Why did Paul come to Jerusalem? 2) Who were the Jews who first brought the charges against Paul? e) What reason did Paul give for keeping his conscience clear before God? f) What name did the Jews call the Christian faith? g) What were the things on which Paul and his Jewish accusers agreed?

Soon after the transfer of Paul to Caesarea, his Jewish accusers came to Caesarea well prepared to make their charges against Paul. Ananias, the high priest, and some of the Sanhedrin brought a famous Jewish lawyer named Tertullus. Tertullus was probably a Grecian Jew who was trained in the Roman court system who could best argue his case before Roman officials. When Paul was brought in, Tertullus began his speech by trying to gain the favor of Felix by flattery concerning his rule of the land. He praised Felix for keeping peace and for the reforms he had made in the country. This was really not true. The administration of Felix had created tensions between the Jews and the Romans and did not improve the relations between the Jews and the Roman government. There had been a lot of unrest in Palestine. But Tertullus wanted to convince Felix that Paul was a disturber of the peace in the country and get him tried on political reasons rather than on religious grounds.

Tertullus then brought the charges against Paul.

The first accusation was that Paul was a troublemaker, who stirred up riots all over the Roman Empire. He hoped Felix would view Paul as a political activist who stirred up trouble and therefore dangerous to the State.

Secondly, Paul was the leader of the Nazarene sect; those who followed Jesus of Nazareth. John 1:46 described the general attitude of the Jews toward Jesus; "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Only the Jewish religion was allowed by the Romans, and they were trying to point out that Christianity was illegal.

Thirdly, Tertullus accused Paul of trying to desecrate the Temple. (Paul was falsely accused of bringing Greeks into the Temple. Acts 21:29) These were the reasons Tertullus gave for the Jews seizing Paul in Jerusalem. The Jews all agreed that these were true accusations against Paul.

Q. 7. What are some type of accusations that non-Christians make of Christians?

Having listened to the accusations against Paul, Felix now motioned for Paul to speak and give his defense. Paul had been highly trained not only in Judaism, but in the Gentile world and so he knew how serious these charges were that were being made against him. Rather than accuse the Jewish leaders of lying, Paul simply told the truth of what had happened in Jerusalem. He did not use human arguments. But he allowed the truth to speak for itself, and cast himself into the hands of God.

Q. 8. a) When accused falsely, how should a Christian respond in a way that glorifies God. b) What are some wrong ways to respond that Christians should not use?

Paul's answer to the accusations was very simple.

First, he said that he had not been in Jerusalem long enough to cause problems. Paul said that he had only come to Jerusalem twelve days previously.

Second, Paul said that the purpose of his visit to Jerusalem was for religious and humanitarian reasons. He had been gone from Jerusalem for several years. When he came to Jerusalem, he came with money to help the poor in Jerusalem. When he went to worship in the Temple, he was ceremonially clean and therefore did not defile the Temple. The accusers did not find him arguing with anyone or stirring up the people in the Temple, in the synagogues or any place in the city. And he said "they cannot prove the charges against me." (Acts 24:13)

Third, Paul said that it was not Gentiles, but Asian Jews whom he had taken into the Temple. This was allowed in the Jewish law since they were Jews and not Gentiles.

Finally, Paul turned to the real reason of the accusations. It was because he was a follower of the "Way" that the Jewish leaders hated him. In the land of Judea, Christianity was known as "the Way." Paul said "I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets." Rather than working against the Jewish religion, Paul claimed that the basic beliefs were the same. In fact, if there were any accusations that the Sanhedrin could make against him, they were only of a religious nature, for Paul, like many of the members of the Sanhedrin believed in the resurrection of the dead, both the wicked and the righteous. Because of Paul's belief in the resurrection, Paul said, "I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God." In brief, Paul was claiming that he was innocent of all of the charges, and before God he was innocent. He also hinted that it was an unfair hearing since those who had been with Paul and knew the truth were not there to witness on his behalf.

Paul had clearly explained all the things that he and his accusers agreed on which were his love for Israel, that he worshipped the God of their fathers, and believed in the Law and the prophets. Then, he stressed the resurrection of the dead as the issue for which he was being judged. This difference of theology did not concern the Roman court. Felix dismissed the court until another time, when Lysias, the commander of the troops in Jerusalem would come. Paul was to be kept under guard but given freedom for his friends to visit and care for him.

Q. 9. a) How is the response of Paul a good example for Christians to follow when they are accused falsely?
b) What principles can we use to defend ourselves today?

THIRD DAY

ACTS 24:22-27

The charges brought against Paul by Tertullus the lawyer, who came with the high priest and others from Jerusalem, did not convince Felix of Paul's guilt. Felix, the governor of Judea, could have judged Paul's case and declared him innocent but detained him in Caesarea because he had other motives for keeping Paul.

Read Acts 24:22-27 and answer these questions: Q. 10. a) What freedom did Felix give to Paul, though under guard? b) 1) Who came with Felix to talk with Paul? 2) What did they discuss? c) 1) What three topics did Paul teach? 2) How did Felix respond to Paul's teaching? 3) When did Felix say he would send for Paul

again? d) 1) Why did Felix continue to hold Paul? 2) How long was Paul held in Caesarea? 3) Who succeeded Felix as governor of Judea?

History tells us some interesting things about Felix. Antonius Felix was the governor of Judea from 52 to 59 A.D. Originally, Felix had been a slave. His brother Pallas, also a slave, however, had gained influence in the court of Emperor Claudius, the Roman emperor at that time. Using his influence he was able to get Felix the position of governor of Judea. As governor of Judea, his cruelty in putting down Jewish uprisings turned the Jews against him. He had a great lust for power, which he tried to strengthen by three different marriages. At the time Paul was tried, he was married to Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I. His greed and lust for power made him an enemy of all who got in his way.

According to this account in Acts, Felix was not easily influenced by flattery nor manipulated by the Jews. He had probably had other encounters with those of the Way, those known today as Christians. He probably knew more about Christianity than the Jews realized. When he saw Paul's courage and boldness for his faith he was curious to hear more. He also hoped Paul would give him a bribe. He was not concerned about justice, but about power and material advantage. He could have freed Paul immediately, but kept him prisoner for two years.

Q. 11. a) What would have been the normal response of someone who was innocent like Paul yet had to spend two years in prison. b) Why do you think Paul did not pay the bribe and get free to continue his ministry in Rome?

Felix and his wife Drusilla who was a Jewess, wanted to hear more about the Gospel. For them, it was not real interest, but curiosity which led them to listen to the Gospel. But to Paul, this turned out to be an opportunity to share the Gospel to people in authority.

God often uses Christians in authority to open wide doors of ministry and help in the spread of the Gospel. Knowing this, Paul was always open and bold in his witness to those in authority. Even though he could have changed the Gospel so that it was more acceptable to the leaders, Paul refused to be intimidated by those in authority. As clearly as he could, he shared the Gospel to Felix and his wife.

Luke says that Paul talked about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come.

Q. 12. a) Why do you think Felix did not want to hear about righteousness, self-control, and judgment? b) Why do many people, even Christians, not want to hear about these today?

Paul taught about righteousness- both that which comes from God through belief in Jesus and the demands of God upon all people, especially leaders to live in a right way before him. This of course would not be easily acceptable to a cruel leader like Felix.

Paul also talked about self-control- the ability to control one's temper, as well as one's lusts. The Roman world, especially the Roman leaders were known for their desire to have pleasure of any type- especially sexual pleasure. They had no control over themselves- but allowed their lusts to control them even if it brought harm to others. This is directly against what the Bible teaches. Felix, as well as all of us are required by God to have self-control in our sexual lives, our speech, and all of our life.

Q. 13. How does self-control evidence itself in a life of a Christian?

Paul also talked about judgment to come. One of the reasons world leaders are often so cruel and evil is because they do not believe that there is a coming judgment. If there is no resurrection from the dead, and if they are not going to be held accountable for their sins, then there is no reason why one should be good to others. But Paul shared that all people, from the leaders to the common person, must one day stand before God for judgment. The type of judgment one receives is first based upon one's belief in Jesus Christ. Those who believe go to heaven and those who don't believe go to hell. But this judgment also is concerning our actions while on earth. If a person lives for the glory of God he will be rewarded. But all of those, especially leaders who have a lot of authority and abuse their authority and are evil, will receive punishment from God. This clear presentation of the Gospel and the individual responsibility of the leader before God made Felix afraid. He told Paul, "That's enough for now... When I find it convenient, I will send for you."

Paul was held in Caesarea for two years. Felix did not release him nor did he decide in favor of the Jews. He delayed any decision. He sent for Paul frequently but did not take any action.

In 62 A.D. Felix was recalled to Rome and Ponticus Festus became the governor in Judea. Paul was still in prison in Caesarea. Felix realized that Paul had not committed a crime, but he had not wanted to displease the Jews by releasing him.

Q. 14. a) Why is hearing the truth so difficult for those who are in leadership? b) How do most Christian leaders react when their wrongs are pointed out to them?

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 25:1-22

When Felix, the governor of Judea was recalled to Rome, Ponticus Festus, a new governor was appointed. For two years, Paul had been kept under guard in Caesarea because Felix did not want to displease the Jews.

No doubt Paul thought that with a new governor, he would finally be declared innocent and released. But the change of governor was no advantage to Paul. The Jews had not forgotten their determination to kill him, even though two years had passed. There seemed to be only one way that Paul would get to Rome as he had been promised by the Lord. Paul chose that way.

Q. 15. Read Acts 25:1-22 and answer these questions: a) 1) As soon as Festus went to Jerusalem, what case was presented to him? 2) Who brought the charges? 3) Why did they want Paul brought to Jerusalem? 4) How did Festus answer their request? b) 1) Describe the accusations brought against Paul by the Jews. 2) Summarize Paul's defense. c) 1) Why did Festus ask Paul if he was willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried? 2) What was Paul's answer? d) How did Paul's appeal assure his continuing on to Rome?

Just three days after Festus arrived in Caesarea to be the new governor, he went up to Jerusalem. As governor, he needed to meet with the local Jewish leaders of the province, which was the Jewish Sanhedrin.

The Jewish leaders had not forgotten the case against Paul. They immediately brought the case before Festus, and asked that Paul be brought to Jerusalem for trial. This put Festus in a difficult situation. As the new governor no doubt he wanted to please the Jews. But he probably had heard about Paul and realized that as a Roman citizen, Paul had rights to a fair hearing. Therefore, Festus said he was going back to Caesarea and that the Jewish leaders should come with him and try Paul there. Again God used a Roman governor to protect Paul from the Jews, as they had planned to ambush and kill Paul on the road.

When Festus and the members of the Sanhedrin arrived back in Caesarea, Paul was brought into the court to hear again the charges against him. The same charges were given, but again they had no proof for the charges.

Here, as in the trial before Felix, Paul should have been acquitted of the charges, as there was no proof. But, Festus saw an opportunity to find favor with the Jews, so he asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem for another trial.

Paul's answer to the charges was, "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple, or against Caesar." When Festus, wishing to please the Jews, asked if he was willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried again, Paul refused. Paul knew that to return to Jerusalem meant death. Although not afraid of death, Paul realized that it was foolish to needlessly throw away his life. He was willing to die, if he were guilty, but the charges against him by the Jews were not true. Therefore, Paul made use of the final court of appeal for all Roman citizens. He told Festus "I appeal to Caesar!" By this he meant that he appealed to the highest court of the land, the Roman court in Rome. As a Roman citizen, he had this right.

After conferring with his council, Festus agreed and said to Paul, "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

Paul feared neither life nor death. He wrote to the Philippians, "For to me, to live is Christ, to die is gain" Phil. 1:21. However, he was to go to Rome to be a witness and this was God's way to get him there.

Festus was probably relieved to hear Paul's appeal to go to Rome. He would not need to discuss Paul any further with the Jews. Paul's appeal to Caesar took the case out of his power and took Paul out of the power of his Jewish accusers.

Paul, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, made this decision. It would take him to Rome as the Lord had promised. But Paul probably had no knowledge of all the trials he would encounter on the way and after he reached Rome.

If we are obedient to the Word and in daily fellowship with the Lord, the Holy Spirit can direct our decisions. Paul was not faultless, but his one desire to live for Christ made it possible for the Holy Spirit to direct his decisions. Felix and Festus were greatly influenced in their decisions by their desire to please the Jews. This is often true in the lives of political leaders and unbelieving people.

Q. 16. How are your decisions or the decisions of other church leaders often determined by a desire to please someone more than God? Give examples.

Why did Luke spend so much time writing about the imprisonment of Paul? You will remember that the book of Acts was written to a Gentile called Theophilus. Luke wanted to explain to him and all other

interested Gentiles why Paul was in prison. Paul was imprisoned not because he was guilty of any crime, but because of the jealousies of the Jews and the fear of the Roman leaders. Luke also wanted to trace the spread of Christianity from the small town of Jerusalem to the capitol of the Roman empire, Rome.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. a) How did the Roman commander, Claudius Lysais learn of the plot against Paul by the Jews?
b) What was the plot?
2. a) How was Paul rescued from the Jews?
b) Who escorted Paul?
3. Who came with the Jews to Caesarea to present their accusations against Paul?
4. a) Why didn't Felix dismiss the case against Paul?
b) How long did he hold Paul in Caesarea?
5. a) When Felix and Drusilla listened to Paul tell about his faith in Christ, how did it affect Felix?
b) What did he say to Paul?
6. a) Who succeeded Felix as governor in Judea?
b) What was the first case that the Sanhedrin brought to Festus?
7. Why did the Jews want Paul brought back to Jerusalem for another trial?
8. a) What prevented Paul's case from returning to Jerusalem?
b) Why did Paul make the decision?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a. 1) Why did God want Paul to witness before government officials?
2) What important role have Christians played in Ethiopia while serving as government officials?
3) From Paul's witness to government officials, what can we learn about witnessing to government officials?
- b. 1) How is a Christian to respond while falsely accused?
2) Should a Christian give bribes? Why or why not?
- c. 1) Why did God allow Paul to spend so much time in prison?
2) What principles can we learn from this?
- d) Paul talked with Felix about righteousness, self-control, and judgment.
 - 1) What is the place of all three concepts in our witness to non-Christians?
 - 2) How are these three demonstrated in a Christian's life?
 - 3) In what way are some of these often lacking in some Christians lives?

Lesson Eighteen

Acts 25:13-27:26

FIRST DAY

ACTS 25:13-27

For over two long years, Paul had been waiting in prison in Caesarea. Although he had been tried by two Roman governors who could not find any reason to convict Paul, they refused to release him. Finally, when the new governor, Festus, refused to pass a proper judgment for him, Paul appealed to Caesar to be tried in Rome.

It is hard for us to understand the purpose of the Lord and why he allowed Paul to be in prison for so long. And yet it was all part of the Lord's plan for Paul. Because he was imprisoned, he was able to share the Gospel with Gentile leaders who might never have heard the Gospel any other way. The Lord's promise that Paul would testify for him in Rome gave Paul assurance to continue his bold witness for the Lord.

Question 1. Read Acts 25:13 - 27:26. Describe briefly the major events which took place in these verses.
Q. 2. Read Acts 25:13-27 and answer the following questions: a) 1) Who came to Caesarea to visit Festus?
2) What did Festus discuss with them? b) Of which law, Jewish and Roman, did Festus remind the Jews, concerning judgment of a prisoner? c) How did Paul describe the disagreement between Paul and the Jews? d) What help did Festus seek from Agrippa?

A few days after Paul's trial, when he had appealed to be sent to Rome for trial Festus received some important guests. It was customary for neighboring rulers to visit a new governor when he came to a province in order to establish friendly relations. King Herod Agrippa II ruled over part of Galilee and cities in Perea, to the north of Judea. He came with his sister, Bernice, to visit Festus.

Since Herod was part Jew and had a good understanding of the Jewish people and religious customs, Festus discussed Paul with Agrippa. He told Agrippa how the priests and elders in Jerusalem asked that Paul be condemned to death. Festus said that he told the Jews that it was not Roman custom to hand over a man until he was given a trial and an opportunity to defend himself. The Jews had come to Caesarea and presented their case, but they hadn't any charges that were condemning. They disputed with Paul concerning a dead man named Jesus, who Paul claimed was alive. The Jews wanted to return Paul to Jerusalem to be judged there but when Festus asked Paul if he would go Paul refused. Paul asked to be sent to Caesar and Festus was waiting for an opportunity to send him to Rome.

When King Agrippa found out that Paul was in Caesarea, he asked if he could meet Paul since he had heard of this great man. No doubt most of the people in the land of Palestine had heard about Paul, the famous Jewish leader who had turned to Christianity and was spreading the Gospel around the world. Festus agreed that King Agrippa could hear Paul the next day.

The next day Festus arranged for a gathering of the high ranking officers and leading men of Caesarea, most likely all Gentiles, with Agrippa and Bernice. It was probably like a large banquet which was prepared

to honor Herod as the guest. As requested, Festus sent for Paul. Festus explained to all how the Jews in Jerusalem and again in Caesarea wanted him to condemn Paul to death. When Festus could see nothing worthy of the death sentence, he asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem to be judged but Paul appealed to Caesar. Most likely Festus was trying to justify himself to the gathering so that none could accuse him of being anti-Jew. Festus asked those gathered and especially Agrippa to examine Paul and help him determine the charges he should write to Rome.

According to the historian, Josephus, Festus was a just governor. He especially wanted the opinion of Agrippa, who professed the Jewish religion. Agrippa was known as an expert on all things concerning the Jewish religion, so Festus requested his help.

Q. 3. Why was this a good opportunity for Paul to share the Gospel?

SECOND DAY

ACTS 26:1-32

With the arrival of Herod Agrippa who was part Jew and an expert in Jewish affairs, Paul was brought before Herod and other high ranking officials to give his testimony. Festus also wanted help in knowing what Paul was accused of so that he could send a letter stating the charges along with Paul to Rome.

Even as Jesus predicted in Matt. 10:17-19, the apostle Paul had been before councils, synagogues, governors, and officials and now he was before a king. Although in from prison Paul continued to carry out his witness of the risen Christ to Jews and Gentiles.

Q. 4. Read Acts 26:1-32 and answer these questions: a) 1) Why was Paul pleased to present his case to Agrippa? 2) Why did Paul begin his explanation from his early life and his religious training? b) 1) For what did Paul say he was on trial? 2) What was the hope which Paul mentioned? c) Paul dealt with three periods of his life. List the three. d) 1) What made the change in Paul's life? 2) How did he explain his commission from the Lord? (To whom was he sent? For what purposes?) (Acts 26:15-19) e) What was Paul saying when Festus interrupted him? f) 1) What question did Paul ask Agrippa? 2) With what question did Agrippa answer Paul? g) 1) How did they judge Paul? 2) What did Agrippa say concerning Paul's case?

Paul's address before King Agrippa was very similar to his address to the Jews on the steps of the Roman fortress in Jerusalem. This is because both were familiar with the Jewish religion. However, Paul adapted his speech to his audience. His speech was especially directed to Agrippa who knew the Jewish customs and religion. Paul tried to show that neither his manner of life nor his teaching should cause hostility especially from the Jews.

Paul was pleased to give his testimony before Herod for he knew that Herod was familiar with the religious background of Palestine. He would have known about Jesus and his death and had no doubt heard that Jesus had risen from the dead. He knew about the jealousies of the high priest and religious leaders and the difference between the Pharisees and Sadducees. Herod was the most qualified ruler in Palestine to judge Paul.

Paul started by giving a summary of his life before he was converted. Paul was not a rebel against the law, but a member of the Pharisees and closely followed the law. Paul said the reason he was on trial was because he believed in what God had promised the Jewish forefathers. By this he was referring to the coming of God's Messiah, the establishment of God's kingdom on earth, the resurrection of the dead to life, etc. This was not a unique belief because all of the Jews were looking forward to these promises. The difference between Paul and most of the Jews is that Paul believed that these were fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. If the Jews believed in the resurrection of the dead, Paul could not understand why it was so difficult for them to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Not only was Paul a devout Pharisee, but before he became a Christian he himself was a great persecutor of the Church. Paul wanted to show Herod and the others that he did not start as a sympathizer to the Christians. Rather he was their major enemy. It was Paul who was sent by the Sanhedrin to imprison and help execute the Christians. Paul's greatest desire was to completely destroy Christianity which he thought was a great heresy. Paul told about this period of his life to show how unusual it was that he should suddenly change. It was the fact that God had so drastically changed his life from being a hater of Jesus to a follower of Jesus that Paul wanted the hearers to understand. Paul's change was not from him, but because of something God had done to him.

Q. 5. How has this change been evident in your life?

Secondly, Paul told of his conversion and then his commission to serve Jesus. At the command of the high priest and Jewish religious leaders, Paul was on his way to Damascus. He was not going to worship or join the Christians, but to persecute them. But something happened that changed Paul. There on the road to Damascus, Paul miraculously met with Jesus. This is the only thing which could have changed a persecutor of Christian into a Christian. There on the road to Damascus, Paul was told to tell both the Jews and Gentiles that they needed to believe in Jesus Christ in order to have their spiritual eyes opened, to go from the kingdom of darkness to light, from the power of Satan to living under the control of God, and to receive forgiveness from sins.

Q. 6. a) How is this last statement a good summary of the Gospel and what it does to the sinner? b) In what way do we have a similar responsibility as Paul? Describe how you are fulfilling your responsibility.

Paul told that he was obedient to God's commission. Beginning in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and all Judea and then to the Gentiles Paul had proclaimed the Gospel message. He taught that all need to turn to God in repentance which must be shown by their deeds and lives. This did not go against his being a Pharisee or a good Jew. Rather, because of his relationship with Jesus, he better fulfilled the beliefs of the Old Testament prophets. As a Pharisee, Paul stood for the hope of Israel which was the resurrection of the dead and that was why he was seized in Jerusalem.

Paul continued by explaining that all he taught was the fulfillment of what Moses and the prophets said- that Christ would rise from the dead and would proclaim light to the Gentiles.

Q. 7. Make a list of how the coming of Christ fulfilled some of the Old Testament prophecies.

When Paul mentioned the belief in the resurrection from the dead, Festus, who did not know the writings of the prophets, was confused and told Paul his great learning had made him insane. As a Gentile he could not believe that someone who was dead could rise from the dead.

Paul answered that he was not insane. In fact, King Agrippa was familiar with the things he was saying. Then Paul asked Agrippa, "Do you believe the prophets?"

With his knowledge of the Scriptures, Agrippa could have confirmed Paul's testimony. No doubt he was convicted by the Holy Spirit. But rather than believe, Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" He could not deny the truth of Scripture but he wasn't ready to accept it.

Q. 8. Why is it so difficult for leaders or rich people to believe the Gospel?

Paul answered that he prayed to God that not only Agrippa, but everyone there might become Christians as he was. But he did not wish upon them chains of imprisonment.

King Agrippa, Bernice and Festus got up and left the room, saying among themselves that there was nothing in Paul's report that justified putting him to death or even his imprisonment. Again we see that the leaders, even Herod Agrippa who understood the Jews, realized that Paul was innocent. But, in the plan of God, Paul was to remain a prisoner and travel to Rome as a prisoner and not a free man.

Agrippa said to Festus that if Paul had not appealed to Caesar he would have gone free. However, God's plan for Paul at that time was not freedom, but Rome.

For the third time in the book of Acts we have the story of the conversion of Paul. Each one was to a different audience and given for a different reason. But all showed the great change that had come over the life of Paul when he believed in Jesus. Too often we forget the power of the Gospel to change lives. Christians often do not seem to change much when they believe in Jesus. But, the Gospel message, if believed and obeyed, will greatly change all of our lives- the way we think, work, act, what we say, etc. If there is no change in our lives, we should search our hearts to see if we have really believed in Jesus.

Q. 9. Make a list of things that have changed in your life since you became a child of God.

THIRD DAY

ACTS 27:1-12

Having shared his testimony before King Agrippa, an expert in Jewish customs and religion, who realized that Paul was innocent of the charges against him, Paul prepared to go on to Rome as a prisoner.

Paul's journey to Rome began in 59 A.D. and was not completed until 60 A.D. Paul's sea voyage from Caesarea to Rome was filled with danger and disaster. Those must have been discouraging days for Paul. But through it all we see the Lord's protection. The dangers of the voyage show the power of the Holy Spirit to give calmness in difficulties and dangers.

Read Acts 27:1-26 and answer these questions: Q. 10. a) List those who were on the ship which took Paul from Caesarea. b) At which port was Paul permitted to go to his friends? c) Trace Paul's journey on the map in Appendix G from Caesarea to Fair Havens on the southern island of Crete. d) In what port did they hope to spend the winter? e) What warning did Paul give to the centurion, the pilot and captain of the ship?

Not long after his testimony before Herod Agrippa, Paul and some other prisoners were put on ship to begin the journey to Italy. Although normally a one month journey, this trip took many months. A centurion, named Julius was put in charge of the prisoners. Luke, the writer of Acts was also with Paul on that ship when it left Caesarea for we read "we" boarded a ship from Adramyttium, a port southeast of Troas.

There were some others also who sailed with Paul. One of these was Aristarchus. You will remember that Aristarchus who was from Macedonia was with Paul in Ephesus and was one of the delegation bringing gifts to the church in Jerusalem. (Acts 19:29; 20:4) It could be that Timothy and others also accompanied Paul at this time. We do know from later letters that Paul wrote that Timothy was with him in Rome. The Lord always provided friends for Paul in his travels.

Q. 11. List some of the friends God has provided for you when you have needed them. Thank the Lord for them.

Leaving Caesarea, the port of Judea, the ship sailed north along the coast until it landed in Sidon. There Julius, Paul's guard, allowed Paul to visit some of the Christians in the city who provided for Paul's needs. Paul had already won the trust of this leader of the guards.

In the Mediterranean Sea, there were certain months when the rain and the wind made sailing very difficult and dangerous. By the time Paul had reached Sidon, it was late in the season for sailing. But their ship left anyway. Since the wind was against them when they left Sidon, they sailed north of Cyprus. They continued along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia to the harbor of Myra in the province of Lysia.

At the port of Myra, the centurion found another ship from Alexandria which was sailing for Italy, and Paul and his companions were put on the ship. They travelled on to Cnidus with difficulty, because of the wind. Then they sailed south of the island of Crete, passing the port of Salmone. After much difficulty from the wind they reached the port of Fair Havens. Because of the difficulties they had faced on the way, the sailing season was almost over. From about November to January it was impossible to sail. The "fast" mentioned was "The Great Day of Atonement"- a Jewish holy day. In the year of 59 A.D. it was on October 5. This was the dangerous season for sailing. Travel by sailing vessel was very dangerous in the winter winds, which blew from the northeast. These winds often blew up very suddenly. A sailing vessel had no motor power to resist the drive of the wind. They were helpless before a winter storm.

Paul advised the commander of the ship and the guard that they should spend a few months in Fair Haven until the winter winds stopped and the sailing season began again. In fact, he prophesied that if they left the port of Fair Havens, their ship and its cargo would be lost, and human lives endangered. However, because it was not a good port in which to spend the winter, the captain and centurion decided to try to get to the port of Phoenix on the other side of the island of Crete, just a short distance away. Little did they realize the tragic results their decision would bring them.

Notice how disobedience to God by the leaders brought much danger to others. Disobedience to God will always bring trouble. Although for a time, those who disobey God sometimes seem to prosper, one day they will suffer. This is especially true when leaders disobey the will of God. Not only do they suffer but unfortunately they can cause others, like Paul, to also suffer for their disobedience. Paul was not disobedient to God, but the commander of the ship. But we will see how this disobedience caused Paul to be shipwrecked and almost lose his life. This is why it is very important for leaders in the church to follow God closely and obey Him completely. Their wrong decision does not only harm them, but all others under their authority as well.

Q. 12. a) How have you seen this happen in your church? b) What decision was made? What was the end result of that decision?

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 27:13-26

Having been delayed by bad weather, the ship carrying Paul as a prisoner to Rome finally reached the port of Fair Havens, on the south of the Island of Crete. In disobedience to the will of God, the centurion and the captain of the ship were determined to go on to Phoenix because it was a better harbor during the winter.

Q. 13. Read Acts 27:13-26 and answer these questions: a) What encouraged the captain and the centurion to continue on the port of Phoenix? b) 1) What sudden danger arose? 2) What did they do to try to secure the ship? c) 1) What encouragement did Paul give to the people on the ship? 2) From whom did Paul receive his promise? 3) What did Paul encourage the people to do?

When a gentle south wind started blowing the captain of the ship decided that they would have plenty of time to reach the port of Phoenix just a short distance away. There he hoped to spend the winter. They left Fair Havens and sailed along the coast of Crete. But suddenly a strong northeastern wind arose and drove them south into the open sea. As they passed south of the small island of Cauda, there was little protection from the violence of the wind so they did all they could to protect the ship. They took the lifeboat, which was usually towed behind the ship on board and tied it. They passed ropes underneath the ship to hold it together. They threw out the anchor, hoping it would prevent the ship from drifting on the sandbars of Syrtis, on the coast of northern Africa. The storm continued so the next day they threw the cargo into the ocean. By the third day of the storm, they threw out the ship's equipment.

The storm continued for many days and most people had no hope of being saved. They thought that they were about to die. Because of the storm, most of the people had not eaten for several days. But God's agent was on the boat and God had a purpose for him. God would not let His chosen one, Paul, die until his work was done. Paul had been promised by God that he would get to Rome. In order for that to be fulfilled, Paul's life had to be spared.

Paul stood up and reminded all of the people of his prophecy and that they should have listened to his warning not to sail from Fair Havens in Crete. Then Paul encouraged them saying that none of them would be lost, though the ship would be destroyed. Paul said, "Last night an angel of God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar, and

God has given you the lives of all who sail with you." Paul encouraged them because he had faith in God. However, because of their disobedience all of the ships good would be lost and they would run aground on some island. Their disobedience would be costly for them.

Q. 14. Why did God send an angel to Paul?

When all hope of survival was lost, the Lord sent an angel to assure Paul that neither he nor those on the ship would be lost. God's promises are certain and the promise to Paul that he would reach Rome was confirmed by an angel.

God's promises are always certain. At times we may feel that God has forgotten His promises. However, when God delays His answer, it does not mean He has refused it.

Q. 15. Why do you think God permitted all of this danger to Paul and those on the ship?

Q. 16. a) Has God allowed you to go through some dangerous or difficult times? b) Can you see His purpose for it? c) Can you trust Him even though you don't see His purpose?

Next week we will see how God protected Paul so that he could stand before the leaders in Rome. One of the great promises that we have as God's children is that in all things, in dangers, trials, shipwrecks, etc. God uses all of these for good. These are not beyond the control of God.

Q. 17. Read Romans 8:28-39. List the different promises that God has given us. How have these promises been fulfilled in your lives? Praise God for these promises.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. a) Who was King Agrippa?
b) Why did Festus consult him about Paul?
2. For what did Paul say he was on trial?
3. a) Did King Agrippa deny the truth of Paul's presentation of Old Testament prophecy?
b) What did he say to Festus which proves it?
4. Who were the friends who travelled with Paul on the ship to Rome?
5. Why was the travel by sea so dangerous?
6. Why didn't the centurion and captain not listen to Paul's warning not to leave Fair Havens?
7. What promise did God give to Paul?

WEEKLY MEETING

DISCUSSION

- a. Why is it difficult for leaders, rich people, etc. to accept Jesus as Saviour? (Look at 1 Cor. 1:18-31)
- b. 1) How should a person's becoming a Christian affect a person's life at a) work b) home c) the way he thinks d) his reason for living.
2) Describe changes you have had to make in your life since you have become a Christian.
3) What are ways Christians should change more to be better lights to the world?

- c. 1) In what ways can a bad decision by a church leader hurt many innocent people?
- 2) What attitude should a Christian have when his leader has made a bad decision? In such a time, what should be the Christian's confidence?

Lesson Nineteen

Acts 27:27-28:30

FIRST DAY

Acts 27:27-44

Having rejected the warning from God which came through Paul, the commander of the ship left for the city of Phoenix. This disobedience to God brought the whole ship into grave danger. All of the goods carried by the ship were lost, and finally the ship was destroyed. What a serious price to pay for disobedience to God!

Even the life of Paul was put into danger because of the disobedience of the leader. This was not the first time that Paul had suffered because he followed God. The life of Paul was filled with danger. Time after time his life was threatened. However, in every danger, God intervened and gave Paul opportunities to witness to people who otherwise would not have heard. Again Paul was saved from death and was able to witness to people who perhaps would not have heard the gospel message.

Question 1. Read Acts 27:27- 28:30. a) How did God use the shipwreck to spread the Gospel on the island? b) How was Paul able to share the Gospel while in Rome?

Q. 2. Read Acts 27:27-44 and answer these questions: a) 1) How many days had the ship been driven by the storm? 2) What sea were they in? b) 1) How did the sailors determine in the night that they were nearing land? 2) How did they prepare for the certain loss of their ship? c) 1) How did the sailors plan to escape? 2) Why did Paul warn them? 3) What did he urge all those on ship to do before they crashed? d) 1) What promise did Paul give them? 2) How many people were on the ship? e) 1) When the boat struck a sand bar, what did the soldiers plan to do? 2) Why did the centurion prevent it? 3) How did the people get to land?

The ship carrying Paul to Italy was driven by the storm for fourteen days in the Adriatic sea. (The sea between Italy, Malta, Crete, and Greece in ancient times was called the Adriatic Sea. It is now the Mediterranean.) At midnight the sailors sensed they were nearing land. They could perhaps hear the waves hitting the shore. They measured the depth of the water and it was about 40 meters. A short time later it was 30 meters deep. Fearing that they would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors into the water and prayed for daylight.

The sailors tried to escape from the ship by lowering the life-boat. Paul told the centurion and the soldiers that if the sailors did not remain with the ship the soldiers would lose their lives. It was only by following the plan of God and the provision of deliverance that He provided that they could be saved. So, the soldiers believed Paul and cut the ropes so the lifeboat fell into the sea.

Q. 3. How is this similar to spiritual salvation as well?

Just before dawn Paul advised all the people to eat as they had not eaten for many days. He told them they would need it and assured them not one of them would be injured. Then Paul took some bread, gave

thanks and ate. They were all encouraged and ate some food. The crew also threw the grain into the sea to lighten the load so that they could get closer to land.

When daylight came they saw a sandy beach. They did not know what the land was, but decided to let the ship run onto the shore. They cut loose the anchors and raised the sail so the wind would drive them to land, but the ship hit a sand bar in the water and the waves began to break the ship to pieces.

The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners so they would not escape. It was the Roman custom that if a soldier allowed a prisoner to escape, he was killed in place of the prisoner. Because the centurion wanted to save Paul's life he prevented them from doing it. He ordered those who could swim to jump into the water and swim to the island. The others were to get there on pieces of the broken ship. As Paul had been promised by the angel of God, all reached land safely. The ship and the cargo were lost but every life was saved.

God had a plan for Paul's life and until that was completed, God protected him and encouraged him. Paul was faithful in his witness. No one can frustrate God's purposes.

Q. 4. a) How should our lives be like Paul? b) What encouragement can we receive by knowing that God has a plan for our lives and that no one can frustrate his plan?
Q. 5. Have you learned to trust your life to God's care, even in very dangerous or difficult situations? Give examples of how you have had to do this.

Our testings may not be physical ones like Paul's, but we all face many difficulties and defeats. Can we trust "That in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28)?

SECOND DAY

ACTS 28:1-10

God spared the life of Paul and all of those in the boat. Soon all of those from the ship found themselves safe on the island. Why did God allow another delay in Paul getting to Rome? Today we will see how this delay allowed people on a small island to hear about Jesus and believe.

Q. 6. Read Acts 28:1-10 and answer these questions. a) 1) On what island did the shipwrecked people land? 2) How did the people of the island receive them? b) 1) Why did the people of the island question who Paul was? 2) What did they expect would happen to Paul? c) 1) Who was chief official of the island? 2) How did Paul help him? 3) How long did they remain on the island? d) 1) How did Paul minister on the island? 2) How did they help Paul and the others?

When Paul and the other 275 passengers reached land, they learned that they were on the Island of Malta. It was also called Melita which means "refuge" and was probably often a refuge to ships travelling the sea.

Once on the island, the people who lived on the island began to help those from the shipwreck. Because they were wet and cold, they immediately started a fire. Notice the serving spirit of Paul. He was

an apostle. He was also an older man, perhaps almost 60 years old. He should have let others serve him- but Paul helped the people of the island to gather wood for a fire.

Q. 7. a) Why is it that people in high leadership often lose their desire to serve in small tasks? b) What can we learn about leadership from this simple example from the life of Paul?

As Paul gathered sticks for the fire and threw them on the fire, a poisonous snake which must have been gathered up in the wood tried to escape the fire. It attacked Paul and fastened on to Paul's hand. But Paul shook it off into the fire. Since all recognized the snake as poisonous, they expected Paul to die.

Immediately the unbelievers gave a different understanding to these events. They decided that Paul must have been a wicked man, perhaps a murderer. Here he had just escaped drowning in the sea which they saw as punishment by God. Although he had temporarily escaped, God, they thought, had now punished him by killing him by a snake. When nothing happened, however, they decided Paul was a god. This simple miracle of protecting Paul was soon turned into an opportunity to witness to the people of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Nearby was the home of the chief official of the island named Publius. As leader of the island, he welcomed the people from the ship as his guests for three days. Publius' father was ill. Hearing about Paul's ability to work miracles, Publius had Paul called to his house hoping Paul would heal his father. Paul prayed, laid his hands on him and healed him. When others heard of the healing many other sick people were brought to Paul and they were healed.

Paul and the others remained on the island for the three winter months. After the three months, they were able to sail by boat and left again for Rome. The people gave Paul and his friends all they needed for the rest of the journey.

Luke does not tell us if Paul preached about Jesus Christ to the people of the island. However, we are certain that Paul used every possible opportunity to witness to the people.

Q. 8. Who are the people on this sea journey and on Malta who probably wouldn't have heard the Gospel from Paul and saw the power of Christ in his life if he hadn't been shipwrecked?

THIRD DAY

ACTS 28:11-16

After their shipwreck, Paul and his friends spent the three winter months on the island of Malta. Paul, Luke and Aristarchus no doubt spent much time witnessing the good news of Christ to the people. Paul healed their sick and when they were ready to go the people honored them and gave them supplies for their journey.

Paul had nearly reached the end of his journey to Rome. The Holy Spirit had warned Paul before he went to Jerusalem that he would suffer in prison and face many hardships. But Paul's one desire was to finish the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. (Acts 20:22-24)

Q. 9. Read Acts 28:11-16 and answer these questions. a) 1) How long was Paul on the island of Cyprus? 2) What kind of ship did they find on which to continue their journey? b) 1) What was their first stop after leaving the island? 2) Who did Paul find there? 3) How long did they remain there? c) 1) As Paul and his party travelled on, who met them? 2) Where did they meet? 3) What did Paul do when he saw them? d) 1) Was Paul a prisoner when he reached Rome? 2) How did he live?

Having found a ship from Alexandria, a major town in Egypt that had spent the winter in Malta harbor, they took it to Italy. They sailed north and probably after one day of travel, they reached Syracuse, a harbor on the much larger island of Sicily. Then they went to Rhegium, another port on Sicily. A south wind began to blow so two days later they were at Puteoli on the eastern coast of Italy. There they found some Christian brothers who invited them to stay there a week. Paul was still under guard, so the centurion must have remained there with Paul, and perhaps the other prisoners.

The sea voyage was now ended. From Puteoli they travelled by land. As they neared Rome, some of the Christians heard he was coming and they met Paul at the Forum of Appius and others at the Three Taverns and escorted him on into Rome, which was about 33 miles.

For many years, Paul had wanted to visit Rome. He wrote the letter "Romans" to the church there, and they knew Paul from his letter and from news they heard about him through the years. When these men came to receive Paul he was encouraged and thanked God. They travelled with Paul on the main road into Rome, called the Appian Way. It had been three years since Paul had written the letter to the Romans. He had prayed for them. It comforted Paul to have them come that long way to greet him.

Q. 10. Do you look for opportunities to encourage your Christian brothers and sisters?

FOURTH DAY

ACTS 28:17-31

Near the end of his ministry in Ephesus on his third journey, Paul said that he wanted to see Rome. (Acts 19:21) However, he first was led to visit Macedonia, Achaia, and Jerusalem. No doubt he expected to arrive in Rome in just a few months. But it was four years later that Paul arrived in Rome.

As we have seen throughout the book of Acts, in every city that Paul visited, he first went to his own people, the Jews. Three days after he arrived in Rome he called together the Jewish leaders. He did not know what they had heard about him, but he wanted to tell his story and share the Gospel with the Jews in Rome as soon as possible. He knew that soon an evil report concerning him would come from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem.

His reception in Rome at first was without conflict. But as usual, when he presented Christ as Messiah, many refused his message.

Q. 11. Read Acts 28:17-31 and answer these questions: a) Why did Paul call the Jewish leaders together in Rome? b) For what reason did Paul say he was bound with chains? c) List three things the Jews said to Paul when he explained why he was there in chains. d) When Paul reasoned with the Jews, of what did he try to

convince them? e) 1) Which prophet did Paul quote? 2) What was Paul's final statement to the Jewish leaders? f) How did the Jews respond to Paul's message?

Paul's first thought after he reached Rome was for his own Jewish people. Although still a prisoner in chains, he was permitted to call together the Jewish leaders. First of all he explained that he had done nothing against their people or the customs of their ancestors. Paul told how he had been seized in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans, who examined him and wanted to release him. However, Paul said "the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar – not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you." Paul did everything possible to keep his relationship with his people open and honest.

Q. 12. a) Are you open and honest in your relations with your people- family, friends, and churches? b) Why do some people have bad relationships with others? c) As Christians, what should they do to make these relationships right?

The Jewish leaders said that they had not received any letters from Judea and none of the brothers had reported or said anything against Paul. "But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect." There was a small church in Rome. But among the Jewish community, they had heard bad rumors concerning Christianity and wanted to know the truth. Therefore, they made an appointment for another day.

On the appointed day the Jewish leaders, joined by many others went to the place where Paul was staying. From morning until evening, Paul explained to them the kingdom of God. He tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the prophets. Paul then quoted from Isaiah who prophesied that the Jews would see and hear but not comprehend, because their hearts were hardened. If they would hear and understand with their hearts, God would heal them. This was because having repeatedly heard the Gospel the Jews had continually rejected it. With their rejection came a hardening of their hearts in punishment for their rejection. Soon it became difficult for them to listen to, understand, and believe the Gospel.

When people hear the Gospel they have the choice to believe it or reject it. However, if they reject the Gospel, something begins to happen in their hearts. After having heard the truth, and rejecting it, their hearts begin to harden. After repeated rejection, the hardening of the heart is complete, and then it is difficult, almost impossible to believe. This was the state in which many of the Jews found themselves during the times of Paul and in fact today also.

Q. 13. How have you seen this happen in your experience of witnessing to others?

The Jews listened and some believed but others would not believe. Paul ended his discussion by saying that God's salvation had been sent to the Gentiles and they would listen.

Paul continued in Rome under house arrest for two years. Anyone who wanted could come to see him. He welcomed them all and boldly preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's time in prison in Rome continues to benefit people today through his letters. While he was in prison he wrote his letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.

We do not know why Luke's account ended at this point. Most likely it was because Luke was in Rome that he wrote the book of Acts and the book was completed before Paul's imprisonment ended. His goal had been to continue the Gospel of Luke's account "about all Jesus began to do and teach." (Acts 1:1) He wrote an accurate account of the progress of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. Beginning with birth of Christ, within 60 years Christianity became a major religion in the Roman empire.

This was not the end of the life of Paul. Although not recorded in the New Testament, most likely after the two years imprisonment in Rome, Paul was released. He could have spent some time ministering in Rome. He probably went to Spain and other areas to preach the Gospel. It seems that he went back to visit the churches in Asia Minor and Greece. It was not until about four years later that Paul was again imprisoned and executed by the Romans. It is during this final imprisonment that 2 Timothy was written right before Paul's death.

Q. 14. Think back over the life and ministry of Paul. a) Make a list of principles that you can apply to your life on how to live for the glory of God. b) Make another list of principles on how a Christian leader, especially an evangelist, should work to spread the Gospel.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. If the centurion and sailors had taken Paul's advice would there have been a shipwreck? (Acts 27:10)
2. What profit came from the shipwreck? (Acts 28:7-9)
3. What encouragement did Paul receive in his final journey from Puteoli to Rome?
4. What was Paul's first concern when he got to Rome?
5. How was the response of the Jews in Rome different than in many other places? How was it the same?
6. Describe Paul's ministry in Rome. How does it continue even until today?
7. What reason did Paul give for so many Jews no believing?

DISCUSSION

- a. 1) Why did Paul's teaching the resurrection always cause dissension among the Jews?
2) Is this a point of dissension today? If so, in what way? 3) Why are people unwilling to thin about life after death?
- b. Discuss the characteristics which enabled Paul to fulfill his commission from the Lord.
- c. 1) What are principles that we have seen in the book of Acts that you can apply to your life on how to live for the glory of God?
2) What are principles seen in Acts about how churches are started?
3) What are principles seen in Acts about how a Christian leader, especially an evangelist, should work to spread the Gospel and what he can expect from his work?

Lesson Twenty

Review of Acts

FIRST DAY

In our study of the book of Acts, we have seen that Acts is basically a continuation of the story of Luke. Both books were written by the same author, Luke. They were both addressed to the same person, Theophilus. The Gospel of Luke focuses its attention on the life of Jesus Christ on earth. It ends with Jesus' assurance to His disciples that He would send the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, to them when he left them to return to heaven. Jesus commanded that they were to remain in Jerusalem until the power of the Holy Spirit was given to them. (Luke 24:49-53)

The book of Acts continues the story of Luke. In a way we could call the story of Acts the work that Jesus continued to do on earth through his disciples. This was accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Q. 1. In what way could we say that we too are continuing the work of Jesus on earth?

Acts opens with a reminder of the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the command to go to the end of the earth.

Q. 2. What is the key verse in the book of Acts? Write it down in your exercise book from memory.

Before Jesus was taken to heaven, he gave his final instructions to the disciples. In Acts 1:8 Jesus told the disciples that their primary work on earth as they waited for his return and the establishment of his kingdom was to be witnesses of the truth of the Gospel.

Q. 3. From our study in Acts, what are some of the key truths that we are to be witnesses of? What is the "Gospel?"

The Gospel focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Good News that Jesus has died for the sins of the world so that sinners do not have to pay the penalty of death for their sins. It includes the fact that Jesus was buried and rose from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven. It is a plea to all people to believe on Jesus Christ, repent from their sins, and a commitment to obey all of the commands that Jesus gives. It is a promise that all who believe in Him no matter if they are Jew or Gentile are freely forgiven by God, and are now his children, who are promised eternal life. It was this Good News that the apostles taught, that the early Christians believed, and that changed the Roman empire.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus outlined how the Gospel was to spread throughout the world. This forms a pattern how all Christians of all generations are to view their responsibility in evangelism. First, the

Gospel was to be preached in Jerusalem, the place where the first church was located. Jerusalem was the home of the Jews, the immediate neighborhood of the first church. The preaching of the Gospel in Jerusalem is seen in the first seven chapters of Act. Jerusalem could be compared to the immediate neighborhood of our church, those whom we live and work amongst.

Q. 4. What is your church's Jerusalem?

Then the Gospel was to spread to Judea, to Jews who had the same culture and the same language as those in Jerusalem but were geographically more remote.

Q. 5. What is like Judea for your church?

But the Jerusalem church was not to only be concerned for its own people in its own area. It was also to reach out to Samaria. You will remember that Samaritans were part Jew and part Gentile. They were in some way similar to the Jews, even in their religion, but there were major differences. Because of these differences, it was more difficult to witness to the Samaritans. And yet Jesus had died for them too, and the disciples were obligated to witness to them. This is the story of Acts 8. Part of the Gospel is the truth that God freely accepts people from all tribes and economic status into his family on an equal basis. He is not a tribal God, but the creator and redeemer of all people.

Q. 6. a) What is like Samaria for your church? b) How is your church reaching it? c) Why is it more difficult to witness to people of a slightly different culture and religion than to our own people?

In the book of Revelation we read of a large crowd standing before the throne of God praising God. Those in the crowd came from all people, from all nations, they speak all of the languages of the world. (Rev. 7:9-10) This is the vision of God and the purpose that Jesus died on the cross. That is why Jesus commanded the disciples that they must also be witnesses to all of the world. From Acts 13-28 we have the story of how the Gospel reached out into the known Gentile world especially through the ministry of Paul the apostle.

Q. 7. a) How is your church fulfilling its responsibility to reach the whole world? b) What more can it do to fulfill this responsibility?

The fact is much of our world has yet to be won to Christ. There are billions of people who have not clearly heard about Jesus and have not believed on him. Even here in Ethiopia there are many who have not heard or believed. The responsibility to reach the world for Christ lies not on the western church alone, but upon all of us. The commandment is also given to us in Ethiopia. May we be obedient to fulfill it in our generation!

SECOND DAY

The book of Acts is not only a story of how Christianity spread throughout the ancient Roman empire, but it is a description of what a healthy church should be and the impact it should make upon

the world. As we studied Acts, we have noticed the following things that make a church strong. We can examine our own church on the basis of these to see if our church is healthy or not.

1. A healthy church is a praying church. God has commanded that we pray. We have seen the emphasis of the early church upon prayer. Almost every chapter includes something about prayer. For instance, it was while in prayer that the Holy Spirit came. Also Peter was released from prison through the prayer of the saints. Prayer is the source of power for the Christian. It is through prayer that we attack and destroy Satan's strongholds. Because it is so important, Satan often attacks the prayer life of the church. He turns prayer into an empty ritual, thoughtlessly repeated words that do not come from our hearts. Or sometimes we become so busy that we do not pray at all. Could this be one of the reasons that our churches are so weak?

Q. 8. a) How much time do you spend in prayer? b) How important is prayer in your church?

2. A healthy church is a witnessing church. Although the book of Acts focuses on two individuals, Peter and Paul, who were greatly used by God to spread the Gospel, we repeatedly saw how the whole church was involved in witnessing. As persecution arose, we saw how the scattering believers took the Gospel to many cities. It is the responsibility of all people in all areas of life to witness for Jesus.

Q. 9. How well are all of the members of your church witnessing as they work, as they fellowship, or in all areas of life?

3. A healthy church is a learning church. We read in the book of Acts of the believers always gathering, not only to praise God, but to learn from the apostles. God does not want his children to be unlearned about the truths of Scripture. It is important not only to win people to the Lord, but to teach them the deep truths of Scripture. Our churches should be places where all of the Word of God should be taught clearly and accurately.

Q. 10. How is your church being taught all of the deeper truths of God so that it will mature into the image of Christ?

4. A healthy church is a growing church. Often a church will become satisfied with how much they have learned and how many members they have. The same members attend year after year, but there is no growth. Just as a healthy family grows through the birth of children, so should a healthy church grow. At other times we are thinking our churches are growing but they aren't. This is because it is only the children of the members that are being added to the church. If unbelievers are not constantly being added to our church, or if they do not stay in our church, then this is a sign of weakness for our church.

Q. 11. a) How many unchurched, unsaved people have been saved in your church this year? b) How many of those who attended your church have been returning to the world and no longer follow Jesus?

5. A healthy church is one where all who attend are being baptized and partaking of the Lord's Supper. One of the commands of Jesus was that the believers be baptized and partake of the Lord's

Supper. Repeatedly in our study of Acts we saw that the Christians did not only believe, but were baptized. In many of our churches those who attend the church are not being baptized and not taking the Lord's Supper. Although they might be saved, they are not fulfilling the commands of Jesus and are spiritually weak.

Q. 12. a) Are most of those who attend your church baptized? b) Do most of them partake of the Lord's Supper? If not, why not?

6. A healthy church has evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit. By this we do not mean that the members have to speak in tongues or that there has to be physical healing taking place. Although the Holy Spirit sometimes does make himself evident in this way, these are not mandatory. The greatest evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in a church is when its members live in harmony, they are changed from their previous life-style, and they are demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, etc. (Gal. 5:22) Also, the Holy Spirit demonstrates his presence when the members are serving and using their many types of spiritual gifts.

The coming of the Holy Spirit marked the beginning of the church. It marked the beginning of a new age. During the Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit only descended upon certain leaders who were used by God for a certain task. At times, when the task was completed or when sin entered the life of the leader, the Holy Spirit would leave the person. But in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit came upon all of the believers. Initially, the Holy Spirit evidenced his coming through fire and the gift of tongues, on the initial members of each type of Christian (Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles) when they received Christ. But after that initial time, all of the believers received the Holy Spirit when they believed and accepted Christ as their personal Savior whether they spoke in tongues or not.

Q. 13. How is the presence of the Holy Spirit evident in your church?

The main truth of Pentecost was not the newness of the Spirit, but that its power was made available to all of God's children. It was the presence of the Holy Spirit which would enable those present to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the Age. (Acts 1:8; 2:1-6) As the prophet predicted, the Spirit of the Lord would be poured out on all people, both Jews and Gentiles. And whoever would call on the Lord would be saved. (Joel 2:22-32; Acts 2:17-21) On the Day of Pentecost, people from many countries heard the message of Christ in their own languages from the Spirit-filled followers of Jesus. (Acts 2:5)

The Holy Spirit that descended at Pentecost gave power to the Christian church to do its work. It gave boldness to Peter and John to speak the Word. (Acts 4:13-31) The seven deacons were spirit-filled. (Acts 7:55-58) Work among the Samaritans was confirmed by the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:17) Paul's conversion was confirmed by the Holy Spirit. (Acts 9:17-18) It led in the sending and guided the evangelists Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 13:2,4; Paul and Silas Acts 16:7; Paul concerning his return to Jerusalem (Acts 12:21.)

7. A healthy church is a persecuted church. As we studied the spread of the Gospel, we saw that one of the ways Satan tries to destroy a healthy church is through persecution. This persecution was of different types but the purpose was always to destroy the church and to keep the members of the

church from witnessing. The apostles were persecuted with James losing his life. Stephen, the deacon, was the first martyr of the church. Wherever Paul went with the Gospel he was persecuted. But in a healthy church, rather than become a hindrance to the Gospel, persecution is a tool of God to purify and cause the spread of the Gospel. As the disciples said "We must obey God rather than men."

Q. 14. How was this seen in the book of Acts?

8. A healthy church is a pure church. The second way that Satan attacked the early church was through impurity. Ananias and Sapphira cheated God but God destroyed them. False teachers tried to corrupt the truths of the Gospel and had to be stopped. The false teaching that troubled the early church and continues to trouble us today is the temptation to add requirements to the Gospel of grace for salvation and acceptance to God. We are saved only by trusting in the death of Jesus for our sins. There is no work that we must do to earn our way into heaven. Satan will always seek to destroy the purity of the members of the church or the purity of the message of the Gospel in a church. These two must be carefully guarded in order for us to grow in a way that honors God.

Another way that Satan attacked the early church was through dissension. We saw how as the numbers of disciples increased, dissension between the Hellenist Jews and the Hebrew Jews arose. The apostles called the believers together to have them select seven men to administer the church affairs. A divided church is a defeated church. It has no power and no witness.

Q. 15. How has Satan attacked your church in these three areas?

THIRD DAY

The focus of the book of Acts is upon two unique individuals in the early church. In the first 12 chapters, the story focuses on the Apostle Peter, the Apostle to the Jews. You will remember that in Matt. 16:17-19, Jesus promised Peter a special place in the Church. He was the rock, the foundation upon which the church would be built. We see in the story of Acts how this was fulfilled. It was Peter who was the first leader of the Jerusalem church. It was through his influence that the 12th apostle was chosen. Peter spoke the first sermon to the crowd on the day of Pentecost at the birth of the Church. It was he who performed the first miracle. Peter was the spokesman before the Jewish leaders. He was used to authenticate the faith of the Samaritans and pass on to them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter was used again to open the door for Gentiles to enter into the church by preaching to Cornelius and witnessing the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles.

Q. 16. In what way could we say that the church in Ethiopia is founded upon Peter?

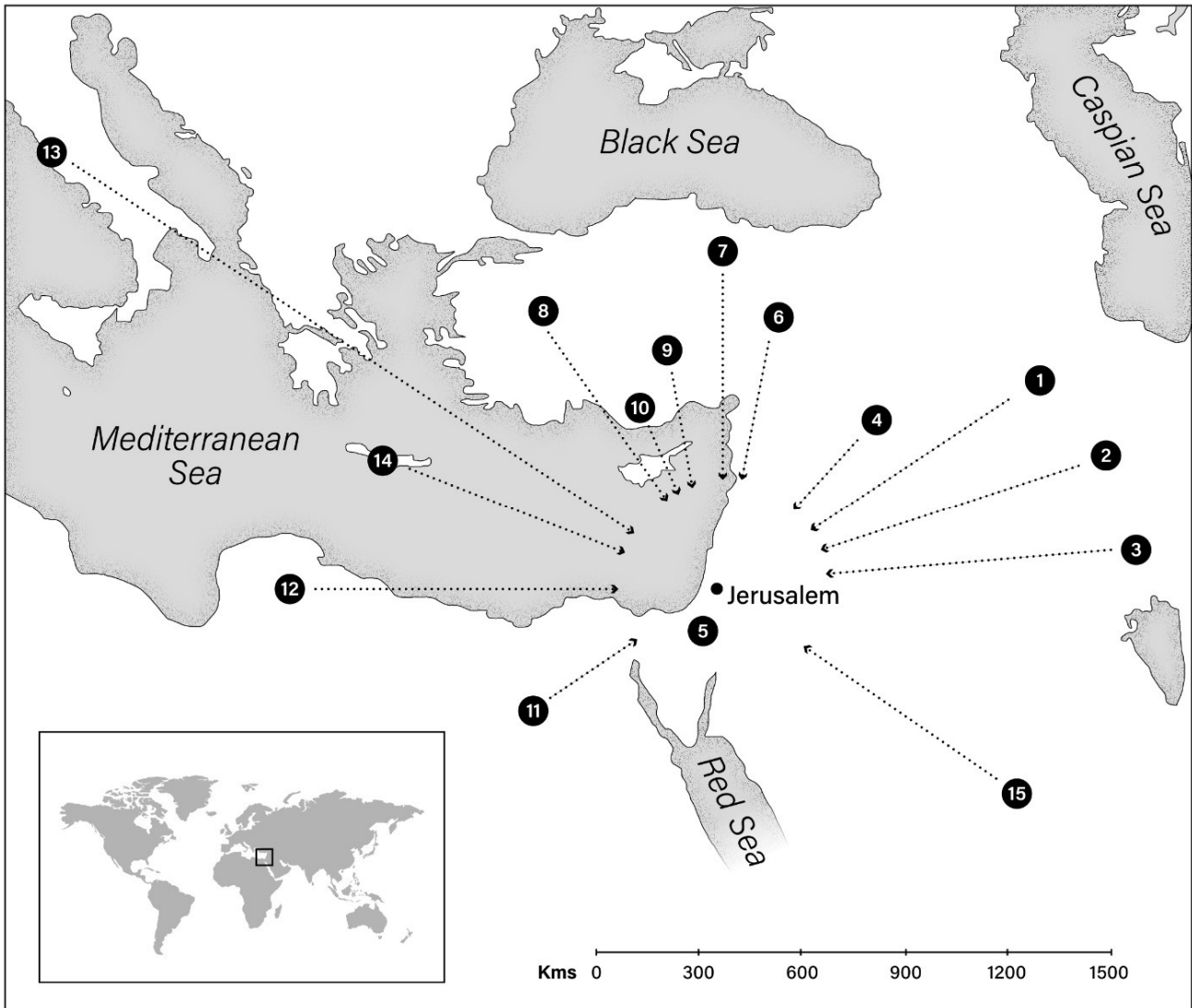
The focus of the last half of Acts is upon another man, Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. In Paul, God took an educated, zealous Jew who hated and persecuted the church, changed his life and used Paul to preach the Gospel throughout the world. In three missionary journeys and one journey to Rome, Paul and his companions reached out with the Gospel. On the first missionary journey, Paul took the Gospel to Asia Minor (now Turkey), especially in the province of Galatia. On the second missionary journey, Paul took the Gospel further, reaching into Europe, to Greece and especially

focusing on the city of Corinth. On the third missionary journey, Paul spent much time visiting and teaching in churches he had already started. But he made his major place of ministry Ephesus. It was out of Ephesus that Luke said that the Gospel reached the whole of Asia Minor. The book of Acts ends by showing how the Gospel reached into the capital city of the Roman empire, Rome. Rome would later become the headquarters of the Christian church for many centuries. Even today, the Catholic pope has his headquarters in the city of Rome.

Q. 17. Look at the four maps at the end of the book on the journeys of Paul. Make a list of the major cities where churches were started through the ministry of Paul.

Appendix A

Map: The Countries of People Mentioned at Pentecost



Legend:(in the order of Acts 2:9-11)

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|----------|
| ① Parthian Empire | ⑥ Cappadocia | ⑪ Egypt |
| ② Media | ⑦ Pontus | ⑫ Cyrene |
| ③ Elam | ⑧ Asia | ⑬ Rome |
| ④ Mesopotamia | ⑨ Phrygia | ⑭ Crete |
| ⑤ Judea | ⑩ Pamphylia | ⑮ Arabia |

Appendix B

Map: Roman provinces in Asia Minor



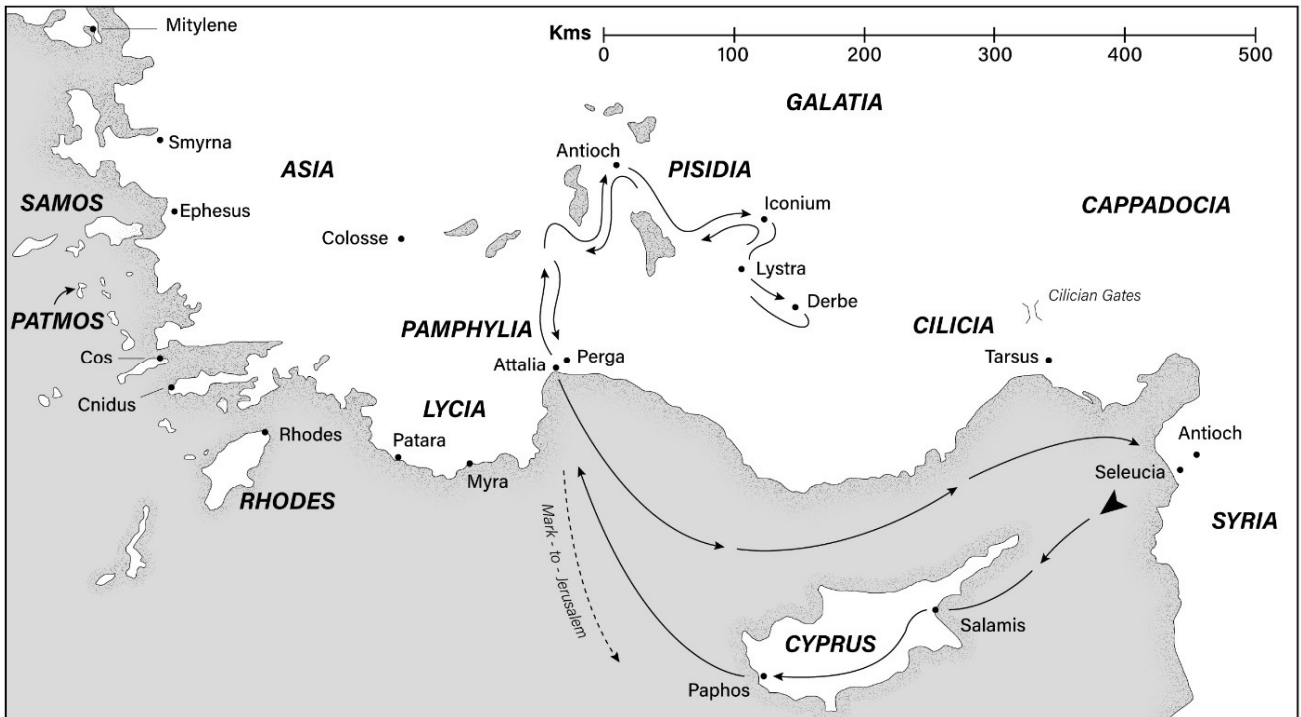
Map: The Expansion of the Roman Empire during the time of Christ



Legend: All territories within the bold borders were Roman provinces ruled directly by Roman authorities. Some regions like Judea (and others marked by the dotted line) were governed indirectly through allied vassal kings at the time of Jesus' birth. But this didn't last. Cappadocia became a Roman Province in AD 17 after the last king died, Lycia was annexed in AD 43, Mauritania in AD 44, Thrace was annexed after internal leadership struggles in AD 46. And Jerusalem was conquered after an uprising in AD 63, though the province of Judea still saw military conflicts to establish Roman control until AD 70.

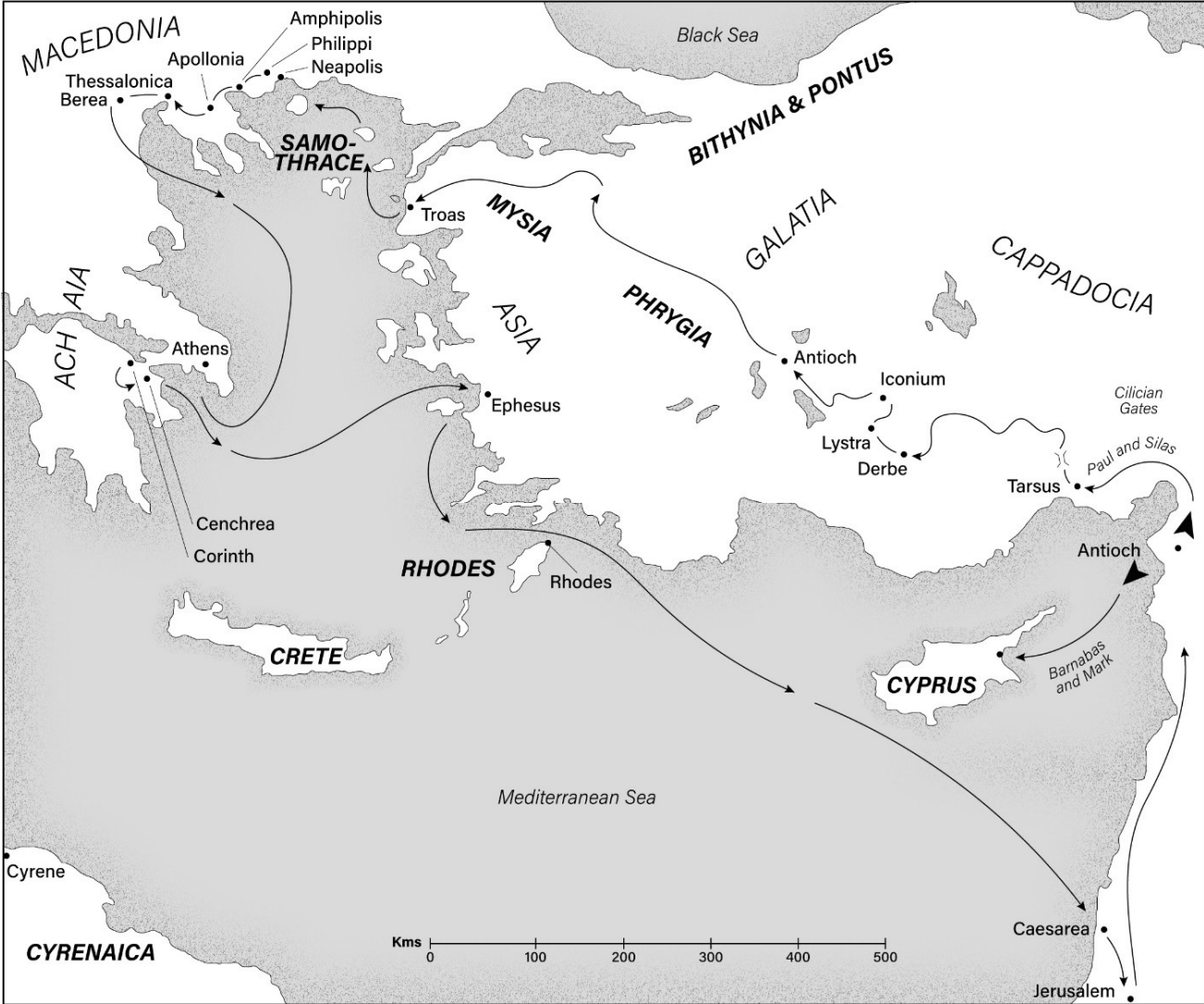
Appendix C

Map: Paul's First Missionary Journey



Appendix D

Map: Paul's Second Missionary Journey



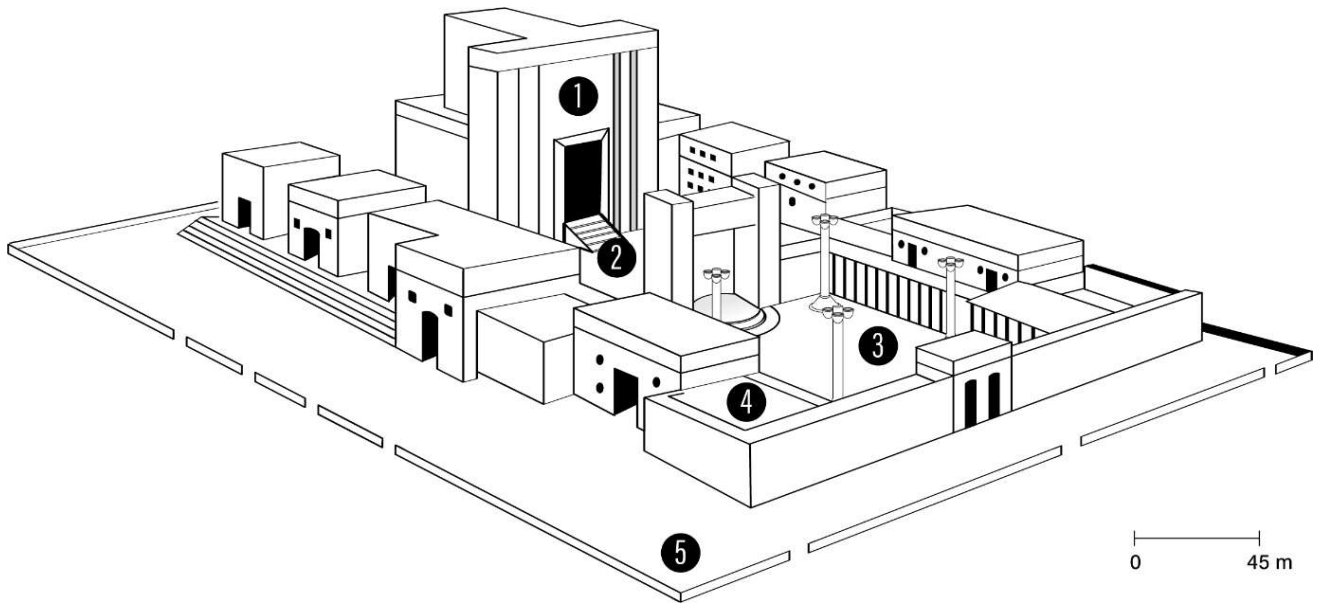
Appendix E

Map: Paul's Third Missionary Journey



Appendix F

Map: Jerusalem Temple Complex

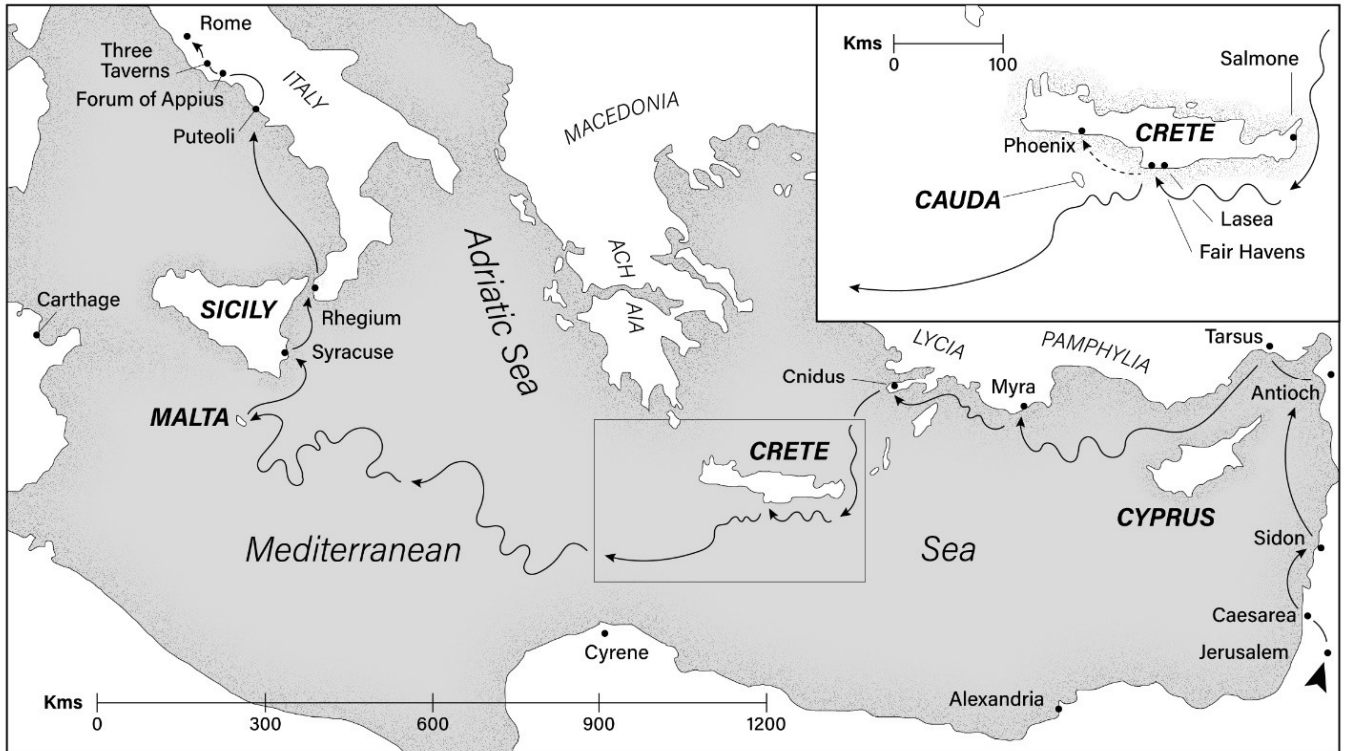


Legend:

- ① Temple
- ② Courtyard of Priests and Courtyard of Israel
- ③ Courtyard of Women
- ④ Storage buildings
- ⑤ A small wall within the wider temple complex to warn non-Jews (Gentiles) of entering the area around the temple

Appendix G

Map: Paul's Journey to Rome in Acts 27-28



Legend: A straight line shows smooth sailing, while a wiggly line symbolises rough sailing where the boat is blown around by strong winds and cannot proceed easily to its destination.