

Tuesday Morning Bible Class



Lord of the Lakes
LUTHERAN CHURCH

ACTS

WITH POWER AND PURPOSE

Acts 1:1–11

You will be my witnesses

Look

- Verse 1 *“In the first book, O Theophilus”*—Luke, the author of Acts, reminds his friend Theophilus of the first book he wrote for him, the gospel of Luke. (See Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; and Philemon 24 for other references to Luke.)
- Verse 6 *“Restore the kingdom to Israel”*—Many Jews hoped that the Messiah would bring back the glory days of David and Solomon to the physical nation of Israel. God’s kingdom would come, but not as they expected.

Discuss

1. List as many appearances of the risen Christ as you can recall. (verses 3, 4)
2. The coming of the Holy Spirit was such a special blessing that Jesus did not want his disciples to miss out on it. What gifts would the Holy Spirit give to them? (See also John 14:26.)
3. What was the mission plan for the disciples? (verse 8)
4. Why was it so important that Jesus ascend into heaven?
5. Explain how the words of the angels were both a gentle rebuke and a profound comfort.

Apply

6. The disciples wanted information about Jesus’ second coming. Jesus said they should focus only on what God wanted them to do now. How can we apply this to ourselves?

Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem to receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:12–26

God chooses an apostle to replace Judas

Look

Verse 18 “[Judas] *acquired a field*”—Judas bought the field indirectly. He threw the 30 pieces of silver into the temple and left (Matthew 27:5–8). The chief priests bought the field with Judas’ money.

Discuss

1. What did the disciples do between Jesus’ resurrection and the Day of Pentecost?
2. Describe the group that met in the upstairs room.
3. Peter knew that a replacement had to be found for Judas. How did he know that?
4. What qualifications were essential for the apostle who would replace Judas? Why were such high standards set?

Apply

5. Peter used the Holy Scriptures in verses 16 and 20 to give guidance to the group. Explain how his example gives direction to us when we are facing difficult decisions.
6. We no longer select men to be “apostles.” However, we still call Christians to serve in the public ministry. For apostles, Jesus emphasized the importance of being with him and hearing his words (John 17:6–12). Read 1 Timothy 3:1–12. What should we look for in our ministers? What shouldn’t we focus on when looking for a minister?

Christians sought guidance from the Word, and the Lord chose a new apostle.

Acts 2:1–21

Miraculous tongues announce the wonders of God

Look

Verse 1 *“When the day of Pentecost arrived”*—Pentecost was a Jewish festival called the Feast of Harvest or Weeks (Leviticus 23:15–22), similar to our Thanksgiving Day. All Jewish males were to bring gifts to the temple.

Verses 2, 3 *“A sound like a mighty rushing wind . . . divided tongues as of fire appeared”*—These were mysterious sights. There was no wind. Only the sound of the wind. Tongues of fire came to rest on the heads of the disciples, but they only seemed to be tongues of fire. One thing is clear, though. The symbolism of the wind and fire clearly pointed to the Holy Spirit. See Matthew 3:11 and John 3:8.

Discuss

1. The Holy Spirit equipped believers to speak in all the languages their audience spoke. What was the content of the apostles' message?
2. Why was Pentecost a good time for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the worldwide spread of the gospel?
3. What was the purpose of the signs and the gift of tongues?
4. Peter quoted Joel as prophesying that the events of Pentecost would occur “in the last days.” If Pentecost happened in the last days, what does that say about the time in which we are now living? Why is that important to know?

Apply

5. The prophet Joel not only announced that the Spirit would come in the last days. He also announced the imminent arrival of the end of the world (Joel 2:28–32). Where in Joel's words do you find sobering warning for sinners (the law)? Where in Joel's words do you find certain comfort for sinners (the gospel)?

On Pentecost, the Spirit announced the wonders of God to all nations. He opened Peter's mind to understand the Old Testament and gave him courage to preach about Jesus.

Acts 2:22–41

You crucified the Messiah, but he is your Savior too

Discuss

1. Peter knew that the people had no sense of what they had done. They were not terrified over God's impending wrath because of their rejection of his Son. What did Peter have to do before he could comfort them with the message that their sins were forgiven?
2. The knowledge that Jesus rose and now sits at God's right hand is comforting. But how did Peter's listeners handle the message of the resurrection, at least at first?
3. After describing the resurrection of Christ, Peter told the crowd, "King David said this very thing would happen." How did Peter demonstrate that the words of David from Psalm 16 referred not to David but to someone else?
4. From Jesus' resurrection, Peter moved on to Jesus' ascension. Again, Jesus' ascension is very comforting to us Christians. Yet Peter described it in such a way as to strike fear in the hearts of his audience. How did Peter do this? (verses 33–35)
5. Terrified sinners asked, "What shall we do?" (verse 37). Peter directed them to a wonderful gift, Baptism. What could they be certain Baptism would do for them?

Apply

6. Peter clearly assigned blame and guilt for the crucifixion of Christ to his audience (verses 36, 37). At the same time, he said that Jesus was handed over to them by God's set purpose and foreknowledge. What comfort does this give Christians when it appears that the forces of evil are succeeding? (See also Romans 8:28 and Genesis 45:4–8.)

Peter pointed out his audience's great evil. He told them that Jesus, whom they had killed, had risen from the dead and now sat at God's right hand. "Repent," Peter told them.

Acts 2:42–47

The Christian family grows in faith and in numbers

Look

Verse 42 *“The breaking of bread”*—While this may refer simply to their custom of eating meals together, it likely includes their celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

Discuss

1. The early Christians devoted themselves to four things. Explain how each was important to their life of faith.
 - The apostles’ teaching
 - Fellowship
 - The breaking of bread
 - Prayer
2. Describe the atmosphere of the early Christian church.

Apply

3. While early Christians did not practice pure socialism (there was still private ownership—see Acts 4:32–35), what were they clearly eager and willing to do? Compare their congregational life to your own. In what practical ways might we reflect that early Christian spirit?
4. “Day by day, attending the temple together.” What benefits do you think this daily activity brought into Christians’ lives? How might we learn from their example?

God’s family grew in love for their Lord and for one another.

Acts 3:1–26

God makes the lame walk and the guilty innocent

Look

Verse 15 *“You killed the Author of life”*—That man they had killed was God himself, the author of life. A stinging accusation, yet Peter’s words also highlight the miracle of Jesus being both God and man. For God to die is to know that Jesus’ sacrifice is of immense value.

Verse 17 *“You acted in ignorance”*—Peter was not denying their accountability. Rather, these words reflect the spirit in which he had preached harsh law. He felt sorry for them, sad at the trick Satan had pulled on them.

Discuss

1. The temple crowd saw a lame man walking. To what mistaken conclusion did they come?
2. When Peter reminded the crowd of what they had done to Jesus, he simply could have said, “You killed Jesus.” Instead, he added many details to allow the harsh reality of their evil to sink in. List various thoughts he used to point out the horror of their sin.
3. Explain how Peter encouraged them to repent. (verses 19–26)

Apply

4. One of the blessings of forgiveness is to experience “times of refreshing” (verse 20). Compare your attitude and feelings while hiding a sin to your attitude and feelings after confessing and hearing that you are forgiven.

A miracle of healing provided an opportunity to proclaim eternal healing in Jesus Christ.

Acts 4:1–22

We can't stop speaking

Look

Verse 2 *"[They were] greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead."* The Sadducees, which included the high priest at this time (Acts 5:17), took the lead in this arrest. They did not believe in life after death and took particular offense at this apostolic teaching.

Discuss

1. "While the rulers plotted to stop Christianity, God sat in heaven and laughed." Evaluate that thought based on verses 3 and 4.
2. What question gave the apostles the opportunity to give a witness to their faith? Summarize their answer.
3. Many claim that all people, whether Moslem or Jew or Christian or some other religion, worship the same God. What words of Peter contradict this modern opinion?
4. The Jewish leaders realized that many people had seen the miracle. What course of action do you think they should have taken? What course of action did they take?

Apply

5. The Jewish leaders saw that these bold and powerful witnesses were unschooled, ordinary people. What lesson might there be for you as you think about witnessing to your faith?
6. Sometimes we think it would be better if we never experienced trouble in this life. The apostles experienced trouble. How would such an event have strengthened their faith? How does God use difficulty in our lives to strengthen us?

Threats of physical loss could not stop the proclamation of eternal gain in Christ.

Acts 4:23–37

Bold in the face of suffering

Look

Verse 28 *“To do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place”*—God was in control. Though Jesus’ enemies may have thought their plan to stop Jesus was succeeding, God was frustrating their intentions and accomplishing his own plan to exalt his Son.

Discuss

1. The apostles and believers prayed to the Lord. What was the theme of their prayer? Use these verses as your outline.
 - Verse 24
 - Verses 25, 26
 - Verse 28
2. What is surprising—and admirable—about the Christians’ request in verse 29? For what might we have expected them to ask? What lesson does their example teach us?
3. How did God respond to their prayer?
4. How does Psalm 24:1 help us understand the attitude and actions described in Acts 4:32?

Apply

5. When confronted with a challenge from the rulers of their day, the believers reminded the Lord—and themselves!—that he had predicted Jesus would die. How might we use the following promises of God in a similar way?
 - Mark 10:29–30
 - Matthew 24:6–12

The believers praised the Lord for his power and control. They asked for spiritual strength to proclaim the truth boldly in the face of opposition. They shared with one another.

Acts 5:1–16

God is powerful in judgment and in love

Look

Verse 4 *“Was it [the money] not at your disposal? . . . You have not lied to men but to God.”* It wasn't a sin for Ananias to give only a portion of the sale price. He was free to give whatever he chose. His sin was lying. He told everyone that he had given the whole sale price, and he glorified himself, not God.

Discuss

1. What lesson did God teach by taking the lives of Ananias and Sapphira?

2. Compare the account of Ananias and Sapphira to Acts 4:36, 37. In what way are these accounts similar? What makes them very different?

Apply

3. *“Great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things”* (Acts 5:11). *“The angel said to [the shepherds], ‘Fear not’”* (Luke 2:10). Does God want us to be afraid? Does God want us not to be afraid? Explain how both are an essential part of our Christian lives.

4. The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira struck great fear in the hearts of all who heard. Yet more and more were added to the number of believers. Had we been there, we may have been afraid of what others would think and counseled God not to be so harsh in his preaching of the law. How does this bit of history of the early Christian church teach us to speak God's truth plainly and not worry that this will stifle interest among outsiders?

God punished hypocrisy severely. The church continued to grow.

Acts 5:17–42

Rejoice when you suffer for the name of Jesus

Look

Verse 34 *“But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel”*—Gamaliel’s most famous student was the apostle Paul (Acts 22:3).

Verse 37 *“Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census.”* Josephus reports that this Judas opposed Quirinius’ census of AD 6 (not the census during which Jesus was born). Judas claimed that it was not lawful to pay taxes to Caesar.

Discuss

1. If you had been released from an unjust imprisonment during the night, what would you naturally want to do? What did the apostles do?
2. It was a miracle that an angel broke at least 12 men out of prison. What added detail makes this miracle even more spectacular? (verse 23)
3. What was the bottom-line answer Peter gave the Sanhedrin? (verse 29)
4. Why did God raise Jesus to his own right hand as Prince and Savior?
5. Was Gamaliel’s advice good or bad?

Apply

6. The apostles rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of Jesus. Give examples of how your flesh has tricked you into fearing disgrace for Jesus’ name. Give examples of occasions when the Lord removed your fear of disgrace and gave you joy in witnessing boldly.

The Lord released his apostles from prison and permitted them to suffer for him.

Acts 6

Responsibility is shared that the Word might be spread

Look

Verse 5 *“Stephen, . . . Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus”*
—These seven all had Greek names. While spiritual qualities were primary in the selection process, these men may have had a special sensitivity to the Grecian complaint.

“Full of faith and of the Holy Spirit”—Every activity of life has a spiritual component. While common sense and technical proficiency are helpful for some aspects of congregational leadership, a faith regularly fed on the Word is essential. Leaders are prime targets for Satan’s attacks, whether they serve on the evangelism team or on the property committee. Regular Bible study and reception of the Lord’s Supper is how God builds up the church’s leaders.

Verse 9 *“Synagogue of the Freedmen”*—The members of this synagogue apparently had served as slaves in distant places (present-day Libya, Turkey, and Egypt) and, given the opportunity, had returned to their native land.

Discuss

1. The early church experienced growing pains. Widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. Why did the apostles feel that delegating this responsibility would be best?
2. After the responsibility was taken off the shoulders of the apostles, something wonderful happened. What was it?
3. The Lord used Stephen in special ways. In addition to helping with the food distribution, how did he serve his God?
4. After the Synagogue of the Freedmen had stirred up the people, they brought Stephen to the Sanhedrin and brought in false witnesses to testify against him. What was their charge?

Apply

5. How might you make sure that your shepherd can devote himself to prayer and the Word?

The apostles delegated certain tasks. The Word of God spread. Stephen was hauled before the Sanhedrin on charges of speaking against Moses and God’s laws.

Acts 7:1–43

You are repeating the sins of your fathers

Look

Verse 37 *“God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.”* Right before he died, Moses prophesied that God would continue to send prophets to speak his words to the Jews. This prophecy was ultimately fulfilled in the great Prophet, Jesus Christ. (See Deuteronomy 18:15.) History demonstrated that the Jewish forefathers had rejected the words God had spoken through Moses. They worshiped the idols of the nations around them. They had rejected the words of God. This was the theme of Stephen’s sermon, and in order to understand his sermon, we must realize that everything he said was spoken in condemnation of the Jews’ unbelief.

Discuss

1. It was the Jewish people, not Jesus or Stephen, who rejected God and his representatives. Look at each section of Stephen’s sermon, and tell whom the Jews’ ancestors had rejected.
 - Verses 2–10 (note verse 9)
 - Verses 11–29 (note verses 27–29)
 - Verses 30–36 (note verse 35)
 - Verses 37–41 (note verses 39–41)
 - Verses 42–43
2. Give examples from Stephen’s history lesson of how God was faithful and merciful.

Apply

3. Recall the incident of the golden calf (Exodus 32). Why did the Israelites feel justified in making the calf? How can we fall into the same sin? What is the antidote for this?

Stephen warned his audience that they were no different than their ancestors. He also gave evidence of God’s faithfulness to his promises

Acts 7:44–60

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit

Discuss

1. Stephen was near the end of his sermon. He had defended himself against the second charge, that he was speaking against God's laws and changing the customs handed down by Moses. Now he brought up the issue of the temple. The Sanhedrin's false witnesses had accused Stephen of speaking against the temple and saying that Jesus would destroy it. Compare the Sanhedrin's accusation against Stephen in regard to the temple (Acts 6:13, 14) with their accusation against Christ (see John 2:19–22 and Mark 14:57, 58).
 - What does Stephen affirm about the Jews' practices in verses 44–47?
 - For what does he fault the Jews for in verses 49 and 50?
2. What was the conclusion of Stephen's sermon?
3. Pride leads sinners stung by the law to lash out mindlessly. How was this demonstrated here?

Apply

4. What comfort does the Lord give us by describing how Stephen died?
5. The Sanhedrin had a sinful understanding of the temple. They seem to have been more concerned about preserving a structure than they were about preserving the Lord's truth. Explain how we can fall into a similar trap. Then describe a God-pleasing attitude toward worship facilities.

Blind unbelief killed yet another prophet. Stephen saw, then experienced, his eternal prize

Acts 8:1–25

Winds of opposition spread gospel seeds

Look

Verse 16 *"[The Holy Spirit] had not yet fallen on any of them."* 1 Corinthians 12:3 says, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit." Because they believed (Acts 8:12), we know that the Holy Spirit had already come upon them to work faith. Peter was praying that they be given the visible gifts of the Spirit, which the disciples had received on Pentecost. This would give them and the church in Jerusalem a clear understanding that God had accepted the Samaritans into the church. (Note: This would happen again when God sent the Spirit on the household of Cornelius to prove to the church in Jerusalem that God indeed did want the Gentiles to be part of the church.)

Verse 17 *"[Peter and John] laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit."* Samaritans and Jews had lived in an atmosphere of hostility for years. Here God used prominent leaders of the church, Peter and John, to make a public demonstration of the unity shared by all believers. As Jesus had promised in Acts 1:8, the apostles would witness even in Samaria.

Discuss

1. The devil wanted to use persecution to crush the church. How did God turn evil into good?
2. What blessings did the Lord give through the miraculous signs performed by Philip?
3. Simon fell into a great sin. Why was his desire to buy God's power wrong?

Apply

4. Imagine being a Christian mother or father or child driven by persecution from the home you've lived in all your life. What temptations do we face when we suffer loss? What should we do when we are persecuted?

Persecution planted Christians in new mission fields. The church spread.

Acts 8:26–40

The promised Messiah has come

Look

Verse 32 *“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter.”* Even before the arrival of Jesus, Jews understood these verses from Isaiah as referring to the coming Messiah. By the time Jesus came, many of those who rejected him reinterpreted this section to refer to the people of Israel, falsely suggesting that the persecution and eventual rebirth of the Jewish nation were foreshadowed by these verses.

Verse 38 *“They both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and [Philip] baptized him.”* We don’t know whether Philip immersed the eunuch or just poured water on him. Since the descriptions “went down into the water” and “came up out of the water” apply to both Philip and the Ethiopian, the phrases by themselves are neutral on this issue, unless Philip immersed himself too, which is not likely. God gives no instructions concerning how water should be applied. What is important is that water is used, connected with God’s powerful Word.

Discuss

1. The Ethiopian eunuch was reading from Isaiah chapter 53. Read Isaiah 53:2–12. Pick out phrases that point to the coming Messiah, and explain how Jesus fulfilled them.
2. Though we don’t hear it specifically mentioned, what teaching must Philip have included in his witness to the Ethiopian? (See Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38.)

Apply

3. Philip began his evangelism encounter with the Ethiopian by asking a question (verse 30). What role did Philip’s question play in the rest of his witnessing opportunity? Give examples of how we might use questions in witnessing encounters. What advantages are there to beginning a conversation about the Lord in that way?

The Spirit announced to a gentile believer that the Messiah had arrived. The Ethiopian went on his way, filled with joy.

Acts 9:1–19

Jesus came to save sinners, of whom I am the worst

Look

Verse 2 *“Belonging to the Way”*—Those believing that Jesus Christ was “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6) were members of the Way. We hear this label used to identify followers of Jesus also during Paul’s ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:9, 23) and in Paul’s trial before Felix (Acts 24:14–22).

Verse 11 *“Street called Straight”*—Straight Street was the main east-west road through the city of Damascus. It was called straight because most of the other roads in town were crooked.

Discuss

1. Imagine you are Saul. What frightened you most about the encounter with Jesus? What about the encounter comforted you?
2. What reasons did Ananias have for not obeying the Lord’s instruction?
3. The Lord was well aware of Saul’s history. What plan did God have for Saul?
4. Demonstrate from Ananias’ words to Saul that he no longer saw Saul as an enemy on whom he wished evil but as a partner in spreading the gospel.

Apply

5. Read 2 Corinthians 11:23–29 and 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10. The Lord would ask Paul to suffer greatly for speaking the truth. Paul did not see this as a curse but as a privilege and honor. Why? Explain how the truths that strengthened Paul can also strengthen us in our suffering. (See also 1 Peter 4:12–14 and Romans 5:3, 4.)

The darkness of Saul’s unbelief was shattered by the bright light of Jesus’ power and forgiving love.

Acts 9:20–31

The former persecutor bravely faces persecution

Look

Verses 22, 23 In the time between verses 22 and 23, Paul probably went to Arabia and stayed there for some time. That is where the Lord Jesus may have taught him personally. (See Galatians 1:17, 18.)

Verse 27 *“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.”* Barnabas is first introduced in Acts 4:36. He sold a field and gave the money to the Lord. His name was actually Joseph, but he was given the name Barnabas, which means “son of encouragement.” The church recognized in this Levite from Cyprus a special spiritual gift. Barnabas bravely introduced Saul, the former persecutor, to the Jerusalem flock.

Discuss

1. When the Holy Spirit creates faith, bringing one who is spiritually dead to spiritual life, everything changes. Compare Saul’s behavior before his conversion to his actions afterward.
2. How did the Lord protect Paul from persecution in Damascus?
3. How did the brothers in Jerusalem respond when they became aware of a plot on Paul’s life?
4. The Lord brought much good through Paul’s conversion. A soul was saved. A voice was added to the Christian witness. What other effect did Paul’s conversion have on the believers living in Israel? (See Acts 8:1–3.)

Apply

5. Sometimes love for the unbeliever or the false believer tells us not to argue or debate our faith. But is it really wrong to do so? Consider Paul’s example.

Paul boldly confessed Jesus and suffered as a result, first in Damascus and then in Jerusalem.

Acts 9:32–43

Powerful deeds accompany powerful words

Look

- Verse 32 *"[Peter] came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda."* The landlocked city of Jerusalem was served by the Mediterranean port of Joppa, about 38 miles to Jerusalem's west. The city of Lydda was along this important route, about 11 miles southeast of Joppa.
- Verse 40 *"[Peter] knelt down and prayed."* Peter knew that the Lord had the power to raise Dorcas from the dead. As Jesus had instructed, Peter must have prayed, "Let your will be done." And it was.
- Verse 43 *"[Peter] stayed . . . with one Simon, a tanner."* Many Jews looked down on tanners because in their work of turning animal hides into leather, they had regular contact with death and were ceremonially unclean. Peter, who continued to grow in his understanding that Jesus had fulfilled and made obsolete the Old Testament ceremonial law, associated comfortably with this man.

Discuss

1. What blessings did the Lord bring about through the healing of Aeneas and the raising of Tabitha?
2. Miracles of the sort Peter performed had a very specific purpose. Read John 20:30, 31. What *wasn't* the purpose of miraculous signs? What did God wish to accomplish through them?

Apply

3. Many today claim the ability to work miraculous signs. Discuss how present-day claims compare to the actions of Peter. Read Deuteronomy 18:20–22; Matthew 24:24; and 1 Timothy 6:3, 4. What standard can we use to determine whether those claiming miraculous powers are acting as the representatives of God or Satan?

Peter strengthened saints and spread the Word in the cities near the Mediterranean Sea. Powerful signs accompanied him.

Acts 10:1–23

Salvation is for all—part 1

Look

The Lord has always desired that all be saved, both Jew and Gentile. After Adam and Eve's sin, he promised that someone would come and crush Satan's head. This was a message of comfort for all people. But people rejected this salvation, and God sent a flood. Again the Lord showered the whole world with the good news of salvation. But once again, people rejected God's way, glorying in themselves and building the Tower of Babel. As time went on, God focused his undeserved love on one family, that of Abraham. Abraham's family was to hold on to the promise, be a light to the world as they experienced a rich outpouring of God's blessings, and be the nation from whom the Savior would come. To keep them as a light to the nations, God made a distinction between his people and the other nations. But when Jesus died for the sins of the world, and when he poured out his Spirit on Pentecost, there was no need for the Jewish witness. Jews and Gentiles would be united in the New Testament church. This lesson God wanted Peter and the entire church to learn.

Discuss

1. The first part of the account points to the object of the Lord's concern. Who was that?
2. In verse 9, the Lord began to prepare Peter for his role in this object lesson. Compare Peter's vision of the animals let down in a sheet with Leviticus 11:1–8; 46; 47. Explain why Peter had difficulty with God's command to kill and eat. How did the Lord deal with Peter's concerns?
3. While Peter's vision focused on food, the immediate application centered on people. What happened "by coincidence" as Peter was thinking about the lesson God has just shown him?

Apply

4. How does this account help us understand the Old Testament laws?

The Lord showed Peter that laws of clean and unclean animals no longer applied. Peter was to go with "unclean" Gentiles to visit more "unclean" Gentiles.

Acts 10:24–48

Salvation is for all—part 2

Look

Verse 35 *“In every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”* This statement could be construed as if Peter was teaching work-righteousness. The point is not that we are to do something to be accepted by God but that God accepts people from every nation who have come to faith and are expressing their faith in what they do. This describes every Christian. Peter realized that God’s church includes believers from all nations.

Verse 46 *“Speaking in tongues”*—At the end of Peter’s sermon, the Holy Spirit poured out miraculous gifts on the Gentiles. In the light of today’s debate on speaking in tongues, note that Peter explains what these gifts were. He said that these Gentiles “have received the Holy Spirit just as we have” (verse 47). Later, when he was asked by the believers in Jerusalem why he had gone into the home of a Gentile, he explained, “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15). According to Peter, then, the gift of speaking in tongues was the ability to speak in known foreign languages, just as the apostles had done on Pentecost. This rules out most, if not all, tongues speaking composed of random syllables.

Discuss

1. What two miracles coincided to bring about this event?
2. Summarize the content of Peter’s sermon. (verses 34–43)
3. After Peter preached the good news about Jesus, how did the Holy Spirit show yet again that God desired all to be saved, including Gentiles?

Apply

4. At what point did God pour out the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his household? What does this teach us?

Through the message of the forgiveness of sins, the Lord poured out his Spirit on the Gentiles. God demonstrated his desire that all be saved.

Acts 11

The believers encourage one another

Look

Verse 17 *"If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"* This event played a critical role when the believers in Jerusalem were honestly wrestling to determine if God would accept the Gentiles without forcing them to become Jews through circumcision.

Discuss

1. We see a division among the believers in Jerusalem. There were three groups who thought differently about circumcision. Some no longer practiced Jewish laws. Some practiced them as reminders of Jesus' work and did not insist that others do the same. Others felt that circumcision was required if a person wanted to be a Christian. Which group challenged Peter?
2. What was the outcome of Peter's explanation? What does this say about the power of the Word? What does this say about God's wisdom to foresee what the church needs?
3. How did the episode with Cornelius help the church in the next stage of its development?

Apply

4. Agabus predicted a famine. Explain how Christians used this tragedy as opportunity.
5. When we see fellow Christians serving the Lord, we may conclude, "Well, that's what they're supposed to be doing" and say nothing good or bad. What is the danger in that attitude? How might we follow Barnabas' example in regard to our fellow Christians?

The issue about circumcision was resolved for a time. The church continued to grow.

Acts 12

Pride leads to persecution, which leads to prayer

Look

- Verse 1 *"Herod"*—This is Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, the man who killed the infants at Bethlehem.
- Verse 2 *"James"*—There were two prominent men named James in the early church. There was the apostle James. He was killed. There was also James, the brother of Jesus, who held the chief leadership position in the church in Jerusalem after Peter left.
- Verse 15 *"It is his angel!"* Some Jews believed that children of God each had a particular angel, who, when making himself visible, would look like that person.

Discuss

1. The love of human praise led both to Peter's arrest and to Herod's death. Explain.
2. Give evidence that makes it appear the jailers were well aware of what happened the last time Peter was thrown into prison (See Acts 5:18, 19.)
3. Notice the response of the people in Mary's house who were praying for Peter's release? Why is it sometimes surprising when God answers our prayers?
4. Why did the Lord put Herod to death?

Apply

5. The apostle James died by Herod's sword. The apostle Peter miraculously escaped from prison. Doesn't the Lord say that he works out all things for the good of his people?
6. In the past, pastors often remained with their flocks in times of plague or persecution. They wanted to serve their people with the Word. Was it wrong for Peter to leave Jerusalem?

The Lord freed Peter from Herod's prison. Then he killed proud Herod and gave the church a time of growth and peace.

Acts 13:1–12

Paul and Barnabas begin their first missionary journey

Look

Verse 1 *“Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch”*—This was the Herod who had beheaded John the Baptist and put the robe on Jesus immediately before the crucifixion. The Lord had brought to faith his foster brother!

Verse 5 *“They had John to assist them.”* This John was a cousin of Barnabas and son of the Mary in whose home the believers were praying when Peter was in prison (Acts 12:12). He accompanied Saul and Barnabas back to Antioch (Acts 12:25) after they had delivered gifts for those suffering from famine in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30). He also accompanied them on this first overseas mission journey.

Discuss

1. The gathering of believers at Antioch was well served by a diverse group of five spiritual leaders. What new plan did the Holy Spirit have for this congregation?
2. Read God’s marching orders for the apostle Paul in Acts 9:15. To whom would Paul speak about the Lord’s name? How did Paul begin carrying out this assignment already on Cyprus?
3. Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul, was well aware of the miracle Paul had worked. What was it, however, that amazed him? What role did the miracle play in this process?

Apply

4. The devil works hard to present error in a good light. He calls false doctrine “just another perspective.” He calls sin an “alternative lifestyle.” He presents those holding to and promoting error as simply having “a different point of view.” Look at the labels Paul applies to Elymas in verse 10. As we face false teachers in our day, of what truths do these labels remind us?

The Holy Spirit graciously brought the truth to the people of Cyprus. Paul and Barnabas confronted Elymas and brought the proconsul of the island to faith.

Acts 13:13–47

Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you

Look

- Verse 14 *“Antioch in Pisidia”*—This city is located in the region of Galatia. Later on, the congregation there would have been one of the recipients of Paul’s letter to the Galatians.
- Verse 47 *“I have made you a light for the Gentiles.”* These words from Isaiah chapter 49 refer specifically to Jesus, the Savior of all nations. Simeon notes this when holding the baby Jesus in his arms, calling him the “light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32). Paul explains to unbelieving Jews that he will continue the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy by proclaiming the light of Christ to all.

Discuss

1. The Jewish congregation in Antioch began their worship service with readings from the Law and the Prophets. In his sermon Paul refers repeatedly to the Law and Prophets and quotes from them. Explain why this was important as Paul introduced Jesus to these people.
2. Spend time examining Paul’s sermon. The verse references break Paul’s sermon into smaller segments. Try to isolate the main point in each section. Note how Paul drew every part of his sermon from the Scriptures the Jewish people held sacred.
 - Verses 16–20
 - Verses 20–22
 - Verses 23–25
 - Verses 26–31
 - Verses 32–37
 - Verses 38–41

Apply

3. The message Paul shared was good news. Jesus had died for the sins of everyone there. After such a “positive” message, why did Paul go on to speak a harsh warning? (verse 41)

Paul recounted God’s promises and announced that Jesus fulfilled them all

Acts 13:48–14:7

Joy and opposition greet the good news

Look

13:48 *“As many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”* Before the creation of the world God chose those who would be saved (Ephesians 1:4). Those in Antioch whom God had graciously chosen were led to faith, a natural next step on their path to eternal life. The truth of predestination brings great comfort when we see our own human weakness and know that on our own we would surely fall. The Lord reminds us, “Your salvation is my work, from start to finish.”

Discuss

1. What was the result of Paul’s sermon? Note: This pattern would repeat itself over and over again throughout Paul’s ministry.
2. In both Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13) and Iconium (Acts 14), Paul began his ministry in the Jewish synagogue. Why? (Hint: Refer to 13:16. Also see Romans 1:16.)
3. Compare the opposition Paul and Barnabas faced in Antioch in Pisidia to what they faced in Iconium. In what ways was the opposition similar? In what ways was it different?

Apply

4. People sometimes argue that since God elected some to come to faith, our attitude and zeal don’t matter; God’s elect will be found. Others argue that since Paul “spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed” and that Paul’s boldness contributed to the success of the gospel, it all depends on our zeal and attitude. Evaluate those positions.

Paul and Barnabas preached in Antioch and Iconium and were persecuted for the gospel in both cities. Nevertheless, their work produced fruit among the Jews and the Gentiles and the Word of God spread throughout the region.

Acts 14:8–20

We are only humans announcing good news

Look

Verse 11 *“The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!”*—A local legend encouraged the crowd’s response. Supposedly Zeus and Hermes had appeared once before in human disguise, but the people had rejected them. The current inhabitants of Lystra did not want to repeat the mistake.

Verse 16 *“In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.”* God was not happy that nations were going their own way. Paul is not saying that in the past, people could worship whomever they pleased and still get to heaven. Rather, Paul is describing an act of God’s forbearance. God did not immediately judge them for their wickedness. Rather, he gave them evidence of his divine presence and his love. (The implication is this: But now the gospel is being preached to all people. God will quickly judge those who reject his Son.)

Discuss

1. What was the first thing Paul and Barnabas did in the city of Iconium? What happened?
2. Paul and Barnabas did not want the crowd to sacrifice to them. The Jews from Antioch and Iconium did not want Paul and Barnabas to be honored either. Compare the motives of the apostles to those of the Jews.
3. What persecution did the believers endure? What boldness did Paul put on display?

Apply

4. Read Acts 20:28; Luke 17:10; and 1 Corinthians 3:5–7. Describe how the Lord wants spiritual leaders to think about themselves.

The apostles suffered persecution in Lystra. Yet the Lord continued to build his church.

Acts 14:21–28

We commit you to the Lord

Look

Verse 21 *“They returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch.”* Though persecuted in Antioch, threatened in Iconium, and stoned in Lystra, Paul and Barnabas visited all three cities a second time, considering the opportunity to encourage the new disciples of more value than their lives.

Verse 23 *“Prayer and fasting”*—While not obligated to fast anymore by Old Testament ceremonial regulations, these new Christians found benefit in the custom. Their temporary change in eating habits may have helped them remember what a special, undeserved privilege prayer is and helped them think about the Lord.

Discuss

1. Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps, visiting every new congregation again. What important work did they do on these second visits?
2. The congregations in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch were brand new to the Christian faith. Even their leaders, who were no doubt well versed in the Old Testament, were recent converts to Jesus. What action on the part of Paul and Barnabas reminded all involved where true strength and unity would be found?
3. How do we know that Paul and Barnabas gave God all the glory for blessings received during their first mission trip?

Apply

4. On their trip to visit Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch a second time, Paul and Barnabas encouraged the believers by saying, *“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”* (verse 22). What temptations does Satan bring in times of trouble? Explain how words that guarantee hardship are an encouragement for the children of God.

The missionaries visited their newborn congregations again, reminding them where to find true strength.

Acts 15:1–21

We agree that salvation is by grace

Look

Verse 1 *“Unless you are circumcised . . . you cannot be saved.”* Those who promoted this teaching did not understand that circumcision was no longer needed in the New Testament church. They also seemed to have misunderstood the role of circumcision even in Old Testament times. They considered it a good work rather than as the way through which the Lord adopted them as members of his people Israel. Paul deals with the same misunderstanding later, noting that even Abraham was a believer without circumcision. Circumcision was a sign that sealed to him the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised (Romans 4:11). Salvation has always come by faith alone.

Verse 10 *“A yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear”*—Moses’ law was added not to give salvation but so that sin might increase (Romans 5:20). God wanted people to see just how evil they were so that they might fully appreciate God’s undeserved gift of life through the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Discuss

1. A dispute arose in the Antioch church. Paul and Barnabas knew they were correct. Yet what did they and the believers in Antioch decide to do to resolve the issue? Explain why this decision was a loving response to those who were in error.
2. What was Peter’s main point in his address to the council?
3. What were Paul’s and Barnabas’ contributions to the discussion?

Apply

4. Describe the role that James played in this discussion. Read 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, and explain how we can learn from James’ example.

The Christian church met to discuss whether keeping the Jewish laws was necessary for salvation. The church affirmed salvation by grace alone and remained united in the truth.

Acts 15:22–35

Brotherly love rights wrongs

Look

- Verse 22 *“They sent . . . Silas”*—This well-respected messenger from Jerusalem would later return to Antioch a second time and accompany Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:40).
- Verse 24 *“Troubled you with words, unsettling your minds”*—Jews from Judea had traveled to Antioch and had told gentile Christians that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Many of these Gentiles had been deeply troubled by the suggestion that simple trust in Jesus was not enough for salvation.
- Verse 29 *“Abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled”*—Eating these foods was no longer in itself sinful. The Old Testament ceremonial law had expired. However, the leaders understood that many Jews would be troubled by such practices. They encouraged Gentiles to show love to their Jewish brothers, giving up for now practices neither commanded nor forbidden by God (Romans 14:14, 15). (Note: The letter mentions immorality, which is a sin. In Greek society, however, sexual activity associated with worship was not considered wrong.)

Discuss

1. The false teachers from Jerusalem had told the Gentiles in Antioch that since they hadn't been circumcised, they were not saved. Which words in the response of the elders in Jerusalem would have reassured the troubled Gentiles?

2. Describe the Gentiles' reaction to the Jerusalem letter.

Apply

3. The Jerusalem believers wrote a letter to their gentile brothers, but they also sent along two representatives. What wisdom do you see in this plan? What insight does this give us as we communicate truths of God to fellow believers and to unbelievers, particularly in an age when communication often occurs at a distance (telephone, e-mail, etc.)?

Jewish Christians reassured their gentile brothers that salvation is by grace. All rejoiced.

Acts 15:36–16:10

The Lord determines our steps

Look

- 15:39 *“There arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other”*—The Lord graciously restored unity. Paul later speaks approvingly of Barnabas’ work (1 Corinthians 9:6) and also comes to think very highly of John Mark (2 Timothy 4:11).
- 16:6 *“Forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia”*—This Roman province of Asia occupied the southwestern part of present-day Turkey. Ephesus was its most prominent city.
- 16:7 *“They attempted to go into Bithynia”*—This Roman province lay on the northern edge of present-day Turkey, just south of the Black Sea.

Discuss

1. Why didn’t Paul want to bring John Mark along on his second journey? How did the Lord use their disagreement for the good of the church?
2. Paul shared the good news that circumcision was not necessary for salvation. Why then did he circumcise Timothy, his new partner in ministry? (See Acts 15:1, 2 and 1 Corinthians 9:22.)
3. Paul intended to preach the good news in the Roman provinces of Asia and Bithynia. What prevented him from carrying out this plan?

Apply

4. Paul intended to preach the good news in Asia. The Holy Spirit prevented him. Paul then decided to go to the province of Bithynia. The Spirit of Jesus did not permit it. When Christians desire to share the good news of Jesus, at times it may appear that they are running into roadblocks. How can Paul’s experience encourage us in our outreach efforts?

Paul brought a new companion, Silas, on his next mission trip. The team was directed by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 16:11–24

The name of Jesus defeats the devil

Look

Verse 12 *“Philippi . . . a Roman colony”*—Caesar Augustus named Philippi a Roman colony, giving it a unique status among other cities in the empire. It had the right to govern itself, it didn’t have to pay taxes to Rome, and it enjoyed all the rights of a city in Italy. Many Roman soldiers were given land in this area as payment for service to the Caesars.

Verse 13 *“On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer.”* Customarily Paul would begin his work in a new city by visiting the synagogue (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1). In Philippi, however, it seems there was no synagogue. (Ten Jewish males were needed to begin a synagogue, which indicated there were not many Jews in Philippi.)

Discuss

1. Which words tell us that the conversion of Lydia was a miracle worked by the Lord?
2. The evil spirit in the slave girl was speaking the truth. Why did God drive the spirit from her?
3. Why were the slave girl’s owners upset at her healing? How did they alter their accusation when they came before the magistrates, and what benefit did they gain by doing that?
4. What mistake did the magistrates make in their quick reaction to the charges against Paul?

Apply

5. People in Philippi were willing to pay a great deal of money in the hope of discovering information about the future. Read Proverbs 3:5 and Romans 8:38. Why is it wrong to seek information about the future from any place other than God’s Word? How can Christians be content though many details of the future are unknown?

The message of Jesus Christ opened Lydia’s heart and drove Satan from a slave girl.

Acts 16:25–40

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved

Look

Verse 28 *“Paul cried with a loud voice, ‘Do not harm yourself.’”* The context (verse 29) suggests that Paul and Silas were still inside the prison, while the jailer was outside, observing the destruction from there. Not seeing any prisoners, the jailer assumed they were all gone and intended to kill himself. Paul saw the jailer from inside the prison and stopped his sword.

Verses 30, 31 *“What must I do to be saved? . . . Believe in the Lord Jesus.”* Who knows what kind of answer the jailer expected. How amazing that Paul’s answer was “You need to do nothing. The Lord has done it all. Trust him.”

Discuss

1. Two types of washings occurred in Philippi that night (verse 33). Read 1 Peter 3:21. In what way were the washings similar? In what way were they different?
2. When Peter was in prison in Jerusalem, the Lord freed him quietly and secretly. Here, the Lord made all kinds of commotion. Why the difference?
3. Why did Paul insist that the magistrates escort them out personally?

Apply

4. Paul and Silas were singing prayers to the Lord as they endured the brutal discomfort of stocks and suffered the indignity of false imprisonment. Why could the apostles glorify God even in prison? Discuss how trouble in our lives can be a unique opportunity for witnessing to those around us.

The Lord snatched a jailer from death and gave him eternal life.

Acts 17:1–15

They examined the Scriptures every day

Look

- Verse 1 *“They came to Thessalonica.”* Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. In spite of intense persecution, the Christian congregation there thrived and served as a witness of Christ for the entire region.
- Verse 3 *“Proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead”*—Many saw the promised Messiah as a conqueror, who would set up an earthly kingdom. A dead Messiah was unthinkable. Paul dispelled this popular misconception by demonstrating from Scripture the true character of the Messiah: he was a suffering servant, who would seem to be crushed by physical enemies. However, he would conquer the real enemy, death, by rising from the dead. Then Paul would announce: *“Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah!”*
- Verse 13 *“Jews from Thessalonica . . . Paul at Berea”*—Berea lay in a mountainous region about 55 miles to the southwest of Thessalonica.

Discuss

1. What accusations did the Thessalonians level against Paul and Silas? In whose footsteps were the Thessalonians following? (See Luke 23:2.)
2. Right away the Lord brought persecution into the lives of the new Christians. Who was persecuted first?

Apply

3. What Berean characteristics does the Holy Spirit hold up as admirable? Explain why such activity on the part of Christians is just as important today as it was in Paul’s day.
4. How many people came to faith in Thessalonica? in Berea? What does this teach us about how God works through his Word?

Paul announced that the Messiah had to die and rise again. The Bereans searched the Scriptures.

Acts 17:16–34

What you worship as unknown will be made known

Look

- Verse 18 *“Epicurean and Stoic philosophers”*—Epicureans taught that happiness is one’s highest goal. They gloried in the sensual. Stoics promoted the opposite, claiming the control of fleshly desires as key to good living. They gloried in pride.
- “What does this babbler wish to say?”* The Epicureans and Stoics saw a purpose only in this life. Paul’s teaching of the resurrection confessed a life after this one, a concept that would undermine both Epicurean and Stoic principles.
- Verse 30 *“The times of ignorance God overlooked”*—Paul is not saying that God does not eternally punish sins committed in ignorance (Romans 2:12). Rather, Paul is saying that in the past God simply let them go their own way (Acts 14:16), that is, he did not directly confront them. Now, however, because of Jesus, God was showering on the nations undeserved mercy. He was warning them to repent and announcing to them forgiveness in Jesus.

Discuss

1. Paul followed his usual practice of preaching in the synagogue to Jews and gentile converts. He does not seem to have had much success. He also spoke to people in the marketplace. Finally, he had a chance to speak with Greek philosophers. Summarize Paul’s sermon by pointing out the key thoughts in these verses.
 - Verses 22, 23
 - Verses 24, 25
 - Verses 26, 27
 - Verses 29–31
2. How did the members of the Areopagus respond? What lesson might we learn from the results of Paul’s work in Athens compared to his work in Thessalonica and Berea?

Apply

3. Mention aspects of our society that properly distress us. How might we repeat Paul’s godly response to things that bothered him?

Paul proclaimed the gospel in Athens and was largely rejected by the philosophers there.

Acts 18:1–17

Do not be afraid, for I am with you

Look

- Verse 12 *“When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia”*—Gallio served in this office during the years AD 51 and 52.
- Verse 17 *“Sosthenes”*—Probably one of the Jewish persecutors (who had succeeded Crispus as the synagogue ruler after the latter had become a Christian). But there are other views, especially in light of 1 Corinthians 1:1.

Discuss

1. For the most part the Roman empire accepted and legalized Judaism. But for some reason Emperor Claudius had ejected the Jews from Rome. How did God use this in his mission plans for Paul?
2. What was the usual pattern of preaching, acceptance, and rejection that Paul faced in each city? How did this play out in Corinth according to verses 1–8?
3. How did the Lord encourage Paul?
4. Persecution did not quickly die out. After a time, it came back in full force. How did God fulfill the promise he had made to Paul in verses 9 and 10?

Apply

5. When Paul first arrived in Corinth, he spent significant time making tents. When Silas and Timothy arrived, it appears they helped support or brought gifts for Paul so that he could focus on sharing the Word. In what ways can members of a congregation ensure that their spiritual leaders are able to devote themselves to the study and sharing of God’s Word?

The Lord promised to protect Paul as he did his missionary work in Corinth. God controlled everything that happened so that his elect would be found and brought to faith.

Acts 18:18–28

Priscilla and Aquila round out Apollos' education

Look

- Verse 18 *"At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow."* We have no more information about the vow Paul had taken. However, from the fact that he cut off his hair to fulfill the vow, Paul may have taken the vow of the Nazarite. Those who took this vow were not permitted to cut their hair for the period of the vow. When the time of the vow was over, they had to cut off all their hair. Paul's vow came to an end when he was at Cenchrea, a port city of Corinth, about to set sail for Jerusalem. This demonstrates that Paul was not against Moses' laws but observed many of them as one of his options in serving God.
- Verse 23 *"After spending some time [in Antioch], he departed."* After a brief rest from his travels, Paul began his third missionary journey.
- Verse 25 *"[Apollos] knew only the baptism of John."* John's baptism was powerful. It resulted in the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). Apollos was not rebaptized, but he had to be instructed in Jesus' baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Discuss

1. How did Paul show his understanding of the principle expressed in James 4:13–15?
2. What special gifts did Apollos have?
3. When Apollos went to the province of Achaia, he worked in the chief city of that province, Corinth. Read Acts 18:27 and 1 Corinthians 3:5, 6. What was Apollos' primary work in Corinth, as compared to that of Paul?

Apply

4. Apollos was a very gifted speaker and knew his Scriptures well. However, Priscilla and Aquila discovered that his teaching was in error on some points. Describe how they handled Apollos' mistake. Discuss the wisdom of their approach. How might we be tempted to handle such incidents in a sinful way? How can we handle them in a godly manner?

Paul finished his second journey and began his third. Apollos grew in knowledge.

Acts 19:1–22

The name of Jesus was held in high honor

Look

Verse 19 *“Fifty thousand pieces of silver”*—A piece of silver was equal to a day’s wage. Figuring six days of work per week, a day laborer could have earned this amount by working 160 years!

Discuss

1. As the gospel spread outward from Jerusalem, the Lord made it clear that each new people to whom the gospel came was welcome into the church—first Jerusalem, then Samaria, then Cornelius, who represented the Gentiles as a whole. How did the Lord continue this pattern in Ephesus?
2. As usual, Paul was ejected from the Jewish synagogue. How did God bring good from this evil?
3. Some Jews saw what God was doing through Paul and thought that they could use God’s name for their benefit too. Describe what happened to them.

Apply

4. What effect did this incident have on the Ephesian believers? Discuss the proper role of fear in the life of a Christian.

Paul conducted a long and fruitful ministry in Ephesus. Miracles played an important role in testifying to God’s grace and his power.

Acts 19:23–41

Once again, the desire for profit leads to persecution

Look

Verse 27 *“The temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing.”* This temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was over 300 feet long and 150 feet wide. Its columns towered more than 50 feet into the sky. While Demetrius worked hard to preserve its honor, about 70 years later, in AD 125, a Germanic tribe invaded Ephesus and leveled the structure.

Verse 33 *“Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd.”* This defense was not intended to help Gaius and Aristarchus, Christian recipients of Ephesian wrath. Jews pushed Alexander to the front hoping to make clear that the Jewish community in general ought not suffer because of this. They too hated Christians. Unfortunately for them, the plan backfired. When the crowd discovered that he was a Jew, voices shouting different things in confusion (verse 32) became a single voice shouting one thing in unison (verse 34).

Discuss

1. What is the connection between Acts 19:10 and the concern Demetrius and his coworkers had?
2. How did Paul react when he heard about the riot? What advice did his friends give him?
3. What reasoning did the city clerk use to disperse the crowd?

Apply

4. Compare the concerns Demetrius expressed about his goddess (verse 27) to Psalm 115:3–9. What is the difference between a false god and the true God? At times we may think that our God is getting beaten. We may see that morality is eroding and especially that the gospel is being watered down or denied. Since we know God, who is described in Psalm 115, why can we remain calm and unafraid?

The truth of Jesus pained the pocketbook of Demetrius. The Ephesians rioted, then dispersed.

Acts 20:1–12

Paul travels through Greece and begins his trip to Jerusalem

Look

From Paul's epistles to the Corinthians, we discover that Luke chose to omit many details of this trip. We learn that Paul was in a crises situation with the church in Corinth. We also learn that he was gathering a collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem. Paul spent three months in Macedonia and Greece, encouraging the churches he had started there on his second missionary journey. He finally arrived in Corinth. From Corinth, he planned to sail for Syria and then travel to Jerusalem. He changed his plans and retraced his steps back to the north through Philippi. A number of men accompanied him. These men were representatives of the church in Asia Minor and Greece, who were carrying the offering to Jerusalem to guard Paul from any accusations that he had taken some of the money for himself. (On the offering, see Romans 15:25, 26.)

Verse 4 *"Accompanied him"*—Certain congregations had elected representatives to accompany Paul and carry the offering to Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:18–24). The list of companions and where they were from reminds us of stops on Paul's third missionary trip: Derbe, Lystra (Timothy's hometown), Thessalonica, Berea, and Ephesus (in the province of Asia).

Discuss

1. A riot in the city of Ephesus led to Paul's decision to leave the city. Though Paul left Ephesus, how did the Lord use his departure as a blessing for others?

2. How did the Lord strengthen the faith of the church at Troas?

Apply

3. After the riot in Ephesus, Paul decided to leave. Later, when Paul heard of a Jewish plot to attack him on the voyage to Syria, he decided to walk instead. Evaluate: When Paul chose to leave Ephesus and when he avoided the Jewish plot, he showed that he did not trust in the Lord. (See Psalm 118:6 and Luke 4:12.) How do we determine what risks to run as we wish to share the good news of Jesus?

Paul traveled through Macedonia and Greece, strengthening the churches there. From Corinth, he began his journey to Jerusalem, accompanied by representatives of the churches who would help him deliver an offering to the poor in Jerusalem.

Acts 20:13–38

I commit you to God and to the Word of his grace

Look

Verse 17 *“Miletus”*—Miletus was the port city for Ephesus. Paul did not want to walk the several miles up to the city of Ephesus. Paul was now on board a ship. He and his traveling companions were working their way down the Asia Minor coast on their way to Jerusalem.

Verse 28 *“The church of God, which he obtained with his own blood”*—God has blood! God is a spirit, but in Jesus Christ, God became a man. As the perfect God-man, Jesus shed blood, God’s blood. When Jesus died, God died. What a precious sacrifice for our salvation!

Discuss

1. Paul’s sermon to the elders at Ephesus is also a warm, encouraging message to church leaders in the New Testament.
 - Verses 18–21 How had Paul lived among the Ephesians? Why do you think he reminds them of this?
 - Verses 22–24 What was Paul’s goal in life?
 - Verses 25–28 What vital task had the elders been called to do?
 - Verses 29–35 Of what did Paul warn the Corinthians? What resource did Paul leave with them?
2. What made the Ephesians so sad?

Apply

3. What would the consequences have been had Paul not proclaimed the whole will of God? What makes us hesitant to announce certain teachings of the Bible? Why is this dangerous?

Paul encouraged the Ephesian elders to care for the church Christ had redeemed by his blood.

Acts 21:1–26

I am ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus

Look

Verse 4 *“Through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.”* In Acts 20:22 Paul said, “And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there.” The Holy Spirit does not give mixed messages. But both messages were true. Paul, through the Spirit, knew what he had to do. The believers, also through the Spirit, knew what would happen to Paul and didn’t want to lose him, so they urged him not to go. Both Paul and the believers were informed and led by the Spirit.

Discuss

1. Trace Paul’s journey from Ephesus to Jerusalem.
2. Paul landed at Tyre. The disciples there warned Paul about what awaited him in Jerusalem. Paul received the same warning in Caesarea. What did the prophet Agabus predict would happen to Paul? Describe the reaction of Paul’s friends, and explain why their attitude eventually changed.
3. The leaders in Jerusalem praised God for what he had done through Paul. But the Jewish Christians had heard a false report about Paul, and they thought he had rejected any use of Moses’ laws. What did Paul teach? What plan did the Jerusalem leaders devise to correct the Jews’ misunderstanding of Paul’s teaching?

Apply

4. When Paul met with the Christian leaders in Jerusalem, both he and they shared exciting information. What blessings did Paul and the Jerusalem leaders describe? How might we put into practice Paul’s example?

Paul arrived in Jerusalem. He proved that he himself—in freedom—followed Moses’ laws.

Acts 21:27–36

Paul is falsely accused by the Jews and arrested

Look

- Verse 27 *“When the seven days were almost completed”*—Paul had agreed to assist four men in ceremonial purification rights to demonstrate that observance of Jewish ceremonial laws, while no longer required, was not forbidden by God. These men would shave their heads on the seventh day, indicating that their vow had been fulfilled.
- “The Jews from Asia”*—Jews in the province of Asia had given Paul problems for a long time. For example, when Paul visited church leaders from Ephesus, the key city in the province of Asia, he reminded them of the “tears and . . . trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews” (Acts 20:19). The same could be said about Paul’s experiences in Antioch, Iconium, and in other cities of Asia Minor.

Discuss

1. What accusations did the Asian Jews use to rile up the Jerusalem crowd?
2. The saints in Tyre and Caesarea had warned Paul against going to Jerusalem. What almost happened to Paul there?
3. Why did the Roman commander decide to bring Paul into the military barracks?

Apply

4. When Jews from Asia saw Trophimus, they concluded the worst, assuming that Paul had violated Jewish laws by bringing this Greek into a restricted temple area. Why was it so easy for them to assume the worst about Paul? When are we most likely to assume the worst about individuals? Read 1 Corinthians 13:5–7 and Galatians 6:1, 2. How should we respond when we think someone has done something wrong?

Asian Jews initiated mob violence against Paul. Paul was saved by the Roman authorities.

Acts 21:37–22:29

Paul makes his defense before the mob

Look

The Asian Jews who had seized Paul riled up the crowd by falsely accusing him of not caring about the law. They said he had violated the Old Testament law by bringing a Greek into the temple area. Paul's defense to the mob centered on their accusation. Paul spoke about his formal training in Judaism and how he persecuted the Christians for the same reason the mob was persecuting him. He told why he had changed and that the Lord had told him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He explained how the man who baptized him, Ananias, carefully followed the law.

Discuss

1. The digest of Paul's speech to the mob is given above. Look at each section as you answer the following question: How did Paul defend himself against the charges of the Asian Jews?
 - Verses 2–5
 - Verses 6–11
 - Verses 12–16
 - Verses 17–21
2. How much good did Paul's sermon accomplish? How did this work out for Paul's good?
3. What benefit did Paul's Roman citizenship have for him?

Apply

4. After his conversion, Paul had returned to Jerusalem. Why did the Lord tell him to leave Jerusalem immediately? Why did Paul think he would be especially qualified to stay in Jerusalem and witness there? How did God react to Paul's idea? At times we may think a situation would best be handled in a particular way, but the Lord chooses to follow a very different direction. Into what temptation can our human logic lead us? How does Paul's experience encourage us?

Paul defended himself by explaining his former training in Judaism and why he had stopped persecuting Christians, but to no avail. He ended up safely in Roman hands.

Acts 22:30–23:11

Paul defends himself before Sanhedrin

Look

The events of this section follow closely on the events of the previous section. When Paul was first captured, he made use of his Roman citizenship for protection. He was hauled before the Sanhedrin, the court that had condemned Jesus to death. He soon realized he would not be given a fair trial, so he used the antagonism between the Pharisees and Sadducees to subvert the hypocrisy of the trial and go back under the Roman court system.

23:3 *“You whitewashed wall!”* Paul here accuses the high priest of hypocrisy (see Ezekiel 13:10–12). *“Your outside is pure, but I can see past the white paint. Inside you are rotting.”* Jesus used a similar picture, describing the teachers of the law and the Pharisees as whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:27, 28).

Discuss

1. Why did Paul feel that the slap was a show of hypocrisy? Yet Paul apologized. Why?
2. How did the Pharisees and the Sadducees differ in their public confessions of faith? On these particular points, which of the groups was correct? How did Paul make use of these conflicting confessions in his defense?
3. How did this conflict serve Paul's good?
4. What message did the Lord give to Paul the night after his appearance before the Sanhedrin? Why would a visit from the Lord have been especially comforting at that particular time?

Apply

5. When Paul found out that the one ordering the slap was the high priest, he was concerned about showing disrespect for authority. He quoted from Exodus, emphasizing the special honor owed God's representatives, even when they were evil. In what ways can we show respect for leaders even when they are going against God's will?

Paul defended himself before the Sanhedrin. The Lord promised to protect Paul.

Acts 23:12–35

A plot to kill Paul serves God's purposes

Look

Verse 27 *"I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen."* Actually, Claudius did not discover that Paul was a Roman citizen until after he had unlawfully chained him and was about to beat him (Acts 22:25–29). This small twist of detail made Claudius look better.

Verse 31 *"The soldiers . . . took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris."* A journey of over 40 miles from Jerusalem.

Discuss

1. How did the Jewish conspirators reveal the depth of their hatred toward Paul?
2. Describe the Jewish plan to kill Paul.
3. Roman protection was the best in the world. Yet not even the Romans could cover all the bases. But there was one who could! How did the Roman army commander find out about the Jewish plot against Paul?
4. In what different ways did the Jerusalem garrison commander work to ensure Paul's safety once he discovered the plot?

Apply

5. Read Ephesians 1:18–23. What role does Jesus play in world government? Why is this comforting, especially when, unlike the Romans here, we see governments acting contrary to God's revealed will?

The Lord used the Roman government and a little boy to save Paul from a violent plot.

Acts 24

Paul testifies before a Roman governor

Look

Verse 1 *"After five days"*—The Jews lost no time in arriving in Caesarea. Jerusalem is in central Palestine; Caesarea is on the coast. They must have packed up and left immediately after Paul had been rushed to Caesarea at night.

Discuss

1. The accusations Tertullus made against Paul are noted below. Study Paul's response, and tell how Paul defended himself against each of these accusations.

- Verse 5a, Tertullus: Paul is a troublemaker. He stirs up riots among Jews all over the world.

- Verse 5b, Tertullus: Paul is the ringleader of a sect.

- Verse 6, Tertullus: Paul tried to desecrate the temple.

2. Why do you think Paul adds to his charges what he had said to the Sanhedrin that ultimately broke up their meeting?

Apply

3. Discuss the difference between Felix' fear and the fear and sorrow God desires.

Paul confessed the truth of the resurrection. Felix listened but rejected Paul's message.

Acts 25:1–22

Lower court injustice brings a higher court appeal

Look

Felix had heard Paul's case and promised to make his decision when Lysius, the commander from Jerusalem, arrived and verified the details. But that never happened. Felix unjustly kept Paul in prison for two years until the next governor arrived.

Verse 1 *"Three days after Festus had arrived in the province"*—Festus quickly went to Jerusalem, which was natural. He wanted to meet the Jewish leadership and discuss any problems or needs they felt he should address. It was good diplomacy. In their first opportunity to speak with this new governor, the Jews asked that Paul be condemned. Their memories were long. Time had not quenched their thirst for Paul's blood.

Verse 6 *"The next day"*—These little time references show how intent the Jews were on killing Paul and how high his case was on their priority list.

Verses 9, 10 *"Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?" But Paul said, 'I am standing before Caesar's tribunal.'" Festus had no good reason to move the courtroom. Paul saw Festus' question for what it was, a poorly disguised attempt to appease the Jews while maintaining the appearance of fairness toward Paul. While Paul was not afraid to die, he would not willingly assist the Jews in their evil plan.*

Discuss

1. Why did the Jews want Paul's case transferred to Jerusalem? How did Festus show good leadership?
2. See the note above on verses 9 and 10. Why did Paul appeal to Caesar?
3. What did Festus tell Agrippa was the real point of contention between Paul and the Jews?

Apply

4. Read Romans 12:19–21. How does God want us to respond when we are treated unjustly?

Festus perverted justice for personal benefit. Paul sought justice from Caesar.

Acts 25:23–26:11

You will witness before kings

Look

26:3 *"[Agrippa,] you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews."* This Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa I, who had killed the apostle James (Acts 12:1, 2). Though Agrippa's territory was north of the Sea of Galilee, Rome had also given him control over Jerusalem's temple. He had the right to name the high priest. Paul knew that Agrippa was well aware of the Jewish Scriptures (Acts 26:27) and Jewish religious disputes.

Discuss

1. What embarrassing position was Festus in, which prompted him to arrange this hearing? (verses 23–27)
2. Agrippa was the more seasoned leader, who understood the Jewish laws and writings. Agrippa motioned with his hand to let Paul have the floor. Examine Paul's defense by stating the main point or points in each of the following sections:
 - Verses 2, 3
 - Verses 4, 5
 - Verses 6–8
 - Verses 9–11

Apply

3. As he recounted his past, we can see him shuddering at the many children of God he had imprisoned or killed. Read 1 Timothy 1:15, 16. As we consider Paul's life and then tremble at the many sins we have committed against others, what comfort does the Lord give us?

Festus needed help finding charges against Paul. He enlisted the help of a ruler familiar with the Jewish nation, Herod Agrippa. Paul began his speech, showing from his life that he was a sincere Jew who really had come to know that Jesus had fulfilled the hope of Israel.

Acts 26:12–32

I pray that you may become what I am

Look

Verse 14 *“It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”* An ox driver prods his animals with a sharp goad, a pointed stick. To kick against the goads is to fight in vain and to be hurt in the process. As Paul was battling Jesus, he was doing just that.

Discuss

1. Continue working through Paul’s speech to Agrippa. State the main point of each section.
 - Verses 12–14
 - Verses 15, 16
 - Verses 17, 18
 - Verses 19–23
2. In his defense before Agrippa, Paul connected the Old Testament and Jesus. Why is this connection especially significant in Paul’s witness to Agrippa?
3. What did Paul mean when he said in verse 29, “I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am”?

Apply

4. What two reactions did Paul receive from his message, and what were his answers? How does this pattern repeat itself today?

Paul explained his faith and life to two rulers. He confidently declared that Jesus fulfilled the prophets’ words. He prayed that God would create faith in the hearts of those who heard him.

Acts 27:1–26

It will happen just as God told me

Look

Verse 9 *“The voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over.”* The Fast, also known as the Jewish Day of Atonement, occurred in late September or in October. Mediterranean sailing after mid-September was always risky.

Discuss

1. How did the centurion show special kindness to Paul on his trip to Rome?
2. Why did the majority dismiss Paul's advice to stay put in the port of Fair Havens?
3. What events led those sailing the ship to give up all hope of being saved?

Apply

4. An angel appeared to Paul, assuring him that he would live. As a bonus, the Lord graciously gave to Paul the lives of his shipmates. What similarities does this act of God have to the events of Genesis 39:2–6? What do such events reveal about the character of our God? What purpose does God have whenever he shows the unbelieving world kindness? (Acts 14:15–17)
5. As a storm raged and it appeared all on the boat would die, Paul may have recalled God's promise in Acts 23:11. Read that promise and discuss how such words would have given Paul a very different perspective as his boat was tossed and nearly broken by the waves. Read Romans 8:38, 39 and Psalm 46:10, and explain how these words give us a very different perspective as we face difficulties in life.

Paul began his trip to Rome. The Lord gave Paul many opportunities to testify.

Acts 27:27-44

God protects Paul and all the people on board

Look

Verse 27 *“When the fourteenth night had come”—A storm of hurricane force had raged for 14 days and blew the ship off course. It was driven out of control across the waters. (The pronoun we notes that Luke, the author of Acts, was with Paul on the journey.)*

Discuss

1. Reading this account is adventure at its best. But it is more than adventure involving the forces of nature or human cunning. The account is the story of God calmly in control of the raging sea and his ability to sail a ship against all human odds. Find the island of Malta on a map. Then compare how far it is from Crete and how much water surrounds it. What were the “odds” that the ship would have been driven for 14 days and come across this island?
2. This adventure story is also the story of calm in the heart of God’s representative, Paul, who was trusting in God’s promises. How did God use a Roman prisoner to steer the passengers and crew to follow his will?

Apply

3. This short account gives us a view of how God has dealt with the world and will continue to deal with the world until the end of time. Can you see how this account does that?
4. Paul took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of a boatload of unbelievers. How can we give witness to our Savior in how we handle the regular activities of daily life?

Paul repeated God’s promise to rescue everyone on the ship. God used Paul to guide the actions of the people on the ship, and all arrived safely on shore.

Acts 28:1–16

Strangers and brothers welcome God's servant

Look

- Verse 1 *"After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta."*
This small island south of Sicily lay about 500 miles from the island of Crete, where Paul and his traveling companions had first been blown off course and set adrift by the autumn storm.
- Verse 13 *"A south wind"*—The violent hurricane winds of God's providence may force us in this or that direction so his will is done, but Christians can always take heart. God can also use the gentle south winds to put us where he wants us.

Discuss

1. How did the Lord immediately give Paul a chance to explain who he was and give a witness to his faith?
2. How did the Lord continue to give Paul a chance to witness to his faith?
3. How did a hurricane wind play into revealing God's love for people of all nations and advance his plan of salvation?
4. Describe Paul's living conditions once he arrived in Rome.

Apply

5. As Paul approached Rome, fellow Christians heard of his coming and went out to meet him. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and literally *took courage* (verse 15). Read Hebrews 10:23–25, and explain why regular contact with fellow Christians is a great blessing.

The people of Malta received the castaways and showed them hospitality. Paul had many opportunities to witness in Malta. When spring came, they completed their trip to Rome.

Acts 28:17–31

For two years, Paul spread the gospel in Rome

Look

Verse 26 *“You will indeed hear but never understand.”* Isaiah (6:9), Jesus (Matthew 13:14), and Paul all spoke these harsh words of judgment. God was saying, “You will never understand.” Following the original Hebrew, we hear God telling Isaiah, “Make their ears dull.” In other words, preach so much that they become hardened in their rejection. Then I myself will harden their hearts so they cannot believe.

Verses 30, 31 *“He lived there two whole years at his own expense . . . proclaiming the kingdom of God.”* God used Paul’s unjust imprisonment to spread the saving news of Jesus. While in Rome, Paul wrote Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and probably Ephesians. After two years, Paul was freed. He continued preaching but was arrested again. During this second imprisonment, he wrote his second letter to Timothy. He told Timothy that he had finished his race. He expected to be executed. He anticipated God’s eternal prize.

Discuss

1. Why did Paul call together leaders of the Jews in Rome?
2. How did the Jews respond to Paul at this first meeting?
3. The Jewish people came to hear Paul explain his teaching. What did Paul attempt to do? What was the result?
4. After Paul had rebuked the Jews for their unbelief, he announced God’s plan for the mission work in Rome. What would Paul do in the years he was there?

Apply

5. How can we follow in Paul’s footsteps?

Paul shared Jesus with the Roman Jews. He condemned their unbelief and turned to the Gentiles.