



The Book Of Acts

An Accurate Historical
Account Of The
Early Church

Compiled By Dr. Harold Bollinger

Acts

OVERVIEW:

Nearly 2,000 years ago, a match was struck in Palestine. At first, just a few in that corner of the world were touched and warmed; but the fire spread beyond Jerusalem and Judea out to the world and to all people. Acts provides an eyewitness account of the flame and fire—the birth and spread of the church. Beginning in Jerusalem with a small group of disciples, the message traveled across the Roman Empire. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, this courageous band preached, taught, healed, and demonstrated love in synagogues, schools, homes, marketplaces, and courtrooms, and on streets, hills, ships, and desert roads—wherever God sent them, lives and history were changed.

Written by Luke as a sequel to his Gospel, Acts is an accurate historical record of the early church. But Acts is also a theological book, with lessons and living examples of the work of the Holy Spirit, church relationships and organization, the implications of grace, and the law of love. And Acts is an apologetic work, building a strong case for the validity of Christ's claims and promises.

The book of Acts begins with the outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit and the commencement of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This Spirit-inspired evangelism began in Jerusalem and eventually spread to Rome, covering most of the Roman Empire.

The gospel first went to the Jews; but they, as a nation, rejected it. A remnant of Jews, of course, gladly received the Good News. But the continual rejection of the gospel by the vast majority of the Jews led to the ever-increasing proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles. This was according to Jesus' plan: the gospel was to go from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). This, in fact, is the pattern that the Acts narrative follows. The glorious proclamation began in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), went to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8 and following), and to the countries beyond Judea (Acts 11:19; Acts 13:4 and on to the end of Acts). The second half of Acts is focused primarily on Paul's missionary journeys to many countries north of the Mediterranean Sea. He, with his companions, took the gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Some of the Jews believed,

and many of the Gentiles received the Good News with joy. New churches were started, and new believers began to grow in the Christian life.

As you read Acts, put yourself in the place of the disciples—feel with them as they are filled with the Holy Spirit, and thrill with them as they see thousands respond to the gospel message. Sense their commitment as they give every ounce of talent and treasure to Christ. And as you read, watch the Spirit-led boldness of these first-century believers, who through suffering and in the face of death take every opportunity to tell of their crucified and risen Lord. Then decide to be a 20th-century version of those men and women of God.

THE BLUEPRINT

A. PETER'S MINISTRY (Acts 1:1-12:25)

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Peter preached boldly and performed many miracles. Peter's actions demonstrate vividly the source and effects of Christian power. Because of the Holy Spirit, God's people were empowered so they could accomplish their tasks. The Holy Spirit is still available to empower believers today. We should turn to the Holy Spirit to give us the strength, courage, and insight to accomplish our work for God.

1. Establishment of the church
2. Expansion of the church

Acts 1:1-12:25

Dear Theophilus:

In my first book I told you about everything Jesus began to do and teach [2] until the day he ascended to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions from the Holy Spirit. [3] During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time and proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. On these occasions he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

[4] In one of these meetings as he was eating a meal with them, he told them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what he promised. Remember, I have told you about this before. [5] John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

[6] When the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, are you going to free Israel now and restore our kingdom?"

[7] "The Father sets those dates," he replied, "and they are not for you to know. [8] But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

[9] It was not long after he said this that he was taken up into the sky while they were watching, and he disappeared into a cloud. [10] As they were straining their eyes to see him, two white-robed men suddenly stood there among them. [11] They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!"

[12] The apostles were at the Mount of Olives when this happened, so they walked the half mile back to Jerusalem. [13] Then they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying. Here is the list of those who were present:

Peter,
John,
James,
Andrew,
Philip,
Thomas,
Bartholomew,
Matthew,
James (son of Alphaeus),
Simon (the Zealot),
and Judas (son of James).

[14] They all met together continually for prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.

[15] During this time, on a day when about 120 believers were present, Peter stood up and addressed them as follows:

[16] "Brothers, it was necessary for the Scriptures to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided the Temple police to arrest Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. [17] Judas was one of us, chosen to share in the ministry with us."

[18] (Judas bought a field with the money he received for his treachery, and falling there, he burst open, spilling out his intestines. [19] The news of his death spread rapidly among all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name Akeldama, which means "Field of Blood.")

[20] Peter continued, "This was predicted in the book of Psalms, where it says, 'Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.' And again, 'Let his position be given to someone else.'

[21] "So now we must choose another man to take Judas's place. It must be someone who has been with us all the time that we were with the Lord Jesus— [22] from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us into heaven. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection."

[23] So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. [24] Then they all prayed for the right man to be chosen. "O Lord," they said, "you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen [25] as an apostle to replace Judas the traitor in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs." [26] Then they cast lots, and in this way Matthias was chosen and became an apostle with the other eleven.

[2:1] On the day of Pentecost, seven weeks after Jesus' resurrection, the believers were meeting together in one place. [2] Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them, and it filled the house where they were meeting. [3]

Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. [4] And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

[5] Godly Jews from many nations were living in Jerusalem at that time. [6] When they heard this sound, they came running to see what it was all about, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

[7] They were beside themselves with wonder. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, [8] and yet we hear them speaking the languages of the lands where we were born! [9] Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, [10] Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya toward Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), [11] Cretans, and Arabians. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" [12] They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other. [13] But others in the crowd were mocking. "They're drunk, that's all!" they said.

[14] Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, "Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. [15] Some of you are saying these people are drunk. It isn't true! It's much too early for that. People don't get drunk by nine o'clock in the morning. [16] No, what you see this morning was predicted centuries ago by the prophet Joel:

[17] 'In the last days, God said,
I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
and your old men will dream dreams.

[18] In those days I will pour out my Spirit
upon all my servants, men and women alike,
and they will prophesy.

[19] And I will cause wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below—
blood and fire and clouds of smoke.

[20] The sun will be turned into darkness,
and the moon will turn bloodred,
before that great and glorious day of the Lord arrives.

[21] And anyone who calls on the name of the Lord
will be saved.'

[22] "People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus of Nazareth by doing wonderful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. [23] But you followed God's prearranged plan. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to the cross and murdered him. [24] However, God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life again, for death could not keep him in its grip.

[25] King David said this about him:

'I know the Lord is always with me.

I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.

[26] No wonder my heart is filled with joy,
and my mouth shouts his praises!

My body rests in hope.

[27] For you will not leave my soul among the dead
or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.

[28] You have shown me the way of life,
and you will give me wonderful joy in your presence.'

[29] "Dear brothers, think about this! David wasn't referring to himself when he spoke these words I have quoted, for he died and was buried, and his tomb is still here among us. [30] But he was a prophet, and he knew God had promised with an oath that one of David's own descendants would sit on David's throne as the Messiah. [31] David was looking into the future and predicting the Messiah's resurrection. He was saying that the Messiah would not be left among the dead and that his body would not rot in the grave.

[32] "This prophecy was speaking of Jesus, whom God raised from the dead, and we all are witnesses of this. [33] Now he sits on the throne of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. [34] For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said,

'The Lord said to my Lord,
Sit in honor at my right hand

[35] until I humble your enemies,
making them a footstool under your feet.'

[36] So let it be clearly known by everyone in Israel that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified to be both Lord and Messiah!"

[37] Peter's words convicted them deeply, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"

[38] Peter replied, "Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [39] This promise is to you and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God." [40] Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this generation that has gone astray!"

[41] Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church—about three thousand in all. [42] They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.

[43] A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. [44] And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. [45] They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. [46] They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their

meals with great joy and generosity— [47] all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

[3:1] Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the three o'clock prayer service. [2] As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in. Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the Temple. [3] When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for some money.

[4] Peter and John looked at him intently, and Peter said, "Look at us!" [5] The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting a gift. [6] But Peter said, "I don't have any money for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!"

[7] Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man's feet and anklebones were healed and strengthened. [8] He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them.

[9] All the people saw him walking and heard him praising God. [10] When they realized he was the lame beggar they had seen so often at the Beautiful Gate, they were absolutely astounded! [11] They all rushed out to Solomon's Colonnade, where he was holding tightly to Peter and John. Everyone stood there in awe of the wonderful thing that had happened.

[12] Peter saw his opportunity and addressed the crowd. "People of Israel," he said, "what is so astounding about this? And why look at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power and godliness? [13] For it is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of all our ancestors who has brought glory to his servant Jesus by doing this. This is the same Jesus whom you handed over and rejected before Pilate, despite Pilate's decision to release him. [14] You rejected this holy, righteous one and instead demanded the release of a murderer. [15] You killed the author of life, but God raised him to life. And we are witnesses of this fact!

[16] "The name of Jesus has healed this man—and you know how lame he was before. Faith in Jesus' name has caused this healing before your very eyes.

[17] "Friends, I realize that what you did to Jesus was done in ignorance; and the same can be said of your leaders. [18] But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had declared about the Messiah beforehand—that he must suffer all these things. [19] Now turn from your sins and turn to God, so you can be cleansed of your sins. [20] Then wonderful times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will send Jesus your Messiah to you again. [21] For he must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his prophets. [22] Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up a Prophet like me from among your own people. Listen carefully to everything he tells you.' [23] Then Moses said, 'Anyone who will not listen to that Prophet will be cut off from God's people and utterly destroyed.'

[24] "Starting with Samuel, every prophet spoke about what is happening today. [25] You are the children of those prophets, and you are included in the covenant God promised to your ancestors. For God said to Abraham, 'Through your descendants all the families on earth will be blessed.' [26] When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you people of Israel, to bless you by turning each of you back from your sinful ways."

[4:1] While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the leading priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and some of the Sadducees came over to them. [2] They were very disturbed that Peter and John were claiming, on the authority of Jesus, that there is a resurrection of the dead. [3] They arrested them and, since it was already evening, jailed them until morning. [4] But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so that the number of believers totaled about five thousand men, not counting women and children.

[5] The next day the council of all the rulers and elders and teachers of religious law met in Jerusalem. [6] Annas the high priest was there, along with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and other relatives of the high priest. [7] They brought in the two disciples and demanded, "By what power, or in whose name, have you done this?"

[8] Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Leaders and elders of our nation, [9] are we being questioned because we've done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed? [10] Let me clearly state to you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed in the name and power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth, the man you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead. [11] For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says,

'The stone that you builders rejected
has now become the cornerstone.'

[12] There is salvation in no one else! There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them."

[13] The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men who had had no special training. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus. [14] But since the man who had been healed was standing right there among them, the council had nothing to say. [15] So they sent Peter and John out of the council chamber and conferred among themselves.

[16] "What should we do with these men?" they asked each other. "We can't deny they have done a miraculous sign, and everybody in Jerusalem knows about it. [17] But perhaps we can stop them from spreading their propaganda. We'll warn them not to speak to anyone in Jesus' name again." [18] So they called the apostles back in and told them never again to speak or teach about Jesus.

[19] But Peter and John replied, "Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? [20] We cannot stop telling about the wonderful things we have seen and heard."

[21] The council then threatened them further, but they finally let them go because they didn't know how to punish them without starting a riot. For everyone was praising God [22] for this miraculous sign—the healing of a man who had been lame for more than forty years.

[23] As soon as they were freed, Peter and John found the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. [24] Then all the believers were united as they lifted their voices in prayer: "O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them— [25] you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor King David, your servant, saying,

'Why did the nations rage?

Why did the people waste their time with futile plans?

[26] The kings of the earth prepared for battle;

the rulers gathered together

against the Lord

and against his Messiah.'

[27] "That is what has happened here in this city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. [28] In fact, everything they did occurred according to your eternal will and plan. [29] And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give your servants great boldness in their preaching. [30] Send your healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

[31] After this prayer, the building where they were meeting shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they preached God's message with boldness.

[32] All the believers were of one heart and mind, and they felt that what they owned was not their own; they shared everything they had. [33] And the apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great favor was upon them all. [34] There was no poverty among them, because people who owned land or houses sold them [35] and brought the money to the apostles to give to others in need.

[36] For instance, there was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means "Son of Encouragement"). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus. [37] He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles for those in need.

[5:1] There was also a man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. [2] He brought part of the money to the apostles, but he claimed it was the full amount. His wife had agreed to this deception.

[3] Then Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. [4] The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God."

[5] As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. [6] Then some young men wrapped him in a sheet and took him out and buried him.

[7] About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. [8] Peter asked her, "Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?"

"Yes," she replied, "that was the price."

[9] And Peter said, "How could the two of you even think of doing a thing like this—conspiring together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Just outside that door are the young men who buried your husband, and they will carry you out, too."

[10] Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. [11] Great fear gripped the entire church and all others who heard what had happened.

[12] Meanwhile, the apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon's Colonnade. [13] No one else dared to join them, though everyone had high regard for them. [14] And more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women. [15] As a result of the apostles' work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter's shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. [16] Crowds came in from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they were all healed.

[17] The high priest and his friends, who were Sadducees, reacted with violent jealousy. [18] They arrested the apostles and put them in the jail. [19] But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, [20] "Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life!" [21] So the apostles entered the Temple about daybreak and immediately began teaching.

When the high priest and his officials arrived, they convened the high council, along with all the elders of Israel. Then they sent for the apostles to be brought for trial. [22] But when the Temple guards went to the jail, the men were gone. So they returned to the council and reported, [23] "The jail was locked, with the guards standing outside, but when we opened the gates, no one was there!"

[24] When the captain of the Temple guard and the leading priests heard this, they were perplexed, wondering where it would all end. [25] Then someone arrived with the news that the men they had jailed were out in the Temple, teaching the people.

[26] The captain went with his Temple guards and arrested them, but without violence, for they were afraid the people would kill them if they treated the apostles roughly. [27] Then they brought the apostles in before the council. [28] "Didn't we tell you never again to teach in this man's name?" the high priest demanded. "Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about Jesus, and you intend to blame us for his death!"

[29] But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than human authority. [30] The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by crucifying him. [31] Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this to give the people of Israel an opportunity to turn from their sins and turn to God so their sins would be forgiven. [32] We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey him."

[33] At this, the high council was furious and decided to kill them. [34] But one member had a different perspective. He was a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert on religious law and was very popular with the people. He stood up and ordered that the apostles be sent outside the council chamber for a while. [35] Then he addressed his colleagues as follows: "Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men! [36] Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About four hundred others joined him, but he was killed, and his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing. [37] After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got some people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered.

[38] "So my advice is, leave these men alone. If they are teaching and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. [39] But if it is of God, you will not be able to stop them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God."

[40] The council accepted his advice. They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go. [41] The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus. [42] And every day, in the Temple and in their homes, they continued to teach and preach this message: "The Messiah you are looking for is Jesus."

[6:1] But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. [2] So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers.

"We apostles should spend our time preaching and teaching the word of God, not administering a food program," they said. [3] "Now look around among yourselves, brothers, and select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will put them in charge of this business. [4] Then we can spend our time in prayer and preaching and teaching the word."

[5] This idea pleased the whole group, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (a Gentile convert to the Jewish faith, who had now become a Christian). [6] These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.

[7] God's message was preached in ever-widening circles. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.

[8] Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people. [9] But one day some men from the Synagogue of Freed Slaves, as it was called, started to debate with him. They were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia. [10] None of them was able to stand against the wisdom and Spirit by which Stephen spoke.

[11] So they persuaded some men to lie about Stephen, saying, "We heard him blaspheme Moses, and even God." [12] Naturally, this roused the crowds, the elders, and the teachers of

religious law. So they arrested Stephen and brought him before the high council. [13] The lying witnesses said, "This man is always speaking against the Temple and against the law of Moses. [14] We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple and change the customs Moses handed down to us." [15] At this point everyone in the council stared at Stephen because his face became as bright as an angel's.

[7:1] Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these accusations true?"

[2] This was Stephen's reply: "Brothers and honorable fathers, listen to me. Our glorious God appeared to our ancestor Abraham in Mesopotamia before he moved to Haran. [3] God told him, 'Leave your native land and your relatives, and come to the land that I will show you.' [4] So Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran until his father died. Then God brought him here to the land where you now live. [5] But God gave him no inheritance here, not even one square foot of land. God did promise, however, that eventually the whole country would belong to Abraham and his descendants—though he had no children yet. [6] But God also told him that his descendants would live in a foreign country where they would be mistreated as slaves for four hundred years. [7] 'But I will punish the nation that enslaves them,' God told him, 'and in the end they will come out and worship me in this place.' [8] God also gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision at that time. And so Isaac, Abraham's son, was circumcised when he was eight days old. Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob was the father of the twelve patriarchs of the Jewish nation.

[9] "These sons of Jacob were very jealous of their brother Joseph, and they sold him to be a slave in Egypt. But God was with him [10] and delivered him from his anguish. And God gave him favor before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God also gave Joseph unusual wisdom, so that Pharaoh appointed him governor over all of Egypt and put him in charge of all the affairs of the palace.

[11] "But a famine came upon Egypt and Canaan. There was great misery for our ancestors, as they ran out of food. [12] Jacob heard that there was still grain in Egypt, so he sent his sons to buy some. [13] The second time they went, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, and they were introduced to Pharaoh. [14] Then Joseph sent for his father, Jacob, and all his relatives to come to Egypt, seventy-five persons in all. [15] So Jacob went to Egypt. He died there, as did all his sons. [16] All of them were taken to Shechem and buried in the tomb Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

[17] "As the time drew near when God would fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. [18] But then a new king came to the throne of Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. [19] This king plotted against our people and forced parents to abandon their newborn babies so they would die.

[20] "At that time Moses was born—a beautiful child in God's eyes. His parents cared for him at home for three months. [21] When at last they had to abandon him, Pharaoh's daughter found him and raised him as her own son. [22] Moses was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he became mighty in both speech and action.

[23] "One day when he was forty years old, he decided to visit his relatives, the people of Israel. [24] During this visit, he saw an Egyptian mistreating a man of Israel. So Moses came to his defense and avenged him, killing the Egyptian. [25] Moses assumed his brothers would realize that God had sent him to rescue them, but they didn't.

[26] "The next day he visited them again and saw two men of Israel fighting. He tried to be a peacemaker. 'Men,' he said, 'you are brothers. Why are you hurting each other?'

[27] "But the man in the wrong pushed Moses aside and told him to mind his own business. 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?' he asked. [28] 'Are you going to kill me as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?' [29] When Moses heard that, he fled the country and lived as a foreigner in the land of Midian, where his two sons were born.

[30] "Forty years later, in the desert near Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to Moses in the flame of a burning bush. [31] Moses saw it and wondered what it was. As he went to see, the voice of the Lord called out to him, [32] 'I am the God of you're a ancestors—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' Moses shook with terror and dared not look.

[33] "And the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. [34] You can be sure that I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries. So I have come to rescue them. Now go, for I will send you to Egypt.' [35] And so God sent back the same man his people had previously rejected by demanding, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?' Through the angel who appeared to him in the burning bush, Moses was sent to be their ruler and savior. [36] And by means of many miraculous signs and wonders, he led them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and back and forth through the wilderness for forty years.

[37] "Moses himself told the people of Israel, 'God will raise up a Prophet like me from among your own people.' [38] Moses was with the assembly of God's people in the wilderness. He was the mediator between the people of Israel and the angel who gave him life-giving words on Mount Sinai to pass on to us.

[39] "But our ancestors rejected Moses and wanted to return to Egypt. [40] They told Aaron, 'Make us some gods who can lead us, for we don't know what has become of this Moses, who brought us out of Egypt.' [41] So they made an idol shaped like a calf, and they sacrificed to it and rejoiced in this thing they had made. [42] Then God turned away from them and gave them up to serve the sun, moon, and stars as their gods! In the book of the prophets it is written,

'Was it to me you were bringing sacrifices
during those forty years in the wilderness, Israel?
[43] No, your real interest was in your pagan gods—
the shrine of Molech,
the star god Rephan,
and the images you made to worship them.
So I will send you into captivity
far away in Babylon.'

[44] "Our ancestors carried the Tabernacle with them through the wilderness. It was constructed in exact accordance with the plan shown to Moses by God. [45] Years later, when Joshua led the battles against the Gentile nations that God drove out of this land, the Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory. And it was used there until the time of King David.

[46] "David found favor with God and asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple for the God of Jacob. [47] But it was Solomon who actually built it. [48] However, the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands. As the prophet says,

[49] 'Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.

Could you ever build me a temple as good as that?'

asks the Lord.

'Could you build a dwelling place for me?'

[50] Didn't I make everything in heaven and earth?'

[51] "You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? But your ancestors did, and so do you! [52] Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. [53] You deliberately disobeyed God's law, though you received it from the hands of angels."

[54] The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists in rage. [55] But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily upward into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. [56] And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

[57] Then they put their hands over their ears, and drowning out his voice with their shouts, they rushed at him. [58] They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. The official witnesses took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

[59] And as they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." [60] And he fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died.

[8:1] Saul was one of the official witnesses at the killing of Stephen.

A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem, and all the believers except the apostles fled into Judea and Samaria. [2] (Some godly men came and buried Stephen with loud weeping.) [3] Saul was going everywhere to devastate the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into jail.

[4] But the believers who had fled Jerusalem went everywhere preaching the Good News about Jesus. [5] Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. [6] Crowds listened intently to what he had to say because of the miracles he did. [7] Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. [8] So there was great joy in that city.

[9] A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, claiming to be someone great. [10] The Samaritan people, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as "the Great One—the Power of God." [11] He was very influential because of the magic he performed. [12] But now the people believed Philip's message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. [13] Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the great miracles and signs Philip performed.

[14] When the apostles back in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God's message, they sent Peter and John there. [15] As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new Christians to receive the Holy Spirit. [16] The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. [17] Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.

[18] When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given when the apostles placed their hands upon people's heads, he offered money to buy this power. [19] "Let me have this power, too," he exclaimed, "so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!"

[20] But Peter replied, "May your money perish with you for thinking God's gift can be bought! [21] You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right before God. [22] Turn from your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, [23] for I can see that you are full of bitterness and held captive by sin."

[24] "Pray to the Lord for me," Simon exclaimed, "that these terrible things won't happen to me!"

[25] After testifying and preaching the word of the Lord in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem. And they stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way to preach the Good News to them, too.

[26] As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, "Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza." [27] So he did, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, [28] and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

[29] The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage."

[30] Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah; so he asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

[31] The man replied, "How can I, when there is no one to instruct me?" And he begged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him. [32] The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this:

"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.

And as a lamb is silent before the shearers,

he did not open his mouth.

[33] He was humiliated and received no justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."

[34] The eunuch asked Philip, "Was Isaiah talking about himself or someone else?" [35] So Philip began with this same Scripture and then used many others to tell him the Good News about Jesus.

[36] As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?" [37] [38] He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

[39] When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. [40] Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the city of Azotus! He preached the Good News there and in every city along the way until he came to Caesarea.

[9:1] Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath. He was eager to destroy the Lord's followers, so he went to the high priest. [2] He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

[3] As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! [4] He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

[5] "Who are you, sir?" Saul asked.

And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! [6] Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

[7] The men with Saul stood speechless with surprise, for they heard the sound of someone's voice, but they saw no one! [8] As Saul picked himself up off the ground, he found that he was blind. [9] So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days. And all that time he went without food and water.

[10] Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord!" he replied.

[11] The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you arrive, ask for Saul of Tarsus. He is praying to me right now. [12] I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him so that he can see again."

[13] "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! [14] And we hear that he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest every believer in Damascus."

[15] But the Lord said, "Go and do what I say. For Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. [16] And I will show him how much he must suffer for me."

[17] So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you may get your sight back and be filled with the Holy Spirit." [18] Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. [19] Afterward he ate some food and was strengthened.

Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. [20] And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!"

[21] All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who persecuted Jesus' followers with such devastation in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And we understand that he came here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests."

[22] Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. [23] After a while the Jewish leaders decided to kill him. [24] But Saul was told about their plot, and that they were watching for him day and night at the city gate so they could murder him. [25] So during the night, some of the other believers let him down in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.

[26] When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They thought he was only pretending to be a believer! [27] Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus. Barnabas also told them what the Lord had said to Saul and how he boldly preached in the name of Jesus in Damascus. [28] Then the apostles accepted Saul, and after that he was constantly with them in Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. [29] He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they plotted to murder him. [30] When the believers heard about it, however, they took him to Caesarea and sent him on to his hometown of Tarsus.

[31] The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it grew in strength and numbers. The believers were walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

[32] Peter traveled from place to place to visit the believers, and in his travels he came to the Lord's people in the town of Lydda. [33] There he met a man named Aeneas, who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. [34] Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you! Get up and make your bed!" And he was healed instantly. [35] Then the whole population of Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord when they saw Aeneas walking around.

[36] There was a believer in Joppa named Tabitha (which in Greek is Dorcas). She was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor. [37] About this time she became ill and died. Her friends prepared her for burial and laid her in an upstairs room. [38] But they had heard that Peter was nearby at Lydda, so they sent two men to beg him, "Please come as soon as possible!"

[39] So Peter returned with them; and as soon as he arrived, they took him to the upstairs room. The room was filled with widows who were weeping and showing him the coats and other garments Dorcas had made for them. [40] But Peter asked them all to leave the room; then he knelt and prayed. Turning to the body he said, "Get up, Tabitha." And she opened her eyes!

When she saw Peter, she sat up! [41] He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then he called in the widows and all the believers, and he showed them that she was alive.

[42] The news raced through the whole town, and many believed in the Lord. [43] And Peter stayed a long time in Joppa, living with Simon, a leatherworker.

[10:1] In Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. [2] He was a devout man who feared the God of Israel, as did his entire household. He gave generously to charity and was a man who regularly prayed to God. [3] One afternoon about three o'clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said.

[4] Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel.

And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have not gone unnoticed by God! [5] Now send some men down to Joppa to find a man named Simon Peter. [6] He is staying with Simon, a leatherworker who lives near the shore. Ask him to come and visit you."

[7] As soon as the angel was gone, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, one of his personal attendants. [8] He told them what had happened and sent them off to Joppa.

[9] The next day as Cornelius's messengers were nearing the city, Peter went up to the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, [10] and he was hungry. But while lunch was being prepared, he fell into a trance. [11] He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. [12] In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. [13] Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them."

[14] "Never, Lord," Peter declared. "I have never in all my life eaten anything forbidden by our Jewish laws."

[15] The voice spoke again, "If God says something is acceptable, don't say it isn't." [16] The same vision was repeated three times. Then the sheet was pulled up again to heaven.

[17] Peter was very perplexed. What could the vision mean? Just then the men sent by Cornelius found the house and stood outside at the gate. [18] They asked if this was the place where Simon Peter was staying. [19] Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, "Three men have come looking for you. [20] Go down and go with them without hesitation. All is well, for I have sent them."

[21] So Peter went down and said, "I'm the man you are looking for. Why have you come?"

[22] They said, "We were sent by Cornelius, a Roman officer. He is a devout man who fears the God of Israel and is well respected by all the Jews. A holy angel instructed him to send for you so you can go to his house and give him a message." [23] So Peter invited the men to be his guests for the night. The next day he went with them, accompanied by some other believers from Joppa.

[24] They arrived in Caesarea the following day. Cornelius was waiting for him and had called together his relatives and close friends to meet Peter. [25] As Peter entered his home, Cornelius fell to the floor before him in worship. [26] But Peter pulled him up and said, "Stand up! I'm a human being like you!" [27] So Cornelius got up, and they talked together and went inside where the others were assembled.

[28] Peter told them, "You know it is against the Jewish laws for me to come into a Gentile home like this. But God has shown me that I should never think of anyone as impure. [29] So I came as soon as I was sent for. Now tell me why you sent for me."

[30] Cornelius replied, "Four days ago I was praying in my house at three o'clock in the afternoon. Suddenly, a man in dazzling clothes was standing in front of me. [31] He told me, 'Cornelius, your prayers have been heard, and your gifts to the poor have been noticed by God! [32] Now send some men to Joppa and summon Simon Peter. He is staying in the home of Simon, a leatherworker who lives near the shore.' [33] So I sent for you at once, and it was good of you to come. Now here we are, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you."

[34] Then Peter replied, "I see very clearly that God doesn't show partiality. [35] In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. [36] I'm sure you have heard about the Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. [37] You know what happened all through Judea, beginning in Galilee after John the Baptist began preaching. [38] And no doubt you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil, for God was with him.

[39] "And we apostles are witnesses of all he did throughout Israel and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by crucifying him, [40] but God raised him to life three days later. Then God allowed him to appear, [41] not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen beforehand to be his witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. [42] And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is ordained of God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. [43] He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name."

[44] Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who had heard the message. [45] The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles, too. [46] And there could be no doubt about it, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter asked, [47] "Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?" [48] So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked him to stay with them for several days.

[11:1] Soon the news reached the apostles and other believers in Judea that the Gentiles had received the word of God. [2] But when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, some of the Jewish believers criticized him. [3] "You entered the home of Gentiles and even ate with them!" they said.

[4] Then Peter told them exactly what had happened. [5] "One day in Joppa," he said, "while I was praying, I went into a trance and saw a vision. Something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners from the sky. And it came right down to me. [6] When I looked inside the sheet, I saw all sorts of small animals, wild animals, reptiles, and birds that we are not allowed to eat. [7] And I heard a voice say, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat them.'

[8] " 'Never, Lord,' I replied. 'I have never eaten anything forbidden by our Jewish laws.'

[9] "But the voice from heaven came again, 'If God says something is acceptable, don't say it isn't.'

[10] "This happened three times before the sheet and all it contained was pulled back up to heaven. [11] Just then three men who had been sent from Caesarea arrived at the house where I was staying. [12] The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to worry about their being Gentiles. These six brothers here accompanied me, and we soon arrived at the home of the man who had sent for us. [13] He told us how an angel had appeared to him in his home and had told him, 'Send messengers to Joppa to find Simon Peter. [14] He will tell you how you and all your household will be saved!'

[15] "Well, I began telling them the Good News, but just as I was getting started, the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning. [16] Then I thought of the Lord's words when he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' [17] And since God gave these Gentiles the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to argue?"

[18] When the others heard this, all their objections were answered and they began praising God. They said, "God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of turning from sin and receiving eternal life."

[19] Meanwhile, the believers who had fled from Jerusalem during the persecution after Stephen's death traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch of Syria. They preached the Good News, but only to Jews. [20] However, some of the believers who went to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene began preaching to Gentiles about the Lord Jesus. [21] The power of the Lord was upon them, and large numbers of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord.

[22] When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. [23] When he arrived and saw this proof of God's favor, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord. [24] Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And large numbers of people were brought to the Lord.

[25] Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to find Saul. [26] When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching great numbers of people. (It was there at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.)

[27] During this time, some prophets traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch. [28] One of them named Agabus stood up in one of the meetings to predict by the Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world. (This was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius.) [29] So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the brothers and sisters in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could. [30] This they did, entrusting their gifts to Barnabas and Saul to take to the elders of the church in Jerusalem.

[12:1] about that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. [2] He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. [3] When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish leaders, he arrested Peter during the Passover celebration [4] and imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod's intention was to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover. [5] But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.

[6] The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, chained between two soldiers, with others standing guard at the prison gate. [7] Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel tapped him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. [8] Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered.

[9] So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was really happening. [10] They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate to the street, and this opened to them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him.

[11] Peter finally realized what had happened. "It's really true!" he said to himself. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jews were hoping to do to me!"

[12] After a little thought, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. [13] He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it. [14] When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, "Peter is standing at the door!"

[15] "You're out of your mind," they said. When she insisted, they decided, "It must be his angel."

[16] Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When they finally went out and opened the door, they were amazed. [17] He motioned for them to quiet down and told them what had happened and how the Lord had led him out of jail. "Tell James and the other brothers what happened," he said. And then he went to another place.

[18] At dawn, there was a great commotion among the soldiers about what had happened to Peter. [19] Herod Agrippa ordered a thorough search for him. When he couldn't be found, Herod interrogated the guards and sentenced them to death. Afterward Herod left Judea to stay in Caesarea for a while.

[20] Now Herod was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they sent a delegation to make peace with him because their cities were dependent upon Herod's country for their food. They made friends with Blastus, Herod's personal assistant, [21] and an appointment with Herod was granted. When the day arrived, Herod put on his royal robes, sat on his throne, and made a speech to them. [22] The people gave him a great ovation, shouting, "It is the voice of a god, not of a man!"

[23] Instantly, an angel of the Lord struck Herod with a sickness, because he accepted the people's worship instead of giving the glory to God. So he was consumed with worms and died.

[24] But God's Good News was spreading rapidly, and there were many new believers.

[25] When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission in Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch, taking John Mark with them.

B. PAUL'S MINISTRY (Acts 13:1-28:31)

Paul's missionary adventures show us the progress of Christianity. The gospel could not be confined to one corner of the world. This was a faith that offered hope to all humanity. We too should venture forth and share in this heroic task to witness for Christ in all the world.

1. First missionary journey
2. The council at Jerusalem
3. Second missionary journey
4. Third missionary journey
5. Paul on trial

Acts 13:1-28:31

Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called "the black man"), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul. [2] One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work I have for them." [3] So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.

[4] sent out by the Holy Spirit, Saul and Barnabas went down to the seaport of Seleucia and then sailed for the island of Cyprus. [5] There, in the town of Salamis, they went to the Jewish synagogues and preached the word of God. (John Mark went with them as their assistant.)

[6] Afterward they preached from town to town across the entire island until finally they reached Paphos, where they met a Jewish sorcerer, a false prophet named Bar-Jesus. [7] He had attached himself to the governor, Sergius Paulus, a man of considerable insight and understanding. The governor invited Barnabas and Saul to visit him, for he wanted to hear the word of God. [8] But Elymas, the sorcerer (as his name means in Greek), interfered and urged the governor to pay no attention to what Saul and Barnabas said. He was trying to turn the governor away from the Christian faith.

[9] Then Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked the sorcerer in the eye and said, [10] "You son of the Devil, full of every sort of trickery and villainy, enemy of all that is good, will you never stop perverting the true ways of the Lord? [11] And now the Lord has laid his hand of punishment upon you, and you will be stricken awhile with blindness." Instantly mist and darkness fell upon him, and he began wandering around begging for someone to take his hand and lead him. [12] When the governor saw what had happened, he believed and was astonished at what he learned about the Lord.

[13] Now Paul and those with him left Paphos by ship for Pamphylia, landing at the port town of Perga. There John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. [14] But Barnabas and Paul traveled inland to Antioch of Pisidia.

On the Sabbath they went to the synagogue for the services. [15] After the usual readings from the books of Moses and from the Prophets, those in charge of the service sent them this message: "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for us, come and give it!"

[16] So Paul stood, lifted his hand to quiet them, and started speaking. "People of Israel," he said, "and you devout Gentiles who fear the God of Israel, listen to me.

[17] "The God of this nation of Israel chose our ancestors and made them prosper in Egypt. Then he powerfully led them out of their slavery. [18] He put up with them through forty years of wandering around in the wilderness. [19] Then he destroyed seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to Israel as an inheritance. [20] All this took about 450 years. After that, judges ruled until the time of Samuel the prophet. [21] Then the people begged for a king, and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years. [22] But God removed him from the kingship and replaced him with David, a man about whom God said, 'David son of Jesse is a man after my own heart, for he will do everything I want him to.'

[23] "And it is one of King David's descendants, Jesus, who is God's promised Savior of Israel! [24] But before he came, John the Baptist preached the need for everyone in Israel to turn from sin and turn to God and be baptized. [25] As John was finishing his ministry he asked, 'Do you think I am the Messiah? No! But he is coming soon—and I am not even worthy to be his slave.'

[26] "Brothers—you sons of Abraham, and also all of you devout Gentiles who fear the God of Israel—this salvation is for us! [27] The people in Jerusalem and their leaders fulfilled prophecy by condemning Jesus to death. They didn't recognize him or realize that he is the one the prophets had written about, though they hear the prophets' words read every Sabbath. [28] They found no just cause to execute him, but they asked Pilate to have him killed anyway.

[29] "When they had fulfilled all the prophecies concerning his death, they took him down from the cross and placed him in a tomb. [30] But God raised him from the dead! [31] And he appeared over a period of many days to those who had gone with him from Galilee to Jerusalem—these are his witnesses to the people of Israel.

[32] "And now Barnabas and I are here to bring you this Good News. God's promise to our ancestors has come true in our own time, [33] in that God raised Jesus. This is what the second psalm is talking about when it says concerning Jesus,

'You are my Son.

Today I have become your Father.'

[34] For God had promised to raise him from the dead, never again to die. This is stated in the Scripture that says, 'I will give you the sacred blessings I promised to David.' [35] Another psalm explains more fully, saying, 'You will not allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.' [36] Now this is not a reference to David, for after David had served his generation according to the will of God, he died and was buried, and his body decayed. [37] No, it was a reference to someone else—someone whom God raised and whose body did not decay.

[38] "Brothers, listen! In this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins. [39] Everyone who believes in him is freed from all guilt and declared right with God—something the Jewish law could never do. [40] Be careful! Don't let the prophets' words apply to you. For they said,

[41] 'Look you mockers,
be amazed and die!
For I am doing something in your own day,
something you wouldn't believe
even if someone told you about it.' "

[42] As Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue that day, the people asked them to return again and speak about these things the next week. [43] Many Jews and godly converts to Judaism who worshiped at the synagogue followed Paul and Barnabas, and the two men urged them, "By God's grace, remain faithful."

[44] The following week almost the entire city turned out to hear them preach the word of the Lord. [45] But when the Jewish leaders saw the crowds, they were jealous; so they slandered Paul and argued against whatever he said.

[46] Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and declared, "It was necessary that this Good News from God be given first to you Jews. But since you have rejected it and judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life—well, we will offer it to Gentiles. [47] For this is as the Lord commanded us when he said,

'I have made you a light to the Gentiles,
to bring salvation to the farthest corners of the earth.' "

[48] When the Gentiles heard this, they were very glad and thanked the Lord for his message; and all who were appointed to eternal life became believers. [49] So the Lord's message spread throughout that region.

[50] Then the Jewish leaders stirred up both the influential religious women and the leaders of the city, and they incited a mob against Paul and Barnabas and ran them out of town. [51] But they shook off the dust of their feet against them and went to the city of Iconium. [52] And the believers were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

[14:1] In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went together to the synagogue and preached with such power that a great number of both Jews and Gentiles believed. [2] But the Jews who spurned God's message stirred up distrust among the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas, saying all sorts of evil things about them. [3] The apostles stayed there a long time, preaching boldly about the grace of the Lord. The Lord proved their message was true by giving them power to do miraculous signs and wonders. [4] But the people of the city were divided in their opinion about them. Some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.

[5] A mob of Gentiles and Jews, along with their leaders, decided to attack and stone them. [6] When the apostles learned of it, they fled for their lives. They went to the region of Lycaonia, to the cities of Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding area, [7] and they preached the Good News there.

[8] While they were at Lystra, Paul and Barnabas came upon a man with crippled feet. He had been that way from birth, so he had never walked. [9] He was listening as Paul preached, and Paul noticed him and realized he had faith to be healed. [10] So Paul called to him in a loud voice, "Stand up!" And the man jumped to his feet and started walking.

[11] When the listening crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in their local dialect, "These men are gods in human bodies!" [12] They decided that Barnabas was the Greek god Zeus and that Paul, because he was the chief speaker, was Hermes. [13] The temple of Zeus was located on the outskirts of the city. The priest of the temple and the crowd brought oxen and wreaths of flowers, and they prepared to sacrifice to the apostles at the city gates.

[14] But when Barnabas and Paul heard what was happening, they tore their clothing in dismay and ran out among the people, shouting, [15] "Friends, why are you doing this? We are merely human beings like yourselves! We have come to bring you the Good News that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. [16] In earlier days he permitted all the nations to go their own ways, [17] but he never left himself without a witness. There were always his reminders, such as sending you rain and good crops and giving you food and joyful hearts." [18] But even so, Paul and Barnabas could scarcely restrain the people from sacrificing to them.

[19] Now some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and turned the crowds into a murderous mob. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, apparently dead. [20] But as the believers stood around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

[21] After preaching the Good News in Derbe and making many disciples, Paul and Barnabas returned again to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, [22] where they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that they must enter into the Kingdom of God through many tribulations. [23] Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders in every church and prayed for them with fasting, turning them over to the care of the Lord, in whom they had come to trust. [24] Then they traveled back through Pisidia to Pamphylia. [25] They preached again in Perga, then went on to Attalia.

[26] Finally, they returned by ship to Antioch of Syria, where their journey had begun and where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. [27] Upon arriving in Antioch, they called the church together and reported about their trip, telling all that God had done and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, too. [28] And they stayed there with the believers in Antioch for a long time.

[15:1] While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the Christians: "Unless you keep the ancient Jewish custom of circumcision taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." [2] Paul and Barnabas, disagreeing with them, argued forcefully and at length. Finally, Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question. [3] The church sent the delegates to Jerusalem, and they stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria to visit the

believers. They told them—much to everyone's joy—that the Gentiles, too, were being converted.

[4] When they arrived in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported on what God had been doing through their ministry. [5] But then some of the men who had been Pharisees before their conversion stood up and declared that all Gentile converts must be circumcised and be required to follow the law of Moses.

[6] So the apostles and church elders got together to decide this question. [7] At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: "Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. [8] God, who knows people's hearts, confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he gave him to us. [9] He made no distinction between us and them, for he also cleansed their hearts through faith. [10] Why are you now questioning God's way by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? [11] We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the special favor of the Lord Jesus."

[12] There was no further discussion, and everyone listened as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

[13] When they had finished, James stood and said, "Brothers, listen to me. [14] Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. [15] And this conversion of Gentiles agrees with what the prophets predicted. For instance, it is written:

[16] 'Afterward I will return,
and I will restore the fallen kingdom of David.

From the ruins I will rebuild it,
and I will restore it,

[17] so that the rest of humanity might find the Lord,
including the Gentiles—
all those I have called to be mine.

This is what the Lord says,

[18] he who made these things known long ago.'

[19] And so my judgment is that we should stop troubling the Gentiles who turn to God, [20] except that we should write to them and tell them to abstain from eating meat sacrificed to idols, from sexual immorality, and from consuming blood or eating the meat of strangled animals. [21] For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations."

[22] Then the apostles and elders and the whole church in Jerusalem chose delegates, and they sent them to Antioch of Syria with Paul and Barnabas to report on this decision. The men chosen were two of the church leaders—Judas (also called Barsabbas) and Silas. [23] This is the letter they took along with them:

"This letter is from the apostles and elders, your brothers in Jerusalem. It is written to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings!

[24] "We understand that some men from here have troubled you and upset you with their teaching, but they had no such instructions from us. [25] So it seemed good to us, having unanimously agreed on our decision, to send you these official representatives, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, [26] who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. [27] So we are sending Judas and Silas to tell you what we have decided concerning your question.

[28] "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these requirements: [29] You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or eating the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell."

[30] The four messengers went at once to Antioch, where they called a general meeting of the Christians and delivered the letter. [31] And there was great joy throughout the church that day as they read this encouraging message.

[32] Then Judas and Silas, both being prophets, spoke extensively to the Christians, encouraging and strengthening their faith. [33] They stayed for a while, and then Judas and Silas were sent back to Jerusalem, with the blessings of the Christians, to those who had sent them.

[34] [35] Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch to assist many others who were teaching and preaching the word of the Lord there.

[36] After some time Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's return to each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are getting along." [37] Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. [38] But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not shared in their work. [39] Their disagreement over this was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus. [40] Paul chose Silas, and the believers sent them off, entrusting them to the Lord's grace. [41] So they traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches there.

[16:1] Paul and Silas went first to Derbe and then on to Lystra. There they met Timothy, a young disciple whose mother was a Jewish believer, but whose father was a Greek. [2] Timothy was well thought of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium, [3] so Paul wanted him to join them on their journey. In deference to the Jews of the area, he arranged for Timothy to be circumcised before they left, for everyone knew that his father was a Greek. [4] Then they went from town to town, explaining the decision regarding the commandments that were to be obeyed, as decided by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. [5] So the churches were strengthened in their faith and grew daily in numbers.

[6] Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had told them not to go into the province of Asia at that time. [7] Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed for the province of Bithynia, but again the Spirit of Jesus did not let them go. [8] So instead, they went on through Mysia to the city of Troas.

[9] That night Paul had a vision. He saw a man from Macedonia in northern Greece, pleading with him, "Come over here and help us." [10] So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, for we could only conclude that God was calling us to preach the Good News there.

[11] We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis. [12] From there we reached Philippi, a major city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony; we stayed there several days.

[13] On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we supposed that some people met for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had come together. [14] One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. [15] She was baptized along with other members of her household, and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am faithful to the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we did.

[16] One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a demon-possessed slave girl. She was a fortune-teller who earned a lot of money for her masters. [17] She followed along behind us shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved."

[18] This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and spoke to the demon within her. "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her," he said. And instantly it left her.

[19] Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. [20] "The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!" they shouted. [21] "They are teaching the people to do things that are against Roman customs."

[22] A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. [23] They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. [24] So he took no chances but put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

[25] Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. [26] Suddenly, there was a great earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! [27] The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. [28] But Paul shouted to him, "Don't do it! We are all here!"

[29] Trembling with fear, the jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down before Paul and Silas. [30] He brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

[31] They replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with your entire household." [32] Then they shared the word of the Lord with him and all who lived in his household. [33] That same hour the jailer washed their wounds, and he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. [34] Then he brought them into his house and set a meal before them. He and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

[35] The next morning the city officials sent the police to tell the jailer, "Let those men go!"
[36] So the jailer told Paul, "You and Silas are free to leave. Go in peace."

[37] But Paul replied, "They have publicly beaten us without trial and jailed us—and we are Roman citizens. So now they want us to leave secretly? Certainly not! Let them come themselves to release us!"

[38] When the police made their report, the city officials were alarmed to learn that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. [39] They came to the jail and apologized to them. Then they brought them out and begged them to leave the city. [40] Paul and Silas then returned to the home of Lydia, where they met with the believers and encouraged them once more before leaving town.

[17:1] Now Paul and Silas traveled through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. [2] As was Paul's custom, he went to the synagogue service, and for three Sabbaths in a row he interpreted the Scriptures to the people. [3] He was explaining and proving the prophecies about the sufferings of the Messiah and his rising from the dead. He said, "This Jesus I'm telling you about is the Messiah." [4] Some who listened were persuaded and became converts, including a large number of godly Greek men and also many important women of the city.

[5] But the Jewish leaders were jealous, so they gathered some worthless fellows from the streets to form a mob and start a riot. They attacked the home of Jason, searching for Paul and Silas so they could drag them out to the crowd. [6] Not finding them there, they dragged out Jason and some of the other believers instead and took them before the city council. "Paul and Silas have turned the rest of the world upside down, and now they are here disturbing our city," they shouted. [7] "And Jason has let them into his home. They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, Jesus."

[8] The people of the city, as well as the city officials, were thrown into turmoil by these reports. [9] But the officials released Jason and the other believers after they had posted bail.

[10] That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived there, they went to the synagogue. [11] And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to check up on Paul and Silas, to see if they were really teaching the truth. [12] As a result, many Jews believed, as did some of the prominent Greek women and many men.

[13] But when some Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God in Berea, they went there and stirred up trouble. [14] The believers acted at once, sending Paul on to the coast, while Silas and Timothy remained behind. [15] Those escorting Paul went with him to Athens; then they returned to Berea with a message for Silas and Timothy to hurry and join him.

[16] While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. [17] He went to the synagogue to debate with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there.

[18] He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, they said, "This babbler has picked up some strange ideas." Others said, "He's pushing some foreign religion."

[19] Then they took him to the Council of Philosophers. "Come and tell us more about this new religion," they said. [20] "You are saying some rather startling things, and we want to know what it's all about." [21] (It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.)

[22] So Paul, standing before the Council, addressed them as follows: "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious, [23] for as I was walking along I saw your many altars. And one of them had this inscription on it—"To an Unknown God.' You have been worshiping him without knowing who he is, and now I wish to tell you about him.

[24] "He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in man-made temples, [25] and human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need there is. [26] From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand which should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.

[27] "His purpose in all of this was that the nations should seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. [28] For in him we live and move and exist. As one of your own poets says, 'We are his offspring.' [29] And since this is true, we shouldn't think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. [30] God overlooked people's former ignorance about these things, but now he commands everyone everywhere to turn away from idols and turn to him. [31] For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead."

[32] When they heard Paul speak of the resurrection of a person who had been dead, some laughed, but others said, "We want to hear more about this later." [33] That ended Paul's discussion with them, [34] but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the Council, a woman named Damaris, and others.

[18:1] Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. [2] There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had been expelled from Italy as a result of Claudius Caesar's order to deport all Jews from Rome. [3] Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was.

[4] Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue, trying to convince the Jews and Greeks alike. [5] And after Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul spent his full time preaching and testifying to the Jews, telling them, "The Messiah you are looking for is Jesus." [6] But when the Jews opposed him and insulted him, Paul shook the dust from his robe and said, "Your blood be upon your own heads—I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

[7] After that he stayed with Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God and lived next door to the synagogue. [8] Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and all his household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also became believers and were baptized.

[9] One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! [10] For I am with you, and no one will harm you because many people here in this city belong to me." [11] So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God.

[12] But when Gallio became governor of Achaia, some Jews rose in concerted action against Paul and brought him before the governor for judgment. [13] They accused Paul of "persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law." [14] But just as Paul started to make his defense, Gallio turned to Paul's accusers and said, "Listen, you Jews, if this were a case involving some wrongdoing or a serious crime, I would be obliged to listen to you. [15] But since it is merely a question of words and names and your Jewish laws, you take care of it. I refuse to judge such matters." [16] And he drove them out of the courtroom. [17] The mob had grabbed Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and had beaten him right there in the courtroom. But Gallio paid no attention.

[18] Paul stayed in Corinth for some time after that and then said good-bye to the brothers and sisters and sailed for the coast of Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him. (Earlier, at Cenchrea, Paul had shaved his head according to Jewish custom, for he had taken a vow.) [19] When they arrived at the port of Ephesus, Paul left the others behind. But while he was there, he went to the synagogue to debate with the Jews. [20] They asked him to stay longer, but he declined. [21] So he left, saying, "I will come back later, God willing." Then he set sail from Ephesus. [22] The next stop was at the port of Caesarea. From there he went up and visited the church at Jerusalem and then went back to Antioch.

[23] After spending some time in Antioch, Paul went back to Galatia and Phrygia, visiting all the believers, encouraging them and helping them to grow in the Lord.

[24] Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well, had just arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. [25] He had been taught the way of the Lord and talked to others with great enthusiasm and accuracy about Jesus. However, he knew only about John's baptism. [26] When Priscilla and Aquila heard him preaching boldly in the synagogue, they took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately.

[27] Apollos had been thinking about going to Achaia, and the brothers and sisters in Ephesus encouraged him in this. They wrote to the believers in Achaia, asking them to welcome him. When he arrived there, he proved to be of great benefit to those who, by God's grace, had believed. [28] He refuted all the Jews with powerful arguments in public debate. Using the Scriptures, he explained to them, "The Messiah you are looking for is Jesus."

[19:1] While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior provinces. Finally, he came to Ephesus, where he found several believers. [2] "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he asked them.

"No," they replied, "we don't know what you mean. We haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

[3] "Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked.

And they replied, "The baptism of John."

[4] Paul said, "John's baptism was to demonstrate a desire to turn from sin and turn to God. John himself told the people to believe in Jesus, the one John said would come later."

[5] As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. [6] Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied. [7] There were about twelve men in all.

[8] Then Paul went to the synagogue and preached boldly for the next three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God. [9] But some rejected his message and publicly spoke against the Way, so Paul left the synagogue and took the believers with him. Then he began preaching daily at the lecture hall of Tyrannus. [10] This went on for the next two years, so that people throughout the province of Asia—both Jews and Greeks—heard the Lord's message.

[11] God gave Paul the power to do unusual miracles, [12] so that even when handkerchiefs or cloths that had touched his skin were placed on sick people, they were healed of their diseases, and any evil spirits within them came out.

[13] A team of Jews who were traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus. The incantation they used was this: "I command you by Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" [14] Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. [15] But when they tried it on a man possessed by an evil spirit, the spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul. But who are you?" [16] And he leaped on them and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and badly injured.

[17] The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. [18] Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. [19] A number of them who had been practicing magic brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. [20] So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect.

[21] Afterward Paul felt impelled by the Holy Spirit to go over to Macedonia and Achaia before returning to Jerusalem. "And after that," he said, "I must go on to Rome!" [22] He sent his two assistants, Timothy and Erastus, on ahead to Macedonia while he stayed awhile longer in the province of Asia.

[23] But about that time, serious trouble developed in Ephesus concerning the Way. [24] It began with Demetrius, a silversmith who had a large business manufacturing silver shrines of the Greek goddess Artemis. He kept many craftsmen busy. [25] He called the craftsmen together, along with others employed in related trades, and addressed them as follows:

"Gentlemen, you know that our wealth comes from this business. [26] As you have seen and heard, this man Paul has persuaded many people that handmade gods aren't gods at all. And this is happening not only here in Ephesus but throughout the entire province! [27] Of course, I'm not just talking about the loss of public respect for our business.

I'm also concerned that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will lose its influence and that Artemis—this magnificent goddess worshiped throughout the province of Asia and all around the world—will be robbed of her prestige!"

[28] At this their anger boiled, and they began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" [29] A crowd began to gather, and soon the city was filled with confusion. Everyone rushed to the amphitheater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, who were Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. [30] Paul wanted to go in, but the believers wouldn't let him. [31] Some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, also sent a message to him, begging him not to risk his life by entering the amphitheater.

[32] Inside, the people were all shouting, some one thing and some another. Everything was in confusion. In fact, most of them didn't even know why they were there. [33] Alexander was thrust forward by some of the Jews, who encouraged him to explain the situation. He motioned for silence and tried to speak in defense. [34] But when the crowd realized he was a Jew, they started shouting again and kept it up for two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

[35] At last the mayor was able to quiet them down enough to speak. "Citizens of Ephesus," he said. "Everyone knows that Ephesus is the official guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, whose image fell down to us from heaven. [36] Since this is an indisputable fact, you shouldn't be disturbed, no matter what is said. Don't do anything rash. [37] You have brought these men here, but they have stolen nothing from the temple and have not spoken against our goddess. [38] If Demetrius and the craftsmen have a case against them, the courts are in session and the judges can take the case at once. Let them go through legal channels. [39] And if there are complaints about other matters, they can be settled in a legal assembly. [40] I am afraid we are in danger of being charged with rioting by the Roman government, since there is no cause for all this commotion. And if Rome demands an explanation, we won't know what to say." [41] Then he dismissed them, and they dispersed.

[20:1] When it was all over, Paul sent for the believers and encouraged them. Then he said good-bye and left for Macedonia. [2] Along the way, he encouraged the believers in all the towns he passed through. Then he traveled down to Greece, [3] where he stayed for three months. He was preparing to sail back to Syria when he discovered a plot by some Jews against his life, so he decided to return through Macedonia.

[4] Several men were traveling with him. They were Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; Aristarchus and Secundus, from Thessalonica; Gaius, from Derbe; Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus, who were from the province of Asia. [5] They went ahead and waited for us at Troas. [6] As soon as the Passover season ended, we boarded a ship at Philippi in Macedonia and five days later arrived in Troas, where we stayed a week.

[7] On the first day of the week, we gathered to observe the Lord's Supper. Paul was preaching; and since he was leaving the next day, he talked until midnight. [8] The upstairs room where we met was lighted with many flickering lamps. [9] As Paul spoke on and on, a young man named Eutychus, sitting on the windowsill, became very drowsy. Finally, he sank into a

deep sleep and fell three stories to his death below. [10] Paul went down, bent over him, and took him into his arms. "Don't worry," he said, "he's alive!" [11] Then they all went back upstairs and ate the Lord's Supper together. And Paul continued talking to them until dawn; then he left. [12] Meanwhile, the young man was taken home unhurt, and everyone was greatly relieved.

[13] Paul went by land to Assos, where he had arranged for us to join him, and we went on ahead by ship. [14] He joined us there and we sailed together to Mitylene. [15] The next day we passed the island of Kios. The following day, we crossed to the island of Samos. And a day later we arrived at Miletus.

[16] Paul had decided against stopping at Ephesus this time because he didn't want to spend further time in the province of Asia. He was hurrying to get to Jerusalem, if possible, for the Festival of Pentecost. [17] But when we landed at Miletus, he sent a message to the elders of the church at Ephesus, asking them to come down to meet him.

[18] When they arrived he declared, "You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now [19] I have done the Lord's work humbly—yes, and with tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews. [20] Yet I never shrank from telling you the truth, either publicly or in your homes. [21] I have had one message for Jews and Gentiles alike—the necessity of turning from sin and turning to God, and of faith in our Lord Jesus.

[22] "And now I am going to Jerusalem, drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what awaits me, [23] except that the Holy Spirit has told me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. [24] But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love.

[25] "And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again. [26] Let me say plainly that I have been faithful. No one's damnation can be blamed on me, [27] for I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants for you.

[28] "And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his blood—over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders. [29] I know full well that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. [30] Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following. [31] Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you—my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you.

[32] "And now I entrust you to God and the word of his grace—his message that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself.

[33] "I have never coveted anyone's money or fine clothing. [34] You know that these hands of mine have worked to pay my own way, and I have even supplied the needs of those who were with me. [35] And I have been a constant example of how you can help the poor by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

[36] When he had finished speaking, he knelt and prayed with them. [37] They wept aloud as they embraced him in farewell, [38] sad most of all because he had said that they would never see him again. Then they accompanied him down to the ship.

[21:1] After saying farewell to the Ephesian elders, we sailed straight to the island of Cos. The next day we reached Rhodes and then went to Patara. [2] There we boarded a ship sailing for the Syrian province of Phoenicia. [3] We sighted the island of Cyprus, passed it on our left, and landed at the harbor of Tyre, in Syria, where the ship was to unload. [4] We went ashore, found the local believers, and stayed with them a week. These disciples prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem. [5] When we returned to the ship at the end of the week, the entire congregation, including wives and children, came down to the shore with us. There we knelt, prayed, [6] and said our farewells. Then we went aboard, and they returned home.

[7] The next stop after leaving Tyre was Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters but stayed only one day. [8] Then we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food. [9] He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.

[10] During our stay of several days, a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea. [11] When he visited us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands with it. Then he said, "The Holy Spirit declares, 'So shall the owner of this belt be bound by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Romans.'" [12] When we heard this, we who were traveling with him, as well as the local believers, begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

[13] But he said, "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." [14] When it was clear that we couldn't persuade him, we gave up and said, "The will of the Lord be done."

[15] Shortly afterward we packed our things and left for Jerusalem. [16] Some believers from Caesarea accompanied us, and they took us to the home of Mnason, a man originally from Cyprus and one of the early disciples. [17] All the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem welcomed us cordially.

[18] The next day Paul went in with us to meet with James, and all the elders of the Jerusalem church were present. [19] After greetings were exchanged, Paul gave a detailed account of the things God had accomplished among the Gentiles through his ministry.

[20] After hearing this, they praised God. But then they said, "You know, dear brother, how many thousands of Jews have also believed, and they all take the law of Moses very seriously. [21] Our Jewish Christians here at Jerusalem have been told that you are teaching all the Jews living in the Gentile world to turn their backs on the laws of Moses. They say that you teach people not to circumcise their children or follow other Jewish customs. [22] Now what can be done? For they will certainly hear that you have come.

[23] "Here's our suggestion. We have four men here who have taken a vow and are preparing to shave their heads. [24] Go with them to the Temple and join them in the purification ceremony, and pay for them to have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know that the rumors are all false and that you yourself observe the Jewish laws.

[25] "As for the Gentile Christians, all we ask of them is what we already told them in a letter: They should not eat food offered to idols, nor consume blood, nor eat meat from strangled animals, and they should stay away from all sexual immorality."

[26] So Paul agreed to their request, and the next day he went through the purification ritual with the men and went to the Temple. Then he publicly announced the date when their vows would end and sacrifices would be offered for each of them.

[27] The seven days were almost ended when some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul in the Temple and roused a mob against him. They grabbed him, [28] yelling, "Men of Israel! Help! This is the man who teaches against our people and tells everybody to disobey the Jewish laws. He speaks against the Temple—and he even defiles it by bringing Gentiles in!" [29] (For earlier that day they had seen him in the city with Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus, and they assumed Paul had taken him into the Temple.)

[30] The whole population of the city was rocked by these accusations, and a great riot followed. Paul was dragged out of the Temple, and immediately the gates were closed behind him. [31] As they were trying to kill him, word reached the commander of the Roman regiment that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. [32] He immediately called out his soldiers and officers and ran down among the crowd. When the mob saw the commander and the troops coming, they stopped beating Paul. [33] The commander arrested him and ordered him bound with two chains. Then he asked the crowd who he was and what he had done. [34] Some shouted one thing and some another. He couldn't find out the truth in all the uproar and confusion, so he ordered Paul to be taken to the fortress. [35] As they reached the stairs, the mob grew so violent the soldiers had to lift Paul to their shoulders to protect him. [36] And the crowd followed behind shouting, "Kill him, kill him!"

[37] As Paul was about to be taken inside, he said to the commander, "May I have a word with you?"

"Do you know Greek?" the commander asked, surprised. [38] "Aren't you the Egyptian who led a rebellion some time ago and took four thousand members of the Assassins out into the desert?"

[39] "No," Paul replied, "I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, which is an important city. Please, let me talk to these people." [40] The commander agreed, so Paul stood on the stairs and motioned to the people to be quiet. Soon a deep silence enveloped the crowd, and he addressed them in their own language, Aramaic.

[22:1] "Brothers and esteemed fathers," Paul said, "listen to me as I offer my defense." [2] When they heard him speaking in their own language, the silence was even greater. [3] "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. At his feet I learned to follow our Jewish laws and customs very carefully. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just as all of you are today. [4] And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, binding and delivering both men and women to prison. [5] The high priest and the whole council of leaders can testify that this is so. For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the Christians from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished.

[6] "As I was on the road, nearing Damascus, about noon a very bright light from heaven suddenly shone around me. [7] I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

[8] " 'Who are you, sir?' I asked. And he replied, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting.' [9] The people with me saw the light but didn't hear the voice.

[10] "I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord told me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that you are to do.'

[11] "I was blinded by the intense light and had to be led into Damascus by my companions.

[12] A man named Ananias lived there. He was a godly man in his devotion to the law, and he was well thought of by all the Jews of Damascus. [13] He came to me and stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And that very hour I could see him!

[14] "Then he told me, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and hear him speak. [15] You are to take his message everywhere, telling the whole world what you have seen and heard. [16] And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on the name of the Lord.'

[17] "One day after I returned to Jerusalem, I was praying in the Temple, and I fell into a trance. [18] I saw a vision of Jesus saying to me, 'Hurry! Leave Jerusalem, for the people here won't believe you when you give them your testimony about me.'

[19] " 'But Lord,' I argued, 'they certainly know that I imprisoned and beat those in every synagogue who believed on you. [20] And when your witness Stephen was killed, I was standing there agreeing. I kept the coats they laid aside as they stoned him.'

[21] "But the Lord said to me, 'Leave Jerusalem, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!'

"

[22] The crowd listened until Paul came to that word; then with one voice they shouted, "Away with such a fellow! Kill him! He isn't fit to live!" [23] They yelled, threw off their coats, and tossed handfuls of dust into the air.

[24] The commander brought Paul inside and ordered him lashed with whips to make him confess his crime. He wanted to find out why the crowd had become so furious. [25] As they tied Paul down to lash him, Paul said to the officer standing there, "Is it legal for you to whip a Roman citizen who hasn't even been tried?"

[26] The officer went to the commander and asked, "What are you doing? This man is a Roman citizen!"

[27] So the commander went over and asked Paul, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"

"Yes, I certainly am," Paul replied.

[28] "I am, too," the commander muttered, "and it cost me plenty!"

"But I am a citizen by birth!"

[29] The soldiers who were about to interrogate Paul quickly withdrew when they heard he was a Roman citizen, and the commander was frightened because he had ordered him bound and whipped.

[30] The next day the commander freed Paul from his chains and ordered the leading priests into session with the Jewish high council. He had Paul brought in before them to try to find out what the trouble was all about.

[23:1] Gazing intently at the high council, Paul began: "Brothers, I have always lived before God in all good conscience!"

[2] Instantly Ananias the high priest commanded those close to Paul to slap him on the mouth.

[3] But Paul said to him, "God will slap you, you whitewashed wall! What kind of judge are you to break the law yourself by ordering me struck like that?"

[4] Those standing near Paul said to him, "Is that the way to talk to God's high priest?"

[5] "I'm sorry, brothers. I didn't realize he was the high priest," Paul replied, "for the Scriptures say, 'Do not speak evil of anyone who rules over you.' "

[6] Paul realized that some members of the high council were Sadducees and some were Pharisees, so he shouted, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, as were all my ancestors! And I am on trial because my hope is in the resurrection of the dead!"

[7] This divided the council—the Pharisees against the Sadducees— [8] for the Sadducees say there is no resurrection or angels or spirits, but the Pharisees believe in all of these. [9] So a great clamor arose. Some of the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees jumped up to argue that Paul was all right. "We see nothing wrong with him," they shouted. "Perhaps a spirit or an angel spoke to him." [10] The shouting grew louder and louder, and the men were tugging at Paul from both sides, pulling him this way and that. Finally, the commander, fearing they would tear him apart, ordered his soldiers to take him away from them and bring him back to the fortress.

[11] That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have told the people about me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome."

[12] The next morning a group of Jews got together and bound themselves with an oath to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. [13] There were more than forty of them. [14] They went to the leading priests and other leaders and told them what they had done. "We have bound ourselves under oath to neither eat nor drink until we have killed Paul. [15] You and the high council should tell the commander to bring Paul back to the council again," they requested. "Pretend you want to examine his case more fully. We will kill him on the way."

[16] But Paul's nephew heard of their plan and went to the fortress and told Paul. [17] Paul called one of the officers and said, "Take this young man to the commander. He has something important to tell him."

[18] So the officer did, explaining, "Paul, the prisoner, called me over and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you."

[19] The commander took him by the arm, led him aside, and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?"

[20] Paul's nephew told him, "Some Jews are going to ask you to bring Paul before the Jewish high council tomorrow, pretending they want to get some more information. [21] But don't do it! There are more than forty men hiding along the way ready to jump him and kill him. They have vowed not to eat or drink until they kill him. They are ready, expecting you to agree to their request."

[22] "Don't let a soul know you told me this," the commander warned the young man as he sent him away.

[23] Then the commander called two of his officers and ordered, "Get two hundred soldiers ready to leave for Caesarea at nine o'clock tonight. Also take two hundred spearmen and seventy horsemen. [24] Provide horses for Paul to ride, and get him safely to Governor Felix." [25] Then he wrote this letter to the governor:

[26] "From Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency, Governor Felix. Greetings! [27] This man was seized by some Jews, and they were about to kill him when I arrived with the troops. When I learned that he was a Roman citizen, I removed him to safety. [28] Then I took him to their high council to try to find out what he had done. [29] I soon discovered it was something regarding their religious law—certainly nothing worthy of imprisonment or death. [30] But when I was informed of a plot to kill him, I immediately sent him on to you. I have told his accusers to bring their charges before you."

[31] So that night, as ordered, the soldiers took Paul as far as Antipatris. [32] They returned to the fortress the next morning, while the horsemen took him on to Caesarea. [33] When they arrived in Caesarea, they presented Paul and the letter to Governor Felix. [34] He read it and then asked Paul what province he was from. "Cilicia," Paul answered.

[35] "I will hear your case myself when your accusers arrive," the governor told him. Then the governor ordered him kept in the prison at Herod's headquarters.

[24:1] Five days later Ananias, the high priest, arrived with some of the Jewish leaders and the lawyer Tertullus, to press charges against Paul. [2] When Paul was called in, Tertullus laid charges against Paul in the following address to the governor:

"Your Excellency, you have given peace to us Jews and have enacted reforms for us. [3] And for all of this we are very grateful to you. [4] But lest I bore you, kindly give me your attention for only a moment as I briefly outline our case against this man. [5] For we have found him to be a troublemaker, a man who is constantly inciting the Jews throughout the world to riots and rebellions against the Roman government. He is a ringleader of the sect known as the Nazarenes. [6] Moreover he was trying to defile the Temple when we arrested him. [7] [8] you can find out the truth of our accusations by examining him yourself." [9] Then the other Jews chimed in, declaring that everything Tertullus said was true.

[10] Now it was Paul's turn. The governor motioned for him to rise and speak. Paul said, "I know, sir that you have been a judge of Jewish affairs for many years, and this gives me confidence as I make my defense. [11] You can quickly discover that it was no more than twelve days ago that I arrived in Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. [12] I didn't argue with anyone in the Temple, nor did I incite a riot in any synagogue or on the streets of the city. [13] These men certainly cannot prove the things they accuse me of doing.

[14] "But I admit that I follow the Way, which they call a sect. I worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the books of prophecy.

[15] I have hope in God, just as these men do, that he will raise both the righteous and the ungodly. [16] Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and everyone else.

[17] "After several years away, I returned to Jerusalem with money to aid my people and to offer sacrifices to God. [18] My accusers saw me in the Temple as I was completing a purification ritual. There was no crowd around me and no rioting. [19] But some Jews from the province of Asia were there—and they ought to be here to bring charges if they have anything against me! [20] Ask these men here what wrongdoing the Jewish high council found in me, [21] except for one thing I said when I shouted out, 'I am on trial before you today because I believe in the resurrection of the dead!' "

[22] Felix, who was quite familiar with the Way, adjourned the hearing and said, "Wait until Lysias, the garrison commander, arrives. Then I will decide the case." [23] He ordered an officer to keep Paul in custody but to give him some freedom and allow his friends to visit him and take care of his needs.

[24] A few days later Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish. Sending for Paul, they listened as he told them about faith in Christ Jesus. [25] As he reasoned with them about righteousness and self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified. "Go away for now," he replied. "When it is more convenient, I'll call for you again." [26] He also hoped that Paul would bribe him, so he sent for him quite often and talked with him.

[27] Two years went by in this way; then Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And because Felix wanted to gain favor with the Jewish leaders, he left Paul in prison.

[25:1] Three days after Festus arrived in Caesarea to take over his new responsibilities, he left for Jerusalem, [2] where the leading priests and other Jewish leaders met with him and made their accusations against Paul. [3] They asked Festus as a favor to transfer Paul to Jerusalem. (Their plan was to waylay and kill him.) [4] But Festus replied that Paul was at Caesarea and he himself would be returning there soon. [5] So he said, "Those of you in authority can return with me. If Paul has done anything wrong, you can make your accusations."

[6] Eight or ten days later he returned to Caesarea, and on the following day Paul's trial began. [7] On Paul's arrival in court, the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem gathered around and made many serious accusations they couldn't prove. [8] Paul denied the charges. "I am not guilty," he said. "I have committed no crime against the Jewish laws or the Temple or the Roman government."

[9] Then Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asked him, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there?"

[10] But Paul replied, "No! This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well I am not guilty. [11] If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die. But if I am innocent, neither you nor anyone else has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I appeal to Caesar!"

[12] Festus conferred with his advisers and then replied, "Very well! You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you shall go!"

[13] A few days later King Agrippa arrived with his sister, Bernice, to pay their respects to Festus. [14] During their stay of several days, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. "There is a prisoner here," he told him, "whose case was left for me by Felix. [15] When I was in Jerusalem, the leading priests and other Jewish leaders pressed charges against him and asked me to sentence him. [16] Of course, I quickly pointed out to them that Roman law does not convict people without a trial. They are given an opportunity to defend themselves face to face with their accusers.

[17] "When they came here for the trial, I called the case the very next day and ordered Paul brought in. [18] But the accusations made against him weren't at all what I expected. [19] It was something about their religion and about someone called Jesus who died, but whom Paul insists is alive. [20] I was perplexed as to how to conduct an investigation of this kind, and I asked him whether he would be willing to stand trial on these charges in Jerusalem. [21] But Paul appealed to the emperor. So I ordered him back to jail until I could arrange to send him to Caesar."

[22] "I'd like to hear the man myself," Agrippa said.

And Festus replied, "You shall—tomorrow!"

[23] So the next day Agrippa and Bernice arrived at the auditorium with great pomp, accompanied by military officers and prominent men of the city. Festus ordered that Paul be brought in. [24] Then Festus said, "King Agrippa and all present, this is the man whose death is demanded both by the local Jews and by those in Jerusalem. [25] But in my opinion he has done nothing worthy of death. However, he appealed his case to the emperor, and I decided to send him. [26] But what shall I write the emperor? For there is no real charge against him. So I have brought him before all of you, and especially you, King Agrippa, so that after we examine him, I might have something to write. [27] For it doesn't seem reasonable to send a prisoner to the emperor without specifying the charges against him!"

[26:1] Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You may speak in your defense."

So Paul, with a gesture of his hand, started his defense: [2] "I am fortunate, King Agrippa, that you are the one hearing my defense against all these accusations made by the Jewish leaders, [3] for I know you are an expert on Jewish customs and controversies. Now please listen to me patiently!

[4] "As the Jewish leaders are well aware, I was given a thorough Jewish training from my earliest childhood among my own people and in Jerusalem. [5] If they would admit it, they know that I have been a member of the Pharisees, the strictest sect of our religion. [6] Now I am on trial because I am looking forward to the fulfillment of God's promise made to our ancestors. [7] In fact, that is why the twelve tribes of Israel worship God night and day, and they share the same hope I have. Yet, O king, they say it is wrong for me to have this hope! [8] Why does it seem incredible to any of you that God can raise the dead?

[9] "I used to believe that I ought to do everything I could to oppose the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. [10] Authorized by the leading priests, I caused many of the believers in Jerusalem to be sent to prison. And I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death.

[11] Many times I had them whipped in the synagogues to try to get them to curse Christ. I was so violently opposed to them that I even hounded them in distant cities of foreign lands.

[12] "One day I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with the authority and commission of the leading priests. [13] About noon, Your Majesty, a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions. [14] We all fell down, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to fight against my will.'

[15] " 'Who are you, sir?' I asked.

"And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. [16] Now stand up! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and my witness. You are to tell the world about this experience and about other times I will appear to you. [17] And I will protect you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am going to send you to the Gentiles, [18] to open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me.'

[19] "And so, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to that vision from heaven. [20] I preached first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that all must turn from their sins and turn to God—and prove they have changed by the good things they do. [21] Some Jews arrested me in the Temple for preaching this, and they tried to kill me. [22] But God protected me so that I am still alive today to tell these facts to everyone, from the least to the greatest. I teach nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would happen— [23] that the Messiah would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead as a light to Jews and Gentiles alike."

[24] Suddenly, Festus shouted, "Paul, you are insane. Too much study has made you crazy!"

[25] But Paul replied, "I am not insane, Most Excellent Festus. I am speaking the sober truth. [26] And King Agrippa knows about these things. I speak frankly, for I am sure these events are all familiar to him, for they were not done in a corner! [27] King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do—"

[28] Agrippa interrupted him. "Do you think you can make me a Christian so quickly?"

[29] Paul replied, "Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains."

[30] Then the king, the governor, Bernice, and all the others stood and left. [31] As they talked it over they agreed, "This man hasn't done anything worthy of death or imprisonment." [32] And Agrippa said to Festus, "He could be set free if he hadn't appealed to Caesar!"

[27:1] when the time came, we set sail for Italy. Paul and several other prisoners were placed in the custody of an army officer named Julius, a captain of the Imperial Regiment. [2] And Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was also with us. We left on a boat whose home port was Adramyttium; it was scheduled to make several stops at ports along the coast of the province of Asia.

[3] The next day when we docked at Sidon, Julius was very kind to Paul and let him go ashore to visit with friends so they could provide for his needs. [4] Putting out to sea from there, we encountered headwinds that made it difficult to keep the ship on course, so we sailed north of Cyprus between the island and the mainland. [5] We passed along the coast of the provinces of Cilicia and Pamphylia, landing at Myra, in the province of Lycia. [6] There the officer found an Egyptian ship from Alexandria that was bound for Italy, and he put us on board.

[7] We had several days of rough sailing, and after great difficulty we finally neared Cnidus. But the wind was against us, so we sailed down to the leeward side of Crete, past the cape of Salmone. [8] We struggled along the coast with great difficulty and finally arrived at Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea. [9] We had lost a lot of time. The weather was becoming dangerous for long voyages by then because it was so late in the fall, and Paul spoke to the ship's officers about it.

[10] "Sirs," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on—shipwreck, loss of cargo, injuries, and danger to our lives." [11] But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship's captain and the owner than to Paul. [12] And since Fair Havens was an exposed harbor—a poor place to spend the winter—most of the crew wanted to go to Phoenix, farther up the coast of Crete, and spend the winter there. Phoenix was a good harbor with only a southwest and northwest exposure.

[13] When a light wind began blowing from the south, the sailors thought they could make it. So they pulled up anchor and sailed along close to shore. [14] But the weather changed abruptly, and a wind of typhoon strength (a "northeaster," they called it) caught the ship and blew it out to sea. [15] They couldn't turn the ship into the wind, so they gave up and let it run before the gale.

[16] We sailed behind a small island named Cauda, where with great difficulty we hoisted aboard the lifeboat that was being towed behind us. [17] Then we banded the ship with ropes to strengthen the hull. The sailors were afraid of being driven across to the sandbars of Syrtis off the African coast, so they lowered the sea anchor and were thus driven before the wind.

[18] The next day, as gale-force winds continued to batter the ship, the crew began throwing the cargo overboard. [19] The following day they even threw out the ship's equipment and anything else they could lay their hands on. [20] The terrible storm raged unabated for many days, blotting out the sun and the stars, until at last all hope was gone.

[21] No one had eaten for a long time. Finally, Paul called the crew together and said, "Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Fair Havens. You would have avoided all this injury and loss. [22] But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. [23] For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, [24] and he said, 'Don't be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What's more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.' [25] So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said. [26] But we will be shipwrecked on an island."

[27] About midnight on the fourteenth night of the storm, as we were being driven across the Sea of Adria, the sailors sensed land was near. [28] They took soundings and found the water was only 120 feet deep. A little later they sounded again and found only 90 feet. [29] At this rate they were afraid we would soon be driven against the rocks along the shore, so they threw out four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. [30] Then the sailors tried to abandon the ship; they lowered the lifeboat as though they were going to put out anchors from the prow. [31] But Paul said to the commanding officer and the soldiers, "You will all die unless the sailors stay aboard." [32] So the soldiers cut the ropes and let the boat fall off.

[33] As the darkness gave way to the early morning light, Paul begged everyone to eat. "You haven't touched food for two weeks," he said. [34] "Please eat something now for your own good. For not a hair of your heads will perish." [35] Then he took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it. [36] Then everyone was encouraged, [37] and all 276 of us began eating—for that is the number we had aboard. [38] After eating, the crew lightened the ship further by throwing the cargo of wheat overboard.

[39] When morning dawned, they didn't recognize the coastline, but they saw a bay with a beach and wondered if they could get between the rocks and get the ship safely to shore. [40] So they cut off the anchors and left them in the sea. Then they lowered the rudders, raised the foresail, and headed toward shore. [41] But the ship hit a shoal and ran aground. The bow of the ship stuck fast, while the stern was repeatedly smashed by the force of the waves and began to break apart.

[42] The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to make sure they didn't swim ashore and escape. [43] But the commanding officer wanted to spare Paul, so he didn't let them carry out their plan. Then he ordered all who could swim to jump overboard first and make for land, [44] and he told the others to try for it on planks and debris from the broken ship. So everyone escaped safely ashore!

[28:1] Once we were safe on shore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta. [2] The people of the island were very kind to us. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome us and warm us.

[3] As Paul gathered an armful of sticks and was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, fastened itself onto his hand. [4] The people of the island saw it hanging there and said to each other, "A murderer, no doubt! Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live." [5] But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and was unharmed. [6] The people waited for him to swell up or suddenly drop dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and decided he was a god.

[7] Near the shore where we landed was an estate belonging to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us courteously and fed us for three days. [8] As it happened, Publius's father was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, he healed him. [9] Then all the other sick people on the island came and were cured. [10] As a result we were showered with honors, and when the time came to sail, people put on board all sorts of things we would need for the trip.

[11] It was three months after the shipwreck that we set sail on another ship that had wintered at the island—an Alexandrian ship with the twin gods as its figurehead. [12] Our first stop was Syracuse, where we stayed three days. [13] From there we sailed across to Rhegium. A day later a south wind began blowing, so the following day we sailed up the coast to Puteoli. [14] There we found some believers, who invited us to stay with them seven days. And so we came to Rome.

[15] The brothers and sisters in Rome had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us at the Forum on the Appian Way. Others joined us at The Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

[16] When we arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier.

[17] Three days after Paul's arrival, he called together the local Jewish leaders. He said to them, "Brothers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Roman government, even though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors. [18] The Romans tried me and wanted to release me, for they found no cause for the death sentence. [19] But when the Jewish leaders protested the decision, I felt it necessary to appeal to Caesar, even though I had no desire to press charges against my own people. [20] I asked you to come here today so we could get acquainted and so I could tell you that I am bound with this chain because I believe that the hope of Israel—the Messiah—has already come."

[21] They replied, "We have heard nothing against you. We have had no letters from Judea or reports from anyone who has arrived here. [22] But we want to hear what you believe, for the only thing we know about these Christians is that they are denounced everywhere."

[23] So a time was set, and on that day a large number of people came to Paul's house. He told them about the Kingdom of God and taught them about Jesus from the Scriptures—from the five books of Moses and the books of the prophets. He began lecturing in the morning and went on into the evening. [24] Some believed and some didn't. [25] But after they had argued back and forth among themselves, they left with this final word from Paul: "The Holy Spirit was right when he said to our ancestors through Isaiah the prophet,

[26] 'Go and say to my people,
You will hear my words,
 but you will not understand;
you will see what I do,
 but you will not perceive its meaning.
[27] For the hearts of these people are hardened,
 and their ears cannot hear,
 and they have closed their eyes—
so their eyes cannot see,
 and their ears cannot hear,
 and their hearts cannot understand,
And they cannot turn to me
 and let me heal them.'

[28] So I want you to realize that this salvation from God is also available to the Gentiles, and they will accept it." [29]

[30] For the next two years, Paul lived in his own rented house. He welcomed all who visited him, [31] proclaiming the Kingdom of God with all boldness and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.

MEGATHEMES

THEME: Church beginnings

EXPLANATION:

Acts is the history of how Christianity was founded and organized and solved its problems. The community of believers began by faith in the risen Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, who enabled them to witness, to love, and to serve.

IMPORTANCE:

New churches are continually being founded. By faith in Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the church can be a vibrant agent for change. As we face new problems, Acts gives important remedies for solving them.

THEME: Holy Spirit

EXPLANATION:

The church did not start or grow by its own power or enthusiasm. The disciples were empowered by God's Holy Spirit. He was the promised Counselor and Guide sent when Jesus went to heaven.

IMPORTANCE:

The Holy Spirit's work demonstrated that Christianity was supernatural. Thus the church became more Holy Spirit-conscious than problem-conscious. By faith, any believer can claim the Holy Spirit's power to do Christ's work.

THEME: Church growth

EXPLANATION:

Acts presents the history of a dynamic, growing community of believers from Jerusalem to Syria, Africa, Asia, and Europe. In the first century, Christianity spread from believing Jews to non-Jews in 39 cities and 30 countries, islands, or provinces.

IMPORTANCE:

When the Holy Spirit works, there is movement, excitement, and growth. He gives us the motivation, energy, and ability to get the gospel to the whole world. How are you fitting into God's plan for expanding Christianity? What is your place in this movement?

THEME: Witnessing

EXPLANATION:

Peter, John, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, and thousands more witnessed to their new faith in Christ. By personal testimony, preaching, or defense before authorities, they told the story with boldness and courage to groups of all sizes.

IMPORTANCE:

We are God's people, chosen to be part of his plan to reach the world. In love and by faith, we can have the Holy Spirit's help as we witness or preach. Witnessing is also beneficial to us because it strengthens our faith as we confront those who challenge it.

THEME: Opposition

EXPLANATION:

Through imprisonment, beatings, plots, and riots, Christians were persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles. But the opposition became a catalyst for the spread of Christianity. Growth during times of oppression showed that Christianity was not the work of humans, but of God.

IMPORTANCE:

God can work through any opposition. When severe treatment from hostile unbelievers comes, realize that it has come because you have been a faithful witness and you have looked for the opportunity to present the Good News about Christ. Seize the opportunities that opposition brings.

TIMELINE

Jesus crucified; Pentecost; church begun A.D. 30
Stephen martyred; Paul's conversion 35
Paul returns to Tarsus 38
Barnabas goes to find Paul 43
James martyred; Peter in prison 44
Paul's first missionary journey 46-48
Jerusalem Council 50
Paul's second missionary journey 50-52
Paul's third missionary journey 53-57
Nero becomes emperor 54
Paul imprisoned in Caesarea 57-59
Paul's journey to Rome 59
Paul released from prison 62
Paul martyred 67?
Rome destroys Jerusalem 70

An invitation is given to open your heart's door.

Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: Living Bible Translation

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print

