

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

ACTS



Lesson 1

Introduction

As we begin the study of the book of Acts, we need to keep in mind the “Meta-Narrative” and God’s eternal plan of redemption from before the foundations of the earth. Remember the stages of the plan? The planning stage, the preparation stage, the fulfillment stage and finally the results of the fulfilled stage. Acts appears in God’s grand story after Jesus came and fulfilled the eternal plan of redemption. Acts begins stage four—the results of the fulfilled plan—and describes this in terms of the sending of the Holy Spirit, the role of the Holy Spirit, the spread of the gospel and the establishment of the early church. All is a result of Jesus fulfilling the eternal plan of redemption, and we are now living in the results of the fulfilled plan.

Acts is a continuation of the marvelous deeds that God was doing in the Old Testament and the great deeds Christ accomplished in the gospels. Now that Christ has been crucified, buried, resurrected and ascended to heaven, God begins the church. Acts is about the beginning and growth of the early church and how the gospel spread to the surrounding areas. Acts is not about the work of man beginning the church but about God and His beginning of the church through the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Acts was written by Luke who is the same person who wrote the gospel of Luke. Both the gospel of Luke and Acts were addressed to a man named Theophilus (***Luke 1:1; Acts 1:1***). Luke was writing the gospel, or his account of the life of Christ to inform Theophilus of the life and ministry of Christ. Then Luke wrote Acts to tell what God continued to do through the Holy Spirit after Jesus went back to heaven. Instead of the book of Acts being called “The Acts of the Apostles,” it would be better called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” because it is the work of the Holy Spirit directing and leading the apostles and church leaders in what to know and do in the establishment of the early church. As we begin our study of the book of Acts, we are going to focus on where we see God faithfully and divinely intervening to carry out His work of beginning the church.

Jesus’ Instructions Before He Went to Heaven

Read Acts 1:1-8.

Before Jesus’ departure, He instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father to be given to them. This is consistent with how we have seen God work throughout all of the Bible. God has always been communicating with mankind and not leaving them to figure out things on their own. He gives specific instructions to them to wait for the Holy Spirit. In these

first few verses of Acts, we have Jesus' instructions after he was crucified and rose again but before he ascended to heaven. In the gospels, we also have Jesus giving the very same instructions before he was crucified.

Read Luke 24:49 and John 14:16-17; 16:7; 13-15.

What was this promise of the Father? The promise was the Helper, who is the Holy Spirit, coming to indwell these early believers. Jesus' sacrifice had cleared the way for the Holy Spirit to take up permanent residence in a believer—to not only teach and transform them but also empower them to be a witness of Him throughout the whole world. These words by Jesus and Paul begin to give us an idea of the role of the Holy Spirit:

- To permanently indwell those who have trusted Christ as their Savior (***John 14:16***).
- To bring things to our remembrance (***John 14:26***).
- To guide us into all truth (***John 15:13***).
- To glorify Christ (***John 15:14***).
- To communicate to us the spiritual matters that we have been given because we are in the family of God (***1 Corinthians 2:12***).

In ***Acts 1:4-5*** Jesus is reminding them of what He told them before he was crucified and he makes a distinction between the water baptism that John the Baptist provided with the spiritual baptism that was going to take place in just a few days. We are seeing an emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the very beginning of the book of Acts.

Verse eight tells us that when they receive the Holy Spirit, they will receive power to become witnesses not only where they are but also around the world. Notice that the power does not come from themselves, their clever ways to be a witness, or wonderful articulation of the gospel. The power comes when they are permanently indwelt with the Holy Spirit and He leads them in what to do. This is God's work, not man's work.

The Apostles and Believers Waited in Jerusalem

Read Acts 1:12-16.

Because Jesus had revealed Himself to the apostles when He told them to wait in Jerusalem, this is what they did. They were not waiting just for the sake of waiting but doing it because, while Jesus was here on the earth, He had so revealed Himself to them that their relationship with Him grew and they were confident He could be trusted. Peter told the apostles and others who were

present that what took place with Judas was fulfilling scripture. God did what He said He was going to do and His plan was being fulfilled.

The Giving of the Holy Spirit

Read Acts 2:1-4.

The day of Pentecost was a Jewish feast day, and they were commanded by the law of Moses to observe it every year just like the feast of the Passover. The feast of Pentecost was held fifty days after the feast of the Passover. It was observed as a Sabbath day with public worship and sacrifices at the temple. Because this occurred only once a year, there would have been a very large group of people gathered in Jerusalem at this time.

The Apostles and all of the believers were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost waiting for the Holy Spirit as they were told. As they were gathered together, they were filled with the Holy Spirit—not just the eleven disciples but each believer who was present. Jesus filled all of the believers with the Holy Spirit just as He had promised. He always does what He says.

Remember what we read in ***John 14:16-17*** where Jesus at the Last Supper promised His disciples He would ask His Father to send the Helper, the Holy Spirit, that would live in His children forever? This is exactly what is taking place. The Holy Spirit was sent from heaven to indwell of all His children and He came to indwell all believers for eternity, uniting us together in Christ. God is faithfully and divinely intervening, giving the Holy Spirit at the birth of the church to facilitate and establish the growth of the church.

Beginning of the Church – God’s Presence on the Earth

Based on God’s eternal plan of redemption, He always planned a way to have relationship with mankind. Because Jesus fulfilled that plan, now mankind can be filled with the Holy Spirit and enjoy that relationship and fellowship with God. Here we see God fulfilling His eternal purpose, and this marks the beginning of the church.

On that day, God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell all believers so that they would become God’s dwelling place here on earth. As individuals, we are God’s temple; we are united together by the Spirit and make up the Church. That day of Pentecost was the first day of the beginning of God’s church and since that time, all believers in the world have become a part of it.

1 Corinthians 6:19 – “...your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you...”

Let's Review God's Plan of Dwelling with Mankind through the Old Testament

What was God's first dwelling place here in the earth? The Bible teaches that God dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle Moses built according to God's instructions (*Exodus 25:8; 40:34*). For a Holy God to dwell in the midst of a fallen people, He had to create an elaborate system of laws and sacrifices that temporarily covered their sin and protected them from His wrath. Later He dwelt in the temple that Solomon built for Him (*1 Kings 8:10-11, 27*).

However, because the people loved sin more than God, they rejected Him, and His glorious presence departed from the temple (*Ezekiel 10:18-19*). Soon afterward, the Babylonian army destroyed the temple (*2 Kings 25:8-9*). In time, a new temple was built and God's glory returned to the temple when He sent His Son Jesus (*Mark 11:11*). The people did not recognize Jesus as God's Son and they crucified Him (*John 19:6-7*). When Jesus cried out on the cross, "*It is finished*," God ripped the curtain in the temple that divided the people from God's presence from top to bottom (*John 19:30; Matthew 27:50-51*). God wanted to show that the way back to him had been restored. In addition, His dwelling place would no longer be in a house but in His people.

On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to live in God's people, God came to live in His people. Today we don't need to wait for the Holy Spirit to come like the disciples were instructed. The moment a person believes in Christ as their Savior they are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, and they become a child of God. They become part of the church; the dwelling of God on the earth is now in the people who make up His church.

Results of Being Filled with the Spirit

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit which means that the Holy Spirit would lead and guide them. This is why the Holy Spirit was sent by Jesus—to lead, guide, and teach His children to enable them to witness for Jesus Christ. Just as the Holy Spirit was sent to indwell, lead, and guide the apostles and early believers, He is doing the same with believers today—indwelling, leading, and guiding them. Verse four says that suddenly the believers began to speak languages they did not naturally know. The Spirit of God enabled them to speak languages different from their own native tongue. One would think there would be nothing but confusion and noise in all of this excitement; however, they didn't all speak at the same time. They spoke as the Holy Spirit directed and, therefore, it was not confusing. This is another faithful and divine intervention of God for the church.

Read Acts 2:5-11.

What happened next is proof that this is a work of God and not of man and proving that God is continuing to fulfill His eternal plan of redemption of making a way for mankind to enter into a relationship with Himself and beginning the church. This is only a work that God could do. Jesus said He would build His church, and this is Him doing exactly what He said he would do—beginning to build His church.

The Holy Spirit give these believers the ability to speak these different languages to prove that this was all of God and to begin spreading the gospel. There were Jews of many different languages in Jerusalem because of the feasts. How did there become so many Jews speaking different languages? Hundreds of years earlier, God's people, the Jews, had rejected Him and turned to other gods or idols. God punished the Jews by allowing the Syrians and Babylonians to take them captive. Afterward God restored their freedom and brought some back to Israel to rebuild the temple, but many Jews made their home throughout the world. As the years passed, they eventually lost their language and only spoke the language of the country in which they lived. However, whenever there was a feast, they would return to Jerusalem to worship.

Remember chapter one, verse eight? You will receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses. This is exactly what took place. The Holy Spirit gave them the ability to speak different languages so that all the visiting Jews could hear the gospel in their own language and be amazed.

The People Responded

Read Acts 2:6-13.

The people's response was a strange mix of amazement and skepticism. They probably recognized that they were Galileans by the way they were dressed. They couldn't understand that all these men from Galilee could speak their languages. While those from the other countries could understand what they were saying, those from Jerusalem couldn't understand, and they concluded that the disciples were drunk. The apostles being able to speak in languages that they did not know continued to be an example of the results of Jesus fulfilling the eternal plan of redemption. God gave them the Holy Spirit to enable them and lead them to speak so that people from different areas and having different languages would be able to hear the gospel. Jesus said, "*I will build my church,*" and this is exactly what we see beginning to happen.

Read Acts 2:14-21.

Here we have Peter's response to the people thinking that they are drunk. Do you remember the life of Peter before he denied Jesus? He was self-confident, self-centered, and self-dependent. Peter denied three times that he even knew the Lord when he was asked. He loved Jesus and was a believer, but his faith was not enough to empower him to stand courageously against the

religious leaders and Roman soldiers. Peter failed Jesus but Jesus did not fail Peter. Jesus had prayed for Peter; He prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. Now that Peter had grown in the knowledge of God and understanding the heart of God, he had learned that he cannot trust in himself and his only hope is to trust in God. He had been given the Holy Spirit and was dependent and relying on the Holy Spirit and now is able to be God-dependent and give a God-centered message to those listening. Peter stood up and explained the phenomena they were witnessing. The disciples were not drunk but rather were experiencing the leading of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They were full of God's Spirit just as Jesus had promised in the book of John. God is carrying out His work in such a way that there is no human explanation for what is taking place. We have seen this over and over throughout the scriptures. For example, God chose to make His covenant with Abraham and Sarah when they were old and Sarah was barren, proving that it was a work of God. God chose to use Moses, who did not want to be used by God, to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt. God chose to use Mary who was a simple, unimportant virgin girl to give birth to the Son of God. This happened over and over, proving it is God's work and God giving a testimony of Himself.

Peter Finishes His Sermon

Read Acts 2:22-36.

- ***The Jews crucified Christ.***

Peter accused the Jews for crucifying Jesus. Jesus, the Messiah, healed the sick, the blind, and the lame just as scripture had predicted (*Isaiah 29:18-19; Isaiah 53:4*). Jesus had raised the dead and performed many other wonderful deeds to show that He was the chosen One of God; however, in spite of all the many miracles, most Jews still rejected him as the One sent from God. Notice in verse 23 it says, "*delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.*" This means that Jesus was fulfilling the plan of God that began before the foundations of the world. Jesus was fulfilling the eternal plan of redemption. This was not man being in charge and fulfilling man's plan and crucifying Jesus; this was God's plan that started before the foundation of the world. God was using these men who crucified Jesus to carry out His plan.

- ***God raised up Jesus from the dead.***

Peter then told them that God had raised Jesus from the dead. Although Jesus was not responsible for our sin, He willingly paid the full penalty for our sin, thereby overcoming Satan, sin, and death. Had He not paid the full price for our sin or had sins of His own to pay, He would not have been raised. We praise God that He accepted Jesus' sacrifice as payment in full and raised Him from the dead—another divine intervention of God on the behalf of mankind. Had He not accepted Christ's death, we would still be in our sins and doomed to pay for our sins for eternity (*1 Corinthians 15:14-17*).

- ***All believers are witnesses to these things.***

Peter and the other believers, under the leading of the Spirit, testified boldly of the Lord's resurrection just as Jesus had told them they would. When Jesus rose from the dead, who did He show Himself to? He appeared before believers, not unbelievers, so that they could be witnesses to His resurrection. Right now, the Holy Spirit indwells each believer so that we too can bravely tell others about Jesus' payment for their sins.

- ***Jesus of Nazareth was exalted to the right hand of God.***

Peter then told them that God took Jesus back up to heaven and seated Him at God's right hand as Ruler over heaven and earth. Because the Holy Spirit had come and given the apostles and the other believers the miraculous ability to speak in other languages, this was proof that Jesus was seated at God's right hand in heaven (***John 16:7***). Peter said all should realize that God raised Jesus and exalted Him, and we should all trust Him as our Savior.

The Results of Peter's Sermon

Read Acts 2:37-41.

After hearing Peter's sermon, many realized their sin of rejecting Jesus. The Holy Spirit convinced them that Jesus is the Son of God, the Deliverer. This happened as Jesus promised—the Holy Spirit would convince people that they were sinners and that Jesus is the promised Savior (***John 16:8***). God saved about 3,000 people who put their personal faith and trust in Christ and were baptized as Peter instructed them. Their baptisms showed they agreed with what Peter had taught them regarding Jesus, the promised Deliverer, who came to free them from their sins. They now were trusting in Jesus' death to pay for their sin. In the next lesson, we will learn what the scripture teaches about baptism.

Lesson 2

Introduction

In the previous lesson we looked at Christ's promise to send the Holy Spirit once He returned to heaven. We saw how He followed through with His promise and indwelt those early believers and also indwells all believers ever since. The Holy Spirit empowered these early believers to speak in languages that were not their own but were understandable to those who had gathered from different areas. The Holy Spirit also gave Peter the strength and clarity to give a very powerful and convincing message. We can see God doing what He said He would do through the sending of the Holy Spirit and fulfilling the eternal plan of redemption.

In the last section we read *Acts 2:37-41* and we saw in verse 37 when the people asked, "*What shall we do?*" Peter responds, "*Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" This can be confusing and make it sound like repentance and baptism are needed for one's sins to be forgiven and to receive the Holy Spirit. This is not true and, in this lesson, we will define repentance and look at the meaning and purpose of baptism.

Repentance

What does Peter mean by "repent" and is it a requirement for salvation? The word *repent* means to reconsider, change your mind, or change your position about something. Most of the Jews had regarded Jesus as less than Messiah and had rejected Him. Peter had just finished saying that the Jews rejected and crucified Jesus. As the people listened to Peter, some were convicted that what they had done was wrong and asked what they needed to do to be saved. Peter said change your thinking, repent or change your mind about who Jesus is. Accept the fact that He is the Son of God, the Messiah, and believe this to be true. Instead of believing what you used to believe about Him, now believe that He, the Son of God, has died on the cross for your sins and you will receive forgiveness of your sins and receive the Holy Spirit.

Through the centuries of Bible teaching, many people have made "repentance" a requirement for salvation, and this is one of the verses on which they base their teaching. One thing we need to remember as we begin and continue our study of the book of Acts is that Acts is a transitional book—it transitions from the gospels (and Jesus' teaching primarily for the Jews and their expectation of the coming kingdom) to the church age which most of the epistles describe. In the epistles we never see repentance as a requirement for salvation but instead faith alone in the finished work of Christ.

The Baptism Taught by John

Read Matthew 3:1-6.

The first time we read about baptism in the Bible is when John was baptizing Jews in preparation for the coming Deliverer. John told them the Deliverer was coming—they needed to realize their sin and be baptized, and all who agreed with his message were baptized. They were baptized to publicly demonstrate they believed John’s message that the Messiah was coming and recognized they were sinners in need of a Savior. They were preparing their hearts for the coming of the Lord.

Jesus Instructs the Disciples to Baptize

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

Jesus told the disciples that everyone who responded in faith to the gospel was to be baptized. They were to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Meaning of Baptism

The Greek word “*baptizo*” is where we get the word “baptize” from. This word means “to dip” Or “to immerse.” It was used to describe a piece of cloth being dipped into a dye solution. When the cloth was pulled out from the dye, it would be completely covered in the color of the dye.

- **The baptism that John taught was different from the baptism that Jesus commanded.**

John’s baptism was to show that the individual realized their sin and was believing in, watching, and waiting for the Deliverer to come to save them. The baptism that Jesus commanded was to demonstrate that the believer realized their sin and was trusting in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection to save them from their sin. John’s baptism was believing and looking forward to what was yet to happen and the baptism that Jesus instructed, believers’ baptism, is looking back and believing in what Christ has already done. The disciples were told to baptize believers in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is now our Father, Jesus is our Savior, and the Holy Spirit now lives in us.

- **Baptism as a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ**

When we were born physically, we were automatically identified with the kingdom of this world into which we came—we were born sinners with a fallen spiritual identity. When we trust Christ as our Savior, the Holy Spirit makes us spiritually alive to God. The Bible says we are born again, separated from our old fallen spiritual identity and given a new spiritual identity in Christ. At the moment the Holy Spirit gave us new birth—when we trusted Christ’s death as payment for our personal sin—we were spiritually placed, dipped, immersed, and baptized into Christ’s Body, the Church universal, the glorious Bride of Christ (*1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 1:13-14*).

After trusting Christ as our Savior, the Scriptures call us to publicly give testimony of our faith in Christ by means of water baptism or believers’ baptism (*Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 8:12, 36-37*). Baptism is God’s creative way to picture our salvation. It helps us visualize what happened to us when we were born again. Like a picture, water baptism helps us tell others what Christ did for us on the cross and openly identifies us with Him. We are, through water baptism, publicly identifying ourselves with Christ—His death, His burial, His resurrection (*Romans 6:1*).

The water that believers are immersed in is a picture of the grave into which Jesus’ body was placed when He died for us on the cross. The Bible says that we died with Him; and when He was buried, we were buried with Him (*Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3-5*). Therefore, when we are baptized, we are showing others that we believe Jesus died and was buried for us. Just as the Bible says we died and were buried with Him, so too it says when He was raised to life, we too were raised to newness of life in Him (*Romans 6:4*). When we as believers are raised up out of the water, it symbolizes our resurrection with Christ and shows we have been raised to newness of life in Christ. The new life that we now have is His life in us (*Galatians 2:20*). As we are raised from the water, we are showing we believe Jesus rose from the dead on our behalf.

In the New Testament, baptism involved a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ. Going down into the water symbolized being washed by the blood of the Christ. Coming out of the water symbolized newness in Christ—a result of spiritual cleansing through Jesus. Through baptism, therefore, a believer in Jesus Christ is saying they are publicly identifying themselves with Christ and His Body. It is their announcement to all who watch and witness the event that Jesus Christ is their Savior.

What Baptism Is Not and Cannot Do

Water baptism in no way contributes to a person’s spiritual birth or salvation. To be very clear, baptism is not necessary for salvation and will not help anyone get saved. It does not make anyone a child of God. If an unbeliever is baptized, it will only make him wet. Before God’s eyes, baptism doesn’t cleanse our sin. Only the blood of Christ given for us on the cross can

cleanse us of sin before God. Baptizing infants is not found in the New Testament and, therefore, is not biblical.

Our salvation is solely based on what Jesus did for us. Faith in Christ is the sole requirement necessity for salvation (*Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5*). Baptism simply bears witness to the fact that we have trusted Christ and are born again. Those whom God has already placed into Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit can therefore be baptized in water.

Who should be baptized? The answer: everyone who has trusted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Since water baptism is a symbolic portrayal of a Christian's identification with Christ, obviously only born again believers should be baptized...and indeed, that is what we find throughout the New Testament.

Is Baptism a Good Thing to Do?

Yes, baptism is an opportunity to verbally testify of our faith in Christ to others. Everyone who is baptized can share a simple testimony of their faith in Christ. For many people, this may involve explaining the day and even hour that they understood Jesus died for their sins. Others may not remember the exact details leading up to their conversion, but they know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is their Savior. The important thing in a verbal proclamation of faith is explaining that Jesus is your Savior and it was through faith alone, and no merit or work on your part, that brought about your salvation. The issue should always be FAITH in Christ and not the WORKS of man.

By being baptized, we show to others we are not trusting in ourselves for salvation, but we believe what Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection has done for us. When a believer is baptized, he is identifying with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. He is seeing Jesus' death, burial and resurrection as his own.

So What Does Peter Mean in Acts 2:38?

Peter did not mean that they were to repent and be baptized so their sins would be forgiven; but like this lesson has explained, they were to believe in the message that Peter gave and as a result they were changing their minds regarding who Jesus was and were baptized. Salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone.

Lesson 3

Introduction

After Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, around 3,000 new believers were added to the church! They followed the Lord's command to be baptized and looked to the apostles to teach them all about their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles began to teach these new believers about the new life they now had in Christ. It is important for us to be taught the truth about who we are in Christ and what God wants to accomplish in and through us. This lesson will briefly mention some results of Jesus fulfilling the eternal plan of redemption and the signs of new life and unity the early church showed. Some of the things mentioned in this section are still applicable for believers today. All of them are a result of the Holy Spirit's work in their lives.

Read Acts 2:41-47.

The Early Church Continued in the Apostles' Doctrine

Right away in this passage we see that God is continuing to do His work by saving around 3,000 People, and those who trusted Christ as their Savior were baptized. This is God's work of building the early church and God faithfully and divinely intervening to do it. Before Jesus ascended, He told His disciples in ***Matthew 28:19-20*** to teach all new believers to "*observe all things that He had commanded*" them. What "things" did Jesus want the apostles to share with these new believers? He wanted them to share all they had heard and been taught by Jesus and what they would be taught by the Holy Spirit. There were many other issues Jesus wanted to teach His disciples before He left, but as it says in ***John 16:12***, they could not understand because they did not yet have the Holy Spirit. Jesus understood this and this is why He explained to them in ***John 14:26*** that when the Holy Spirit would come, He would teach them all things and would remind them of the words He had spoken to them. Again, this is God's faithful divine intervention in giving the Holy Spirit to the church to communicate to them what they have been freely given from God (***1 Corinthians 2:12***).

When the Holy Spirit did come, just as Jesus had promised, He reminded them of all that Jesus had taught, as well as taught them new details that Jesus wanted them to know. The apostles then taught Jesus' words to the church in Jerusalem. These God-given truths were eventually written down in the New Testament so that we, too, can know and believe them and trust God to make them a part of our lives.

Hearing and learning God's truth is vital to our spiritual growth. We cannot believe in what we do not know, so it begins with knowing all that God has done for us, to us, and with us so we can believe those things to be true. It is through His Word that God speaks to us and we come to know Him more. The more we hear His Word and grow in the knowledge of Him, the more our faith grows (**Romans 10:17**).

Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (**Hebrews 13:8**). The scriptures teach us that God never changes. He remains constant and doesn't change His mind like we do (**Numbers 23:19; Malachi 3:6**). Therefore, we can trust His unchangeable Word. It reflects His good and perfect will for us. God's commands to His Church never change. His Word is just as binding today as it was when the apostles and prophets first wrote it down. Each believer has the opportunity and responsibility to know, understand, and believe the Word and then to teach others.

The Early Church Continued in Fellowship with Other Believers

The new believers made friends with other believers and spent time with them. As we have made clear, as soon as they believed in Christ as their Savior, they were permanently indwelt with the Holy Spirit. That made them one in Christ and part of the Body of Christ and gave them unity together and the desire to fellowship together. They met as a group separate and apart from the unbelievers. Because they were God's children and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, they were all in close companionship with one another (**1 John 1:3**). It is important for believers to have fellowship and community with other believers and not to live in isolation from the Body of Christ. Because we are all God's children, we too have been separated from the world to live in companionship with one another. However, we can spend time with unbelievers with the purpose of building relationships as an opportunity to share Christ.

They Continued in Breaking of Bread (Observing the Lord's Supper)

When these new believers met together, the Holy Spirit reminded them to remember Jesus' body and blood that was given for their sins. They celebrated what Jesus had done for them through taking communion together. This was a celebratory time together of reflecting on what Jesus had just done for them. When they were eating together and taking communion together, they were eating bread and drinking wine. What do the bread and the wine represent?

The Bread

The broken bread represents the broken body of Jesus and His death on the cross for sin. During the Last Supper that Jesus ate with His disciples, Jesus showed them how they could remember His death (**Mark 14:22-23**). Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave to each

disciple a piece. Jesus told them that after He returned to heaven, they should gather together in this same way. Paul repeats these same instructions in *1 Corinthians 11:23-26*.

We follow the example of Jesus in observing the Lord's Supper. Jesus took the bread and blessed it and shared it with the disciples and they ate of it together. Likewise, when we observe the Lord's Supper, we also thank God and are reminded of Jesus' body that was given in exchange for us on the cross.

The Wine

After Jesus gave out the bread, He then took a cup full of wine and told each of them to take a drink (*Mark 14:23-24*). When they drank the wine, they were to remember Jesus' blood that was poured out for their sins. In the same way, we thank God for the cup that reminds us of Jesus' blood that was shed for payment of our sins.

Remember the soldier, near the end of Jesus' life, who came and stuck his sword into the side of Jesus so that He would die faster? Jesus' blood poured out and that is the blood of Christ paying the penalty for our sins and satisfying God so that we can believe that to be true and enter into and enjoy a relationship with God.

They Continued in Prayer

When Jesus was on the earth, prayer was a big part of His life. Jesus depended on God and His guidance in all that He said and did; therefore, He spent much time in prayer (*Mark 1:35*). Before Jesus chose His disciples, He prayed to His Father (*Luke 6:12-13*). Before Jesus was crucified, He prayed in the garden (*Mark 14:32-36*). So, we see Jesus' communication and dependency exemplified through His prayer to the Father. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, the early believers also continued in prayer, communicating their need and dependency of God. We too have the opportunity and privilege to communicate our need and dependency on God in our lives through prayer. If Jesus took advantage of this opportunity of prayer, we too can take advantage of this opportunity of prayer.

They Continued Loving One Another

Because of the leading of the Holy Spirit and the unity that God had given them in Christ the believers in the church shared with one another, especially with the many poor people who were among them. This was a result of recognizing all that God had done for them through Christ. Because of the great love that God had shared with them through Christ, they wanted to share their love with each other. This wasn't a requirement that someone put on them, but it was a result of understanding the great love that God had for them.

They Continued Praising God

The early church also praised God for His forgiveness of their sins, for their eternal life, and for meeting all of their daily needs. As mentioned in the previous section, the reason that they were continuing to praise God was not because it was something that they were setting out to do in their own strength but it was a result of the Holy Spirit in their lives and being convinced and convicted of God's work and love for them. Keep this is taking place during the results of Jesus fulfilling the eternal plan of redemption.

They Continued Witnessing to Others

The Holy Spirit led them in what to say (***Luke 12:12***) and at the same time He opened hearts for others to understand and believe (***Acts 16:14***). Every day more people trusted in Jesus as they heard from the believers all that He had done. These verses give us a glimpse into the first group of Christians and what their lives looked like as a result of being indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Oh, the excitement that must have been in the lives of this first group of believers.

Lesson 4

Introduction

In this lesson we will be looking at what God did through Peter and John, two of Jesus' disciples. We will see God's faithful and divine intervention to heal a paralyzed man through them; and through the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter gives his second sermon. The leaders are so angry with what Peter and John were doing and saying and how the people were responding to them that they put them in jail. They were released from jail and all the people continued to grow in their faith and dependence upon God. Like we said before, Acts is a continuation of God's eternal plan and a result of Jesus fulfilling the eternal plan of redemption.

Read Acts 3:1-10.

The Paralyzed Man Healed

Even though Christ had come and fulfilled the eternal plan of redemption and the veil had been torn in the temple, most Jewish leaders did not believe Jesus was the Son of God. So, they would still go to the temple to pray and offer animal sacrifices. Peter and John would not have been offering sacrifices because, like many others, they believed Jesus was the Son of God; but they were going there to pray. This again shows that this is a transitional book because Peter and John were still going to the temple to pray. They were not yet aware of God's plan for the church.

As they were nearing the entrance to the temple, they came across a man who was paralyzed. What do you think the paralyzed man was expecting to receive? This man was in for a surprise and about to get what he was not expecting. Notice that Peter says, "*In the name of Jesus the Nazarene, walk!*" Even though around 3,000 people had just gotten saved, there were still many people who did not believe Jesus was the Son of God. Peter wanted to make it very clear who was doing the healing here. This was another faithful divine intervention of God—God doing what only God can do as we have seen Him do throughout the Bible. The man was walking around, jumping around inside and outside the temple, and the people around observed it as an undeniable miracle. Peter could have taken some of the glory for himself but he didn't. He gave all the glory where it should rightly go—to God Himself!

Read Acts 3:11-16.

This Miracle Is Done by the Power of God

Remember back in Acts Chapter 1 Jesus said that after they receive the Holy Spirit, they will receive power? This is exactly what was taking place; they had received the Holy Spirit and now they were enabled to heal this man for the glory of God. The people were

amazed as if Peter or John had healed this man on their own. Peter sets their thinking straight and tells whose power it was done through. He asks the question in verse twelve: *“Why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?”* He then answers the question in verse sixteen: *“On the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know, and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health.”* God is the one who healed this man, not Peter nor John. Peter, being led by the Spirit, again talks with the crowd of people who had gathered because of the miracle. He takes their focus back to Christ and who He was, how they treated Him, what they did to Him, and that they did not believe in Him. He says this miracle was done because of the power of God and in His name.

This is a clear example to us of simply walking by faith in dependency upon the Holy Spirit and trusting God to faithfully and divinely intervene and do what only He can do. Sometimes God may do the miraculous and sometimes He might not, but either way God is a good God and a gracious God. Throughout the book of Acts, we see God enabling the disciples to perform many miracles. God still can perform miracles today, but most of the time the Holy Spirit is working to cause us to be content in the circumstances we are in. The role of the Holy Spirit is to bring things to our remembrance, lead and guide us into all truth, and teach us what we have been freely given from God. Though we have no guarantee that our circumstances will change, we do have the assurance of what the Holy Spirit is doing.

Read Acts 3:17-26.

Here we see Peter continuing his message to the people who gathered around him in the temple because of the miracle. He is telling them to repent and receive Jesus as the Son of God who paid the penalty for their sins. He reminds them that these things were promised by the prophets of old, and the prophecies are now coming true—they should not be suppressed but need to just believe in what is taking place. God is doing exactly what He said he would do in fulfilling His eternal plan of redemption.

Read Acts 4:1-7.

Peter and John Arrested

Because of the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, Peter boldly preached this message in the hearing of all the people at the temple. The same religious leaders who condemned Jesus to die were furious when they heard Peter speak. They arrested Peter and John and put them in prison. Even so, God still divinely intervened and used their preaching to show people they were sinners, and around 5,000 people trusted in Jesus as their Savior. Again, this is proving that this is a work of God and not of man. In verse seven the rulers directly asked them, *“By what name or by what power have you done this?”*

Read Acts 4:8-12.

Peter's Response

In verse 10 Peter makes it very clear that it was not by his power, strength or ability but by the Name of Jesus that this man was healed. Peter depended upon the indwelling Holy Spirit who gave him the right words to say in this situation, and again all credit went to God. We are not to depend upon our own wisdom and strength to do God's will but, as we depend upon the Holy Spirit, He will enable us to do what is according to God's will. Peter fearlessly faced the same men who had condemned Jesus to death because he was depending upon the Spirit of God to speak through him, giving him the right words. If we learn God's Word and depend upon the Holy Spirit, we, too, will be God's witnesses according to His will.

Verses 11-12 focus on the sufficiency of Christ. Peter refers to Jesus as the cornerstone who they had rejected. The cornerstone carries with it the idea of a foundation or what makes something straight and accurate. When one is building something, there are measurements and calculations in the foundation to make sure everything is accurate from the very beginning of the building process. This is what is means by the cornerstone. Through Christ everything is made right, accurate, and straight and salvation is possible—and possible only through His finished work on the cross.

Read Acts 4:13-22.

Jewish Leaders' Decision and Peter and John's Response

Before talking about the Jewish leaders' decision, it is important to note what the leaders recognized about the lives of Peter and John. They recognized that *"they had been with Jesus."* As Jesus revealed Himself to Peter and John, they had gotten to know Jesus. They had grown in their knowledge of Him; and it had impacted their lives in such a way that as they walked in the Spirit, it was a characteristic that was recognizable by those around them. It is also mentioned that they were uneducated and untrained men. This means that the change that took place in their lives was not because of anything they did but because of God's work in their lives and truly knowing Christ.

Do you think those men who hated and killed Jesus were won over by Peter and John's answer? No! Even though they were surprised by their boldness, they rejected the message. Before Jesus left, He commanded them to be His witnesses to all people, but now these men were telling them to be quiet and never again tell anyone about Jesus! Who should they obey? God tells us in His Word that we are to obey our rulers. However, what if the government orders us to disobey God's Word? We should never go against what God says! As we will see from their answer, They followed through with what God said and not the authorities. Because Peter and John had

been with Jesus and were convinced and convicted of who He was, there is no way they were going to stop talking about Him. It had become part of their lives. In fact, all the believers around there were giving glory to God for what was taking place; and so the authorities released them.

Read Acts 4:23-31.

Peter and John Are Released and the Church Praised and Prayed to God

Peter and John are released and notice the people's response and what the people praised and prayed to God for:

- The creation of the world
- The sovereignty of God against those who stood against Israel and those who crucified Christ
- Praising God together
- Boldness and confidence to share with everyone
- Healed and did signs among the people
- Filled with the Holy Spirit
- Speaking with boldness
- God created great unity among the people.
- They were helping take care of each other's needs.

As we keep the big picture in mind here, we can see God doing exactly what He said he was going to do. He was going to build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Jesus came and fulfilled the eternal plan of redemption, and this is the result of Him doing just that. He sent the Holy Spirit, people were convinced of who He was, people were getting saved and manifesting the oneness and unity that was God's desire for the church. This is all a work of God and His grace.

Lesson 5

Introduction

Even though the believers faced fierce opposition from unbelievers, they faithfully witnessed to others and the church grew rapidly. As we learned in the previous chapter, the believers remained strong in their faith and loved each other even more despite persecution. In this lesson, we will study Acts Chapters 5-7 to see how God was growing His church, how He led the church to address the needs of the widows, and how Stephen became the first martyr of the church.

Read Acts 5:12-16.

God Is Continuing to Build His Church

As these verses show, God was continuing to build His church just like He said He would. Remember the big picture that Jesus has fulfilled the eternal plan of redemption and these are the results of Jesus fulfilling the plan. Many people were being healed and many signs and wonders were taking place to prove that Jesus was who He said He was, that He had ascended to heaven, and that He is seated at the right hand of God.

Read Acts 5:17-32.

Because of what the Holy Spirit was doing through Peter and John, the high priest and other leaders were getting upset with their influence on others and the following that Peter and John were gaining. They arrested them again, and this time, while they were in jail, a miracle happened—an angel came and set them free. Again this proves God’s provision because there is no human explanation for their release from jail. The guards go to talk to them but do not find them. They are located in the city and brought before the Council. Because of their boldness through the Holy Spirit, Peter and John tell the leaders they are going to obey God instead of them. In verses 31 and 32, they explain all that God has accomplished through Christ to bring redemption to mankind.

Read Acts 5:33-39.

Gamaliel, one of the leaders, talks with the others Council members and advises them to let Peter and John go. He explains that if this is something that Peter and John are doing in their own strength and power, it will stop and come to nothing. However, if this is something that is of God, they will not be able to stop it. Gamaliel suggests they leave them alone and see what happens. It appears that Gamaliel has some faith and understanding of the ways of God and knows you cannot stop the things of God.

Read Acts 5:40-42.

The group took Gamaliel's advice and let them go but not without beating them and telling them not to preach or teach anymore about Jesus. Peter and John kept right on going from house to house preaching and telling people about Jesus. Here in Chapter 5 we see another great example of the work of the Holy Spirit enabling them to carry out the work that God had them to do. They were not doing it through their own efforts or strength but clearly this was something that could only be done by the power of God and the enablement of the Holy Spirit—delivering them from prison, giving them contentment after being beaten, and continuing to teach about Jesus.

Read Acts 6:1-6.

Deacons Were Chosen Because of the Needs of the Widows

There were two groups of Jews living in Jerusalem—Hellenistic Jews who grew up in outside Palestine and Hebraic Jews who grew up inside Palestine. The Hellenistic Jews were Greek speaking while the Hebraic Jews spoke Aramaic or Hebrew. Many Hellenistic Jews would come to Jerusalem in Palestine in the later part of their lives. The men would often die before the women, leaving the widows to be cared for. The Hellenistic group complained that the Hebrew widows were getting better and preferential treatment.

Notice the twelve disciples do not try to solve the problem through talking with the people, but they realize the need for more leaders to be involved in helping with the needs of the rapidly growing church. Verses one and seven both say that the number of disciples were increasing and it is obvious God was doing His work in growing His church. With the growth of the church came the need for more leaders.

The apostles who were focused on praying, teaching, and the spiritual needs of the ministry did not feel led to stop what they were doing because the teaching about Christ was so very important. They decided to choose seven godly men who were full of the Spirit and wisdom who would take care of the widows' issues. The emphasis was not on choosing just any man but those who were of good reputation and had a good walk with God. They were chosen and commissioned for the work and the church continued to grow.

Verses eight through fifteen focus on Stephen:

- He was full of grace and power, performing great wonders among the people.
- His opposers were unable to cope with the wisdom and Spirit he was talking with.
- When they looked at him, they said that his face shone like an angel.

These did not take place because Stephen was a great person or had great abilities in and of himself but because of the faithful and divine intervention of God. God had intervened in Stephen's life and saved him and was now enabling him to do what He wanted him to do. Again, it was all God carrying out His work.

Read Acts 7:1-53.

Stephen's Defense

The High Priest asked Stephen if the accusations against him were true (*Acts 7:1*). Stephen answered by reviewing the history of the Jewish people. They had a poor track record of recognizing the truth and often rejected God's spokesperson and even sometimes murdered those sent by God to warn them. Even with the wonderful examples of those who grew to trust God like Abraham and Moses, the children of Israel failed to trust God.

He spoke of how God had chosen Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He told of how Joseph (even though his brothers sold him into slavery and rejected him) was made governor of Egypt because God was with him. Joseph was the one God used to save their lives during the famine. Then came a new generation of Israelites living in bondage in Egypt. Moses tried to help the Israelites, but they rejected him and Moses fled from Egypt. However, God was with Moses and sent him back to deliver his people from their captivity in Egypt. Even after their miraculous deliverance, they continued to reject God and wanted to return to Egypt. When they finally got settled in the Promised Land, they rejected God's rule again and worshipped idols. Many times God sent prophets to warn them, but they rejected God's words given through the prophets.

Finally Stephen concluded his message by comparing his accusers to the faithless disobedient Jews. Just as their forefathers rejected and killed many of God's prophets, these men to whom he was speaking rejected and killed the very Son of God!

Read Acts 7:54-60.

Stephen's Death

Stephen's words were so full of hard truth that the men were enraged against him. As they stoned Stephen, they left their coats with a young man named Saul. This young man agreed with the killing of Stephen, and our next lesson will focus on him.

Before Stephen died, he saw Jesus standing at God's right hand. Jesus knew Stephen was going to be killed and was waiting for him to leave his body and come and join Him in heaven. When we die, we may not see Jesus standing at God's right hand before we leave our body, but we

know that He loves each of us just as much as He loved Stephen. He waits for our arrival in heaven just like He did for Stephen.

Notice the love and forgiveness Stephen had for his tormentors. Even while dying, he prayed that God would not hold this sin against them. Without even realizing it, Stephen was praying for the man who would probably be the greatest missionary of all time—a man named Saul who would eventually become the Apostle Paul.

Lesson 6

Introduction

In this lesson we are going to see the one who was standing by and watching Stephen being stoned, Saul, continue to persecute the early church. His persecution was so intense and fierce that the believers feared him. Then we are going to see another faithful and divine intervention of God in saving this man who was causing such intense persecution and trouble for the church. Again this is a picture of God working in such a way that makes no sense logical sense and can only be explained by God Himself.

Saul the Persecutor

Read Acts 8:1-3.

Acts Chapter 8 begins with the story of a young Jewish man named Saul. Saul was the one who watched over the coats of the men who stoned Stephen. Saul didn't believe Jesus was the promised Deliverer, nor did he believe the Christians when they said God had raised Jesus from the dead. Saul believed the Christians were deceiving people and believed Jesus was an imposter, that He was blaspheming when He called Himself the Son of God. In ***John 16:1-4*** Jesus warned this persecution would happen to the disciples and other believers. Events are happening just as Jesus said they would. Saul thought that he was doing the will of the God, by hunting down and arresting those who perpetrated this terrible "hoax" that Jesus was the Messiah. He felt it was his duty to punish and kill all the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. In verse three, Saul was ravaging the church. He was not just causing small problems but large problems, persecution, and disturbances for the church.

The Work of the Scattered Christians

Read Acts 8:4-8.

As Saul's attack on the Christians began in Jerusalem, many believers escaped Jerusalem and went to live in other regions. Wherever these believers went, they were being led and empowered by the Holy Spirit and continued sharing Christ with others. One of those who left Jerusalem was a man named Philip, one of the seven men who were chosen to serve the church (***Acts 6:5***). Before Jesus returned to the Father, He told the apostles that when the Holy Spirit would come, they would then become His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Being led by the Spirit, Philip took the message of the gospel to

Samaria. The Samaritans were the offspring of the foreigners who had intermarried with the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom after the Assyrians had come and defeated them. The Samaritans later built their own temple instead of going to the one in Jerusalem. Because of this, the pure-bred Jews never accepted the Samaritan Jews because they didn't see them as true Jews. In spite of the centuries of distrust and hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans, Philip, dependent upon the Holy Spirit, obeyed Jesus' command and took the gospel to them anyway. Because of Philip's preaching, many of the Samaritans believed and were saved, became the children of God, and were greatly rejoicing in the Lord.

Saul's Conversion

Read Acts 9:1-9.

Saul continued to persecute the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem. He realized that many of the believers had left Jerusalem and went to other places proclaiming the message of Jesus. He followed and arrested them and brought them back to Jerusalem to be tried and punished. What an evil man. Do you think it could be possible for such a terrible person to become a Christian? Of all the people who were being saved by the witnessing of the believers, no one would have ever guessed that God would save such an evil person as Saul. He was probably the last person the church ever expected to believe their message.

Here we have yet another example of God's faithful divine intervention in the life of an individual. Saul was going around pursuing and ravaging the church; and as he is doing so, God divinely intervenes in his life, speaks to Him, takes away his eyesight and tells him to enter the city and wait there. God is working in such a way that there is no human explanation for what is going on. This is not a work of Peter or John or any of the other Christians in the area, but this is a direct work of God.

We must not be afraid to witness about Christ, even if there is opposition or people do not seem to be listening. Through the Holy Spirit, God will be using our words to convict people of their sin. If they believe, then God can change their lives, just like He changed Saul's. Luke said that Saul saw Jesus, whose face shone brighter than the sun at midday and that it blinded him and changed his life.

Imagine Saul's terror when he learned that the person he was persecuting was the LORD God of Israel. He thought he was pleasing God by persecuting the believers, but now he realized he had been wrong. Saul's conscience had bothered him while he was persecuting the church, but Jesus said he had ignored the pricks that he felt. Now Saul knew the truth and could not deny what he had seen and heard. Jesus really was risen from the dead, He truly was the Son of God, the long-promised Deliverer! Saul was led by the hand like a little child into Damascus.

Ananias Sent to Saul

Read Acts 9:10-19.

Lying on a bed in Damascus, Saul was blind and unable to eat or drink for three days. He was not the same man who had persecuted believers in Jerusalem. The Lord tells Ananias to go visit Saul but he was hesitant. Wouldn't you have been? Ananias didn't know Saul had seen Jesus on the road to Damascus; he only knew about the Saul who tore families apart and had people put to death for trusting in Jesus. Ananias heard the words of the Lord encouraging him to be unafraid because Saul was a chosen vessel of the Lord. The Lord revealed His plan to Ananias and gave him confidence to trust the Lord and go to Saul. Ananias talks with Saul and he receives the Holy Spirit and regains his sight. The remainder of the book of Acts is mostly focused on Paul (Saul) and how the Lord used him in many different countries to tell people about Jesus.

Whenever God asks us to do something that is difficult or even impossible, He always gives us His grace or divine enablement to do it. Usually this grace comes to us as we hear, know, and trust His Word. Sometimes we might be like Ananias, afraid to do what the Lord would have us do; but God has revealed Himself to us, proving His goodness, and that He is worthy to be trusted. We can trust that He will never ask us to do something that isn't for our good and the good of the Church.

Again we see God using someone who does not make sense to the logical mind. If God is going to use someone in a great way to spread the gospel to different areas, it would make sense that He would use someone who had been a faithful follower of Him—maybe one of the disciples who had seen Jesus in person and proved he could be trusted with the job of getting the gospel out to new areas. But just like we have seen in the past, God uses someone who does not make logical sense to man's mind to prove that this is of God and not of man. The example that we keep using is when God chose Abraham and Sarah, who were old and childless, to make His covenant with. God was working in such a way to prove that He is the one doing the work and we see God doing the same thing here.

Paul's First Ministry and Escape

Read Acts 9:19-25.

Paul began to meet with the believers in Damascus as well as to witness to his former friends who still hated Jesus. Saul knew the Old Testament very well; he had studied it under the best Jewish teachers, and he himself was a teacher of the law. Saul reminded the Jews in Damascus of all the prophecies that were foretold of Jesus in the Old Testament and he explained how Jesus fulfilled all of these prophecies. He did this to prove from their own scriptures that Jesus was the

Promised Deliverer. In the wisdom of God, this was part of His plan to use Saul to communicate the gospel to the people. God chose someone who did not make logical sense, someone who was very knowledgeable of the scriptures and was now indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God is going to use Saul in great ways.

Satan must have been rather frustrated and angry about Paul's conversion. Because he lost a powerful ally in his war on the saints, he stirred up people to kill Paul. Thick stone walls surrounded cities during this time, and some people made their houses on top of the wall. Paul was probably lowered down through a believer's window whose house was on the wall. Satan cannot stand in the way or prevent God from carrying out His plans. The church was part of God's plan from before the foundations of the world. Jesus said He would build His church and nothing would be able to stop Him. Satan can do only what God allows him to do, and he could not prevent God from working in Saul's life and carrying out the beginnings of the church.

Saul Returns to Jerusalem, Goes to Tarsus, and the Church Continues to Grow

Read Acts 9:26-31.

So Saul left Damascus and returned to Jerusalem. He had left Jerusalem as a child of Satan and now returned as a child of God. He left an enemy of Jesus and the Church and returned a servant of Jesus and a brother of believers. Saul did not receive a warm welcome by the church in Jerusalem because they were afraid and found it hard to believe such a wicked person could become a Christian. They thought it was a trick to gain the confidence of the believers so that he could betray them. God used a special believer named Barnabas to come to Saul's defense. Barnabas, which means "Son of Comfort," apparently was gifted by the Holy Spirit to befriend and encourage other believers. We will hear more about Barnabas later.

These men were the same ones who had stoned Stephen and were now planning to kill Saul. Originally, Saul agreed with Stephen's death; but now because of God's faithful divine intervention in his life, he was teaching what Stephen had taught. Again, the believers helped Saul escape. Saul, who led the persecution of the church, had now become Jesus' trusted servant. At this time, the believers were taught the Word, growing in their understanding of God and strengthened in faith. Many more people trusted in Jesus as their Savior and were baptized and joined the church.

Lesson 7

Introduction

Although it is true they were God's chosen people, the Jews took it a step further and saw themselves as superior to other people. They felt they had a special standing with God due to God's promises to them, their practice of circumcision, and adherence to the ceremonial laws of the temple. They were proud of their heritage and mistakenly thought that somehow they had earned God's approval. Up until the time of Stephen's death and shortly thereafter, the Apostles had only witnessed to other Jews, Gentiles who had converted to Judaism, or Samaritans who recognized Moses and the Law. Even though Jesus had told them to witness to the whole world, they didn't realize that the Gospel was for others who didn't keep the Law of Moses. The Jews despised anyone who wasn't circumcised and keepers of the law.

The Jews who got saved didn't realize that upon Jesus' death and resurrection, circumcision and the law were no longer in effect because His death fully satisfied God's demands. All who trust in Him receive God's acceptance. God no longer required believers to be circumcised. All who accepted Jesus as Savior received the forgiveness of sins, and the Holy Spirit indwelt them whether they were circumcised or not. However, the Apostles didn't know this yet; therefore, God had to teach them. Remember Acts is a transitional book, so there were concepts that the disciples did not know but were learning.

Cornelius

Read Acts 10:1-2.

Cornelius was a Roman army captain who was in charge of one hundred soldiers. Cornelius believed in and worshiped God, but he was not circumcised. At this time, most Gentiles worshiped idols; however, there were some who were like Cornelius and believed in only one God. These Gentiles accepted the teaching of the Jews in the Synagogues, but they weren't ready to become Jews by being circumcised.

God's Instruction to Cornelius

Read Acts 10:3-8.

Do you remember God's promise to Abraham regarding all the nations of the earth? God said that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. All the nations of the earth would

have the opportunity to trust Christ as their Savior. It was now time for this promise to come true. God wanted the news of the Savior to be preached to those who weren't Jewish...to the Gentiles. God divinely intervened and communicated to Cornelius through an angel that he was to send men and bring Peter back to his house. This is another wonderful example of God doing what only God can do and not leaving it up to man to figure out what is best. God is always revealing Himself and His ways to mankind. Cornelius, having seen this vision and message from the angel, does exactly what he is told to do.

Peter stayed with Simon who was a tanner, one who skinned dead animals and prepared their skins to be used as clothing and other accessories. Jewish tanners were often considered low on the social scale and were often treated like outcasts even though they may be devout. Their close contact with dead animals often forced them to live and conduct their business outside of town. It appears God was already preparing Peter's heart regarding accepting people outside of the Jewish faith as candidates for hearing the gospel. It was a hurdle for Peter who was raised a strict Jew to "humble" himself and be a guest of a fellow believer who was a tanner.

The Lord's Preparation of Peter

Read Acts 10:9-16.

The Lord prepared Cornelius, but now He had to prepare Peter so that he would be willing to go into the house of a Gentile, eat his food, and teach him the word. Normally, Jews would never do something like this. God faithfully and divinely intervenes and gives Peter a dream telling him three times to eat the animals he sees. Peter did not want to eat the animals that God had shown him in the vision because God had commanded the Jews regarding what animals they could and could not eat. Jews were permitted to eat some of the animals in the vision; but because they were mixed in with those they couldn't eat, Peter refused to eat them.

Peter had been taught to eat only those animals that were raised and butchered properly according to Old Testament law (*Leviticus 11*). He had been taught to turn away from any food that was contaminated or was "unclean" according to the law. Think of eating an animal that is not naturally considered edible. For example, in some cultures, eating a pet is considered so repulsive that laws forbid such a thing, but in others eating a pet is just fine. This is how Peter felt when he was commanded by God to kill and eat. It was so far from his way of thinking that he was having a hard time accepting it. This is clear evidence that a transition is taking place during this time period and that God was teaching the apostles new things.

So, just what was God trying to teach Peter?

- God's food laws were now abolished because of Christ's death on the cross.
- Believers no longer had to live according to the Old Testament law.
- Just as all the animals were considered clean by God, so Jews or Gentiles who trust in Jesus are considered clean and will be together in one church.
- God had cleansed all believers. Neither Peter nor any other Jew should ever call another believer unclean or consider him or her to be spiritually inferior.
- The life of those who trusted Christ as their savior is now based on grace, not law.

Read Acts 10:17-23.

Peter did not understand what God was doing here, but God was revealing His plan to make it easier for Peter to believe and walk in what God said. Verse nineteen makes it clear that the Holy Spirit communicated to him that these men were coming and so Peter welcomed them in. God is making His plan and ways clear. Then the men who had come on behalf of Cornelius say to Peter that they had been divinely directed by an angel to get him. This is again the faithful divine intervention of God to lead Peter back to Cornelius' house so that he could hear the teaching of the gospel more clearly and trust in Christ as his Savior.

Peter Went to Cornelius' House

Read Acts 10:24-26.

Cornelius gathered all of his family and friends to hear the news that Peter would bring. In his Ignorance, Cornelius fell at Peter's feet and worshipped him; however, Peter would not allow anyone to worship him for only God should be worshiped. Earlier in the gospels we saw where Peter would have taken the credit for himself; but now because he had grown in the knowledge of God, he understood who he was and who God was and was not able to take any credit for himself.

Peter's Message

Read Acts 10:34-43.

Peter preached the simple message of Jesus to Cornelius and his family and friends. He didn't try to convert them to a religion, but he plainly explained the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. As he spoke, the Holy Spirit did a remarkable thing—He opened hearts to believe.

Conversion of the First Gentiles

Read Acts 10:44-48.

Suddenly Cornelius and all those present knew that God was holy and they were sinners. They also knew that God had promised to send a Savior for sinners. While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit opened these Gentiles' minds to understand that Jesus was the promised Deliver who came to save them.

To the amazement of the other believers who accompanied Peter to Cornelius' house, Cornelius and his family believed Peter's words and trusted in Jesus as their Savior even before Peter was finished speaking!

When these people trusted in Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon them and enabled them to speak in languages that they had never learned, just like on the day of Pentecost. God allowed them to speak in tongues like this so that Peter and the onlooking Jews would have no doubt that the Holy Spirit had come upon them, and therefore showing that God accepts them just like He did the Jews. There is only one other mention of people actually speaking in tongues in the Bible, and that is when a group of Old Testament saints (John the Baptist's disciples) believed in Jesus in Acts 19.

Lesson 8

Introduction

In the last lesson we saw the Holy Spirit teach Peter that God accepts Gentiles on the basis of the blood of Jesus Christ alone. The Holy Spirit had proved to Peter and those present that converting to Judaism was not a requirement for becoming a Christian. The Jewish Christians were proud of their heritage and could not believe that God had made redemption possible to those who were pagans without first requiring that they convert to Judaism. They probably thought that Peter had overstepped his authority. Surely, they were in agreement that he should have checked with the leaders in Jerusalem before doing such a repulsive thing as preach the gospel directly to Gentiles!

Disapproval of Peter's Action from Jerusalem

Read Acts 11:1-3.

The only reason Peter went to Cornelius' house was because of the vision. God showed that if He accepts the Gentiles, so must Peter. However, the Apostles and rest of the church in Jerusalem had not seen the vision. Therefore, they couldn't understand why Peter would go to the house of a Gentile and eat with them. God was doing His wonderful work of growing the church, and it was a progressive process of people learning how God was doing it and ushering in the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

There was a certain group of Jews in the church that very much opposed Peter's action (verse 2). They were Christian Jews who believed that Jesus was the Deliverer, but they also believed they had to obey the law, keep circumcision, and obey the commandments. Some of these Jews caused problems for the church later on.

Peter's Explanation and Its Acceptance

Read Acts 11:4-18.

Peter met with the church leadership to explain why he did what he did. Then Peter explained about God's faithful divine intervention of the vision and what had happened in Cornelius' house. He reminded them of the Lord's own words, that God is God, and it is foolish to argue with Him. He was telling them how God was adding Gentiles to the church as well and encouraging them to allow God to do His work of building the church. When they had all heard about God's acceptance of the Gentiles in spite of their being uncircumcised, they also accepted them.

The Ministry of the Scattered Believers

Read Acts 11:19-21.

Luke now begins to tell more about the work of those who were scattered during the time of Stephen's stoning. When the Jewish Christians scattered, they ministered with the gospel only to other Jews. Greek was the main language spoken in the countries that were under the rule of the Roman Empire. Most of the Jews who lived outside of Jerusalem spoke Greek as well. These Greek speaking Jews began to tell the Gentiles about the Deliverer. Many of the Gentiles, like Cornelius, believed in Jesus and many people were getting saved.

Barnabas in the Church at Antioch

Read Acts 11:22-24.

This was the first large group of Gentiles to believe in Jesus. The stunned Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to see if the report they had heard was true. When he arrived, he witnessed the grace of God as God was adding to and building the church. This was that same Barnabas who became Paul's friend after he returned to Jerusalem. He was well respected in the Jerusalem church.

They also sent Barnabas to make sure this new church was following all of the teachings that were given by Jesus. Today, it is still important for churches to believe and follow the teaching of the apostles. Each new generation of believers is responsible to not only learn the truth of God's Word, but to hand it down to others without adding or subtracting from it. It is an awesome responsibility that we must not take lightly.

Saul in the Church at Antioch

Read Acts 11:25-26.

While Barnabas was teaching in Antioch, he remembered Saul and thought it would be good for him to help with the teaching. They taught there for about one year, again emphasizing the importance of good teaching from the word of God. The word "Christian" means Christ's people or followers of Christ. The Antioch believers were trusting in God and walking by faith. As a result, people noticed these obedient followers resembled Christ and named them Christians."

James Killed and Peter Imprisoned

Read Acts 12:1-5.

After Paul was saved, the church enjoyed peace for a time (**Acts 9:31**), but this time came to an end. King Herod, the grandson of the King Herod who had tried to kill Jesus when he was baby, had James killed. James was the first of Jesus' apostles to be slain. When Jesus was on earth, He warned James and the other apostles that some of them would be killed for testifying of Him (**Luke 11:49**). The Jewish leaders were delighted that Herod had killed James. They were envious that so many Jews believed on Jesus. Strangely, what made them the most upset was Jews convincing Gentiles that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would accept them by faith in Christ alone.

Because Herod wanted the praise of the Jewish leaders, he sent men to capture and arrest Peter. The believers did the only thing they could do—they prayed. They continued in prayer asking God to deliver Peter. Although the prison walls were made of thick stone and the doors were made of iron, they are no match for God's great power. The believers knew that, humanly speaking, escape was impossible for Peter. They knew the prisoners were not only chained to guards, but there were also other guards positioned at the gates to make sure the prisoners didn't escape. Could God rescue Peter? Peter's future was bleak. No one could escape the powerful Roman government's justice, or could they? In **Matthew 19:26** Jesus said, "*With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.*" The disciples knew this, so they prayed without ceasing for Peter.

The Lord Delivered Peter

Read Acts 12:6-11.

There isn't anything that God can't do. The God who delivered Israel from Egypt, led them through the Red Sea, fed them manna, and gave them water from the rock to drink for 40 years could also deliver Peter from a Roman prison.

Why would God send an angel to rescue Peter but allow Stephen and James to be killed? Did God love Peter more than the others? No, God doesn't love any of His children more than another; in His eyes we are all favorites. He loves all of His children very much. He loved us so much that He chose to die on the cross rather than live without us for eternity!

If God loves us all the same, then why did God save Peter and not Stephen or James? Was it because the church prayed for Peter and not Stephen and James? No, I'm sure the church prayed for James also. When people are sick and we pray for them, sometimes they get well, and sometimes God does not heal them. However God decides to work things out in our lives, we can be assured of His love for us. Whatever He decides for us will be the best for us (**Romans 8:28, 25**). We cannot dictate to God what He should do. He is our loving heavenly Father and

because we are convinced of His goodness, we can accept what comes from his loving hands and that He always does what is best for His children.

God may have allowed Herod to kill James because His work for him here on earth was done. On the other hand, He may have had Peter released because his work here wasn't done. Despite this seeming confusion, God does hear our prayers and invites us to ask impossible things of Him (*Jeremiah 33:3*). He desires that His children be involved with Him here on earth, and one of those ways is through prayer.

The Praying Church

Read Acts 12:12-17.

The praying believers were shocked at Peter's arrival at the house, but they rejoiced again because of the faithful divine intervention of God. Peter told the believers to tell James and the other leaders in the Jerusalem church how the Lord had rescued him. This man named James was not the same James that Herod had put to death; he was the son of Mary and Joseph and was Jesus' "half-brother." James became the leader of the Jerusalem church after Peter left to work in other places. The Holy Spirit directed James to write one of the books of the Bible, which we will study later.

The Fate of Herod and God's Work

Read Acts 12:23-25.

God showed Herod who is in charge. Herod is persecuting the church and having Christians killed, but God had him struck down and eaten by worms. Another faithful divine intervention of God. The church continues to grow because God is in charge of growing His church.

Lesson 9

Introduction

Before Jesus returned to heaven, He promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would come, and then they would become His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost ends of the earth. So far, we have seen how the Holy Spirit used the believers in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. Now, we will read how the Holy Spirit used Saul and his friends to take the gospel to other countries surrounding Israel.

Paul and Barnabas Called into Missionary Service

Read Acts 13:1-4.

This story begins in Antioch where Saul and Barnabas and others were teaching the new church. As the church at Antioch was worshipping God, the Holy Spirit spoke and instructed them to send out Barnabas and Saul to preach the gospel to those who had never heard.

So, the church gathered together and the leaders laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul to show that the whole church approved of them going forth to teach others of Jesus. By doing so, they were saying they would pray for and support them in their work. This work that the Holy Spirit called them to do wasn't just their work, but was also the work of the entire church in Antioch. Saul and Barnabas were being sent by and representing the church.

The Holy Spirit still calls believers to serve Him in this way. Whether a believer is called to go or stay, each has a part to play in the mission of the church. Those who go are still a part of the local body of believers and are dependent upon the support and prayers of the church. Those left behind have a privilege of praying for and supporting those who are sent (***Matthew 9:37-38***).

Even though Paul and Barnabas were being sent out from the church, notice that verse four says they were sent by the Holy Spirit. This is giving the focus on the leading of the Holy Spirit and the dependency on the Holy Spirit in the sending out. It's not just for man to come up with these ideas and decide who goes, when they go, or where they go. It is based on the leading of God through the Holy Spirit. Not only does God do this work through the leading of the Holy Spirit but also through the leaders of the local church. Again, this is God doing the work in sending the missionaries to evangelize and build His church because it is His work.

Barnabas and Saul in Cyprus

Read Acts 13:4-5.

Sailing from Antioch, Saul and Barnabas landed on the Island of Cyprus, which was Barnabas' homeland. In the town of Salamis on Cyprus, they taught in the synagogues. Although Saul and Barnabas were sent to take the gospel to Gentiles, they most often went into the synagogues first and offered it to the Jews before teaching others. They did this because God first called the Jews to be His special people and gave to them the promises of the Deliverer.

The synagogues were an excellent place to begin teaching because the Jews in the synagogues knew the Old Testament and God's promise to send the Deliverer. However, what they didn't know was that the Deliverer had already come. They didn't know that Jesus of Nazareth, whom their leaders had crucified, was the true Messiah whom God had promised throughout the Old Testament would come. These Jews on Cyprus had probably heard that a man named Jesus had been crucified on the cross. However, they hadn't understood that He had risen from the dead, was now seated at God's right hand, and that He was really the Deliverer whom God had promised to send. Even so, Barnabas and Saul continued testifying of Jesus' resurrection. Keep in mind that Saul had seen Jesus on the road to Damascus after He had risen from the dead.

Barnabas and Saul's pattern of evangelism was to enter the synagogue of a town and worship with the Jews there. After the reading of the law, they were often invited to address the congregation (***Acts 13:15***). It was then that they reasoned with the Jews about who Christ was and how He had brought salvation to all who would believe. They would remind the people of the prophecies regarding the coming Deliverer. Afterward they would show them how Jesus fulfilled all these prophecies.

It wasn't only the Jews who would come to meetings in the synagogues. Gentiles like Cornelius also came. These Gentiles loved and worshipped God. They knew the teachings of the Old Testament and the prophecies regarding the coming Deliverer and they believed them. Most of them weren't willing to become Jews by being circumcised, but they believed the teaching of the Old Testament. Of all the people who heard Saul and Barnabas in the synagogue, the Gentiles were often the most receptive.

Read Acts 13:6-12.

The proconsul here is a person who is in some kind of authority or has a governmental position. This person hears that Saul and Barnabas are in the area and asks them to come and explain God's Word to him. They are opposed by the magician Elymas who did not want this man to hear the gospel. Again we see the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and faithful divine intervention of God to enable Saul to confront this person; when the proconsul sees what takes place by the Holy Spirit through Saul, he believes. God is continuing to do His amazing work of

saving people. He gives this man an interest in the gospel, leads him to know that Paul and Barnabas are in the area, brings them to the man, quiets the person who is objecting to their message, convinces him that what they are sharing is true, and brings the man into a relationship with Himself. Finally, Barnabas, Saul and Mark left Salamis and traveled on to Paphos. Upon arriving on Paphos, Luke, who wrote Acts, no longer calls Saul by his Jewish name, but changes to his Roman name “Paul.”

Read Acts 13:13.

Upon their arrival in Perga, young John Mark left them and went home to Jerusalem. We are not told why he left; however, we later discover that Paul was not happy with this and was not willing to take John Mark on his next mission trip despite Barnabas’ appeal on his behalf (***Acts 15:36-38***). Later on, Paul changed toward Mark and requested that he visit him when he was imprisoned in Rome awaiting execution (***2 Timothy 4:11***).

Paul and Barnabas in Antioch in Pisidia

Read Acts 13:14-41.

They left Perga and went north to another large city, which was also called Antioch. In Antioch, they again went first into the Synagogue. As before, Paul taught from the Old Testament reminding the people of God’s promises to send the Deliverer. He reminded them of God’s faithfulness to their nation of Israel, how God gave them prophets, and how He gave them kings beginning with Saul and then David. Then he told them that God fulfilled His promise by sending Jesus of Nazareth as the Deliverer but that the Jews and their leaders did not accept Jesus as the Deliverer and crucified and buried Him. However, on the third day, God raised Him from the dead. Now through Him, all who trust in Jesus can receive the forgiveness of their sins and be accepted by God.

Paul told them that they will never be accepted by God through keeping the law. Why? Because no one can keep it. Through faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection, all who believe are forgiven, given a new nature, and accepted completely before God.

An interesting verse in this section is where he reminds them of what John the Baptist said: “*One is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.*” He is reminding them of the proper perspective of mankind in light of how great Christ is. John realized he was nothing but Christ was everything—John knew how desperately he needed Christ. Paul is wanting his listeners to also see how desperately they needed Christ and to accept Him as their personal Savior.

Before Jesus was sent into the world, He knew that few Israelites would accept Him. But God had planned that the gospel would go to the Gentiles so that they too could be forgiven for their sins. He had promised Abraham that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed, not just the Jewish family (*Genesis 12:3*). Verse 43 tells us that many were encouraging them to continue in the grace of God.

Read Acts 13:49-52.

Sadly, most Jews refused to believe in Jesus as the Deliverer. They thought their Jewish heritage and their own efforts to obey the law would make them acceptable to God. However, many of the Gentiles realized their sinfulness and hopelessness without Christ. They knew their only hope was to trust in Jesus as their Savior.

Paul and Barnabas were not affected by the Jews' rejection of the gospel. They were enjoying trusting in God and depending on Him for the results. Although they were saddened by the hardness of the Jewish hearts they encountered, they did not allow their emotions or circumstance to determine their course not affect their walk with God. God's truth was the ruling force in their attitude and decisions. They trusted God with the situation and "shook the dust from their feet" and moved on with God's plan for their lives. Verse fifty-two ends with *"the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."* God is faithful to do His work.

Paul and Barnabas in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe

Read Acts 14:1-7.

The people worshipped idols in these Gentile cities. They hadn't been taught about the only true and living God of the Jews. Paul spoke boldly in the Lord and gave testimony of the word of His grace. God was continuing to bring people into relationship with Himself, both Jews and Gentiles. Some of the unbelieving Jews were causing trouble and a disagreement arose among the people, so Paul and Barnabas moved on.

Read Acts 14:8-18.

There was a man who was paralyzed from birth listening to the Paul's teaching. Paul looks at him and can tell this person is believing what Paul is saying. Faith is the only requirement for salvation and Paul can see that this man is believing. So, because of the man's faith, he heals him. People recognize Paul and Barnabas as performing a miracle and thought they were the gods Zeus and Hermes. They begin to worship them and bring animals to offer sacrifices to them. At first Paul and Barnabas didn't know what was happening; but once they realized what

was going on, they ripped their clothes to show they were not pleased by this. Paul and Barnabas ran out into the middle of them shouting, “*We are just men like you.*”

Barnabas and Paul Returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia

Read Acts 14:19-23.

Paul is stoned and left for dead, but God faithfully and divinely intervenes and Paul is able to continue on. Afterward they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia to teach the new believers more about God and their new life as Christians. They encouraged the new church to continue on in the faith and told them to expect hardship and persecution as a result of being a child of God (***1 Peter 2:21***).

Paul and Barnabas appointed men to be elders in each of the churches they had started. These men were responsible to teach and oversee the churches, just like the apostles did in Jerusalem and Paul and Barnabas did in Antioch.

Barnabas and Paul Return Home

Read Acts 14:24-28.

Paul and Barnabas returned to the church in Antioch that had sent them, reporting what the Holy Spirit had done through them. As the Holy Spirit uses us to share His wonderful message of grace with others, we can also share with the rest of the church what the Lord is doing as a great source of encouragement to everyone.

Lesson 10

False Teaching and Confusion about the Gospel

Read Acts 15:1-5.

As was very common during this time in the book of Acts and is also very common during our own time, there was false teaching and confusion about the gospel. Some were saying that you have to be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses in order to be saved. Today people aren't saying that you have to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses to be saved, but they are adding other issues, such as being baptized, repenting of your sins, or doing a certain number of good works in order to be saved. This was a big problem then and Paul and Barnabas took great issue with them. It should be a great issue in the church today when teaching like this occurs. It is a departure from the pure gospel—of Christ alone, by grace alone and through faith alone which brings salvation. Faith in Christ and His finished work is what saves a person; nothing that a person does contributes to salvation.

Not only is there confusion about what it takes for salvation but there is also the same confusion about what it takes for sanctification or our growth. It is also by faith in the finished work of Christ and no effort or amount of work that we contribute in ourselves. As Paul and Barnabas were disturbed by this bad teaching, so we too need to be attentive and aware of bad teaching when we hear it and speak up to protect the simplicity of the gospel for the church and people we are working with. Paul and Barnabas are giving us an example here. The content of teaching is very important and is not something to be taken lightly.

It is decided that Paul, Barnabas, and a few others would go to Jerusalem and meet with the elders and apostles there to talk about this issue of the bad teaching.

Decision of the Group in Jerusalem

Read Acts 15:6-21.

They travel to Jerusalem and gather with all the elders and apostles to talk about this issue because the content of teaching is very important. Peter speaks first and starts by describing how God took the gospel to the Gentiles. He says they should not test what God says is necessary for salvation by adding circumcision or keeping the law for salvation. He ends by saying everyone, Jew or Gentile, is saved by the grace God. Next, Paul and Barnabas tell of the wonderful works God has been doing through them. Finally, James wraps up this discussion by reminding them of how Peter told them the gospel had gone to the Gentiles and this was a fulfillment of scripture. Speaking for the group, James suggests leaving the Gentiles alone and allowing them to receive

salvation as we have—through Christ alone, by grace alone, and through faith alone. However, James does ask the Gentiles to do a few things—to not eat meat offered to idols or associate with temples of fornication and blood offered to idols. Some would say this is a stipulation for salvation, but he is asking them to stay away from what is directly associated with false worship. Refraining from these practices would not make them more acceptable to God. Instead, it would help the unbelievers see that there is a difference between what the believers are doing and the unbelievers are doing. The bottom line at the conclusion of this meeting is that salvation for all is by faith in the finished work of Christ for both Jews and Gentiles.

Letter Delivered to Antioch

Read Acts 15:22-36.

After the meeting, the leaders in Jerusalem decide to write a letter and send it to Antioch explaining the conclusions they made. What we want to see here is what God did through these meetings and delivering the message back to Antioch. After they read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement; and Judas and Silas inspired the people through more teaching and clarity about what the letter meant. There seemed to be peace among the people, and Paul and Silas remained there continuing to teach the word of God.

Paul and Barnabas Plan to Revisit Their Converts

Read Acts 15:35-36.

After returning home for a while, Paul and Barnabas once again planned to return to those churches they had planted on their first journey. They wanted to visit them to give further teaching and guidance. Just like a mother would not leave her newborn to fend for itself, so new believers must be cared for also. The work of caring for new believers is a very important work of the church. Not only do new believers need to be taught, but all believers do, and this responsibility will mainly fall on the shoulders of the church leadership.

The work of the elders is important and there is much to be done. Elders teach and counsel, as well as visit individuals in their homes. They are to be godly examples who watch out for the souls of the flock (*Hebrews 13:7, 17*).

As a local church reaches out to the surrounding community with the gospel and people are saved, it will also be our responsibility as members of that body to provide them with the further teaching and training that they need.

Read Acts 15:37-39.

John Mark, who went with Paul and Barnabas on their first journey but had abandoned them and returned home, now became a point of contention. Paul did not want to take him with them; however, Barnabas insisted that they take him.

Barnabas could not leave Mark. Barnabas was known in the church as “the son of encouragement”; he was gifted by the Holy Spirit to take those who were rejected or friendless under his wing and restore them. When the church first met Paul, they were suspicious and he was not fully trusted until Barnabas befriended him and convinced the church that Paul was indeed a brother in the Lord. Despite this sharp disagreement between them, God used Mark to be a great blessing to Paul later on in his life (2 *Timothy* 4:11).

Paul Returns to the Churches in Syria, Cilicia, and Galatia

Read Acts 15:40-41.

Silas, one of the leaders in the Jerusalem church, became Paul’s companion. This represents a wise principle that our Lord taught His disciples. When He sent his disciples out to preach and heal in His name, He sent them out in pairs (*Mark* 6:7). Having a partner to minister with is a gift from the Lord.

The Bible doesn't really tell us how these churches in Cilicia and Syria got started, but it was probably by Paul when he was a new believer and had left Jerusalem to return home.

Read Acts 16:1-5.

Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised? Was it because Paul thought it necessary in order for God to accept Timothy? No, it was so the Jews would accept him and allow him to enter the synagogue and assist Paul in his teaching there. If Timothy was not circumcised, then the Jews would never accept him or Paul’s message. As Christians, there are many things we do or refrain from doing, not so that God will accept us, but so that others will not be offended. After Paul, Silas, and Timothy left Derbe and Lystra, they visited other churches in that area and God is continuing to do His work of strengthening the churches in the faith and adding to the church numerically.

Paul’s Journey and Call to Macedonia

Read Acts 16:6-8.

After they had visited all the churches in that area, they planned to take the gospel to other countries nearby. There were many people throughout Asia who had not yet heard the gospel, so Paul decided to go; however, because this was not the Lord's will for him to go to this particular area, the Holy Spirit prevented him from going.

The Holy Spirit was sent to indwell all believers to enable us to take the gospel to the entire world. Although the Lord has commanded us to take the gospel to all people, we still need to depend upon the Holy Spirit for His leading and direction, to guide us to the right people at the right time. Therefore, we should always be looking to Him for His will and directions.

Why would the Lord stop Paul from going to these people? Didn't the Lord love these people? Yes, He did. Later the gospel was taken to the people of Asia. The Bible is not clear as to why the Holy Spirit stopped them from going at this time. God doesn't always give us the reasons for what He does. We are called to trust him, not to question Him. When we insist that God explain Himself, we are really showing that we don't trust Him. We should trust Him at all times, even when we don't understand why.

This whole encounter is again showing the faithfulness of God and His divine intervention. God is making it clear what He wants them to do and where He wants them to go. He wasn't leaving it up to themselves to figure it out. God was faithful to lead and guide them in what He wanted them to do and where He wanted them to go.

Read Acts 16:9-12.

Here again we see God's faithfulness in divinely intervening and showing Paul what He wants Paul to do and not leaving it up to Paul to figure out what to do. We have seen God do this over and over again through the scriptures. God didn't always guide Paul by visions, and He probably won't give you a vision to show you either, though He can if He wants to. God probably didn't give the person who led you to trust Christ a vision either. God often leads believers by speaking to them as they read His Word. Then as they trust and talk to Him about it, He places in their hearts a desire to do what He wants them to do even if they have no idea how or why. After Paul saw the vision, he immediately went to Macedonia. Because of what God had shown them, they were convinced this is what God wanted them to do and they did it. From this point on, Luke writes as if he is included with Paul and the others. After their arrival in Troas, the four of them traveled to Philippi.

Paul's Work at Philippi

Read Acts 16:13-15.

There doesn't appear to have been a synagogue in Philippi; however, when Paul heard there was a group of Jewish women who gathered near the river for prayer to God, he met with them.

He met a businesswoman named Lydia. The Lord opened her heart as Paul talked and she believed all that he testified concerning Jesus and was saved. Again, God was doing His work of bringing people to Himself. Her response was genuine and complete; immediately she desired to be used by God as a blessing to Paul and she offered her home and hospitality to meet their needs. It is important we all realize that no matter where we are in our Christian walk, we can have significant impact on those around us. She was a new Christian yet she was willing to be a blessing to those around her. Lydia was a great help to Paul and the new church in Philippi by simply letting God show love to others through her.

Read Acts 16:16-18.

At first, all went well in Philippi, but then trouble came. A young woman who was possessed by a demon began to interfere with Paul's ministry there. In the name of Jesus, Paul commanded the evil spirit to come out of the woman, which clearly revealed that Jesus had authority over the spirits.

Read Acts 16:19-24.

The men who were making money from the girl became furious with Paul over their loss of future income. They had no pity for this girl and were only concerned with their selfish gain. They brought charges against Paul and Silas. The magistrates beat them and ordered the jailer to put them in stocks and make sure they did not escape. Paul and Silas had been whipped and now their backs were bleeding. What do you think Paul and Silas did? They could have really gotten downhearted and discouraged about it. Who would blame them if they complained to God and hated their persecutors?

Read Acts 16:25-34.

They weren't discouraged at all, but rather were praising God for the opportunity to serve and to suffer for His sake! They trusted God that He must have had a good reason for allowing them to suffer. Nothing comes into our lives without purpose. Paul and Silas were able to do this because God had so revealed Himself to them that they knew Him and were confident in who He was and therefore were able to trust in Him. When we don't understand what He's doing, God wants us to trust Him and to believe in the promises of His love and that He will never leave us nor forsake us (***Hebrews 13:5***). God didn't abandon Paul and Silas and soon they saw the reason for the suffering they endured.

The keeper of the prison was going to kill himself, for it was his responsibility to take care of all the prisoners and see that none escape. Paul knew what he was about to do and called out to the

man. God is faithful and divinely intervening to save this man. Even though this man was keeping them in prison, Paul and Silas still loved him and wanted to see him turn to Christ. Remember what Jesus said when He was nailed on the cross (***Luke 23:34***)? Paul and Silas must have already been talking with this man, and the Holy Spirit convicting him of his need to be saved.

Paul didn't just give the man a short answer. He carefully explained the Word of God to this man and to all who lived in his house. The man and his family believed in the gospel and were baptized. Do you remember how Lydia wanted to show kindness to Paul and Silas after she had believed ? Here we see evidence that this man truly believed Paul's message about Jesus. He ministered to Paul and Silas' wounds, followed the Lord's command to be baptized, and finally took them into his own home and cared for their needs.

Read Acts 16:35-40.

It was unlawful for the way Paul and Silas had been treated, and Paul was not going to let them get away with it.

Lesson 11

From Philippi to Athens

Read Acts 17:1-4.

After God delivered Paul and Silas from prison, they left Philippi with Timothy and Luke and traveled to other cities to preach. When they arrived in Thessalonica, Paul went to teach in the synagogue. We see this over and over—Paul going to the synagogues on the Sabbath to teach the Jews from the scriptures. Paul was teaching them that Jesus had to come, suffer, and die on the cross and that He is indeed the Christ. The Holy Spirit was continuing to do His work in bringing people into a relationship with Himself, and verse four tells us that many were continuing to get saved. God is continuing to do His work in building His Church.

Read Acts 17:5-12.

Even though some people in Thessalonica believed, the majority rejected God's love and they planned to imprison Paul and Silas. They may have even killed them, but the believers helped them escape. The Bereans were more willing to accept Paul's teaching than the Thessalonians. The Bereans would listen to Paul's message and then would study the Word on their own to see if Jesus was really the Savior.

Read Acts 17:13-15.

The same group of people who were persecuting Paul in Thessalonica were not happy that the Bereans in the next town were receiving and believing what Paul was teaching. So, they went to Berea and caused problems there as well, but God used Paul's friends to move him to Athens. God is faithfully watching over and protecting Paul through all that he is going through.

Paul's Message in Athens

Read Acts 17:16-21.

Waiting in Athens for Silas and Timothy to come, Paul walked around the city and became disturbed as he saw temples and idols which the people worshiped. The Athenians prayed to and worshiped gods that had ears but couldn't hear and eyes but couldn't see (***Psalm 115:4-8***).

Paul was very concerned for these people who were so deceived, and it wasn't long before God gave him the opportunity to talk with them about the only true God and His provision for their

sins. God had been doing His work and was giving the people an interest in Himself because it says in verse nineteen that people said, “*May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming.*”

Read Acts 17:22-31.

Paul points out that these people are religious and worship in ignorance and begins telling who God is and His desire for relationship. In his message, Paul mentions many aspects describing who God is, God’s creation of man, how man is dependent on God and how God wants a relationship with mankind. This is consistent with God’s eternal plan of redemption because before the foundations of the earth, God’s desire was redemption and relationship.

- God made the world and everything in it.
- He is the Lord of heaven and earth.
- He does not dwell in temples made with hands.
- He is not served by human hands.
- He does not need anything.
- He gives everything to all people including life and death.
- He caused everyone to come from Adam.
- He determines mankind’s times and boundaries.
- He wants everyone to see Him and find Him because He is making Himself available to everyone and is not far from anyone.
- He is the one who enables mankind to live, move, and exist.
- We are the children of God.
- Because we are the children of God, we shouldn’t think that God is made of gold, silver, or other materials; He is alive and He has given us life and existence.
- God is not holding their past against anyone but is desiring all men to repent and come into a relationship with Himself.

What was the result of Paul’s teaching? Did these Gentiles believe God’s word?

Read Acts 17:32-34.

The response was a mixture of those who did not believe and made fun of Paul and his words, those who wanted to hear more, and those who believed in the message that God was giving through Paul. Paul’s part was to walk by faith in the Spirit and teach what God had him to teach and to trust the results to God. That is our same responsibility as well.

From Athens to Corinth

Read Acts 18:1-4.

After leaving Athens, Paul traveled down to Corinth, where he had preached the gospel once before. It is clear from this passage that Paul would work different jobs from time to time—this passage specifically mentions making tents—so that he would not be a burden to the people or the church. Soon he began teaching in the synagogue.

Read Acts 18:5-17.

Paul continues to teach. After Silas and Timothy arrive, he begins to teach full time. However, the people reject the teaching, and Paul warns them that doing so is their decision. He explains that he has done his part in teaching them the truth, but their blood will not be on his hands.

The Lord knows everything even before it happens. He knows who will believe and who will reject His word. We don't know who will believe and who will reject, so we need to tell everyone and trust the Holy Spirit to lead those whose hearts are already prepared to hear the truth.

Even though these people rejected the teaching, others believed and were baptized. We see in verses 9-10 that God gives Paul a specific word of encouragement for not being afraid in the midst of the persecution and dangers he is going through. This is a manifestation of the heart of God in communicating to Paul in this way.

Read Acts 18:18-22.

From Ephesus Paul went to Caesarea, then to Jerusalem, informing the leaders what God had done during his second trip. Next, he returned home to Antioch.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Read Acts 18:23-28.

Because of God's work in Paul's life, he had a great desire to see people entering into a relationship with God and growing in their relationship with God. So, Paul set out again to visit the areas where he had already been and to visit new areas. Priscilla and Aquila had come with him from Corinth, and God uses them to clarify the doctrine of a man named John. He was a good teacher but was only teaching the baptism of John the Baptist. When they heard his teaching and noted it was not correct, they pulled him aside and taught him the baptism of the Holy Spirit which follows salvation.

This section shows how important correct teaching is. They were teaching and making sure that others who were teaching about Jesus were doing so accurately. It is the same with teaching today. We need to make sure that teaching is accurate and according to God's word and be open to seeing where our teaching might need to be corrected and open to graciously correcting others when needed.

Lesson 12

Paul's Ministry in Ephesus

Read Acts 19:1-10.

Paul does something here in Chapter 19 that Aquila and Priscilla did in Chapter 18. The people had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul explains to them and clarifies the teaching and they were baptized again and received the Holy Spirit. Again, this is communicating the importance of good teaching and the need for people to understand the word of God correctly. After Paul taught the Word in Galatia and Phrygia, he came to Ephesus. God demonstrated His power through Paul. Upon arriving in Ephesus, Paul first went to teach in the Jewish synagogue.

Paul stayed in some places for only a short time and others he stayed longer, depending upon their responses. We should do the same when we take the gospel to other places. If people refuse to believe the word that we are teaching them, then we can leave them and move on to those who are more receptive or have never heard. Here we see Paul doing this. He began in the synagogue; but when people refused and rejected what he was teaching, he took those who were interested in hearing the teaching and learning to a place where they would not be distracted by those who were not interested.

Read Acts 19:11-12.

God was continuing to build His church by bringing people to Himself. One of the ways He was doing this was through healing people and the teaching of His word. God used His apostles to begin the building of the church and finish writing His Word. God told them what He wanted them to teach and led them to write it down, preserving it for all generations to come. God also gave them power to do miracles as proof that their message was from God. Today we don't need miracles to prove the message because now we have His complete word.

While in Ephesus, Paul wrote a letter to the church at Corinth. He had heard that they were disobedient to the word and wanted to learn and understand more. This letter is now part of the New Testament, and we will study it later.

Read Acts 19:13-17.

The Jewish vagabond exorcist error

God used this to show everyone that Paul is a true servant of Jesus and that he had received power over Satan and the demons. Also Jesus' name isn't something to speak casually or take lightly. His name is above all names and it is a serious matter to speak the name of Jesus

(Philippians 2:10-11). Only those who are true children of God have the right to call on Jesus' name or to speak it with authority. These men wrongly assumed that it was like a magic incantation and that it could be used at the whim of the speaker. God quickly taught them the truth that He is a great King and should be feared above all else (***Psalm 47:9***).

Read Acts 19:18-20.

The burning of books of magic

Again we see the power of the Holy Spirit working through the lives of those who believe. Just as Lydia and the Philippian jailer displayed a change of heart after they believed, so the Ephesian believers did also. Many of the people in Ephesus practiced magic for healing and cursing people; but when they became believers, they turned away from all this and burned their books. It's sinful for God's children to trust in anything other than God himself. As God's children, we are in His care and don't need to be dependent upon what Satan's children are dependent upon.

Read Acts 19:23-24.

The riot

At this time, Paul had been in Ephesus for about two and a half years. Many miracles had been done, and many had come to the Lord. The people didn't like what was happening there, and they tried to stir up some trouble for Paul and the church.

Read Acts 19:25-41.

The Ephesians had built a big temple for their goddess Diana. Demetrius was one of many silversmiths who would make small silver images of Diana and sell them. Since Paul had been preaching, gradually fewer people worshipped Diana; Demetrius and his friends feared that their sales would decrease. They cared more about money than the good that God had done for the Ephesians.

Paul Ministered in Macedonia and Greece

Read Acts 20:1-5.

Paul revisited the believers in Macedonia to strengthen their faith and trust in the Lord. While there, Paul wrote a second letter to the church at Corinth. When Paul finished his work in Macedonia, he traveled down to Corinth. Paul stayed there for three months teaching and encouraging the believers. During his stay, he wrote another letter, this time to the church in

Rome. He wrote to encourage them and to let them know of his plans to visit them after returning to Jerusalem. While in Corinth, Paul also wrote a letter to the church in Galatia. Paul had heard that false teachers had come to the church; they were teaching that faith in Christ alone won't save but that they had to keep circumcision and the law to be accepted by God.

Paul decided that he would leave Corinth and sail to Syria. However, when he heard that some Jews planned to catch him there and kill him, he changed course and went back up through Macedonia.

Paul Left Corinth and Ministered in Troas

Read Acts 20:6-7.

The early church would meet every day for worship, prayer, and teaching of God's word. In other places the people couldn't meet every day, but they would at least meet on Sundays. These early believers chose Sundays, the first day of the week, because this was the day of the week that Jesus rose from the dead (***Mark 16:9***).

When the church at Troas met together, they had communion to remember Jesus' body that was crucified for them and His blood that was shed for their sins. They also listened to the Word of God. We need to be taught God's Word continually. Even mature believers need to continue studying the Word. These believers were so hungry for God's Word that Paul taught them until midnight! On this particular occasion, something tragic and wonderful happened while he was teaching

Read Acts 20:8-12.

People were continuing to gather because they were hungry to hear God's word. God faithfully and divinely intervenes, giving Paul the power to raise a man from the dead. Everyone could see he really was sent by God and that his message was true. Again, God is working in such a way to prove that this is all taking place because of God.

Paul Called the Ephesian Elders to Come to Miletus

Read Acts 20:17.

When Paul was in Ephesus, he would have appointed elders while he was there. As an apostle, it was Paul's responsibility to train and appoint elders in all of the churches that he started. Today it is also the responsibility of elders to teach, train, and appoint other elders in the church to

oversee, teach, and protect. When each local church sends men like Paul and Silas to plant churches in other areas, it is their responsibility to appoint as elders those whom God makes clear to assure that new churches are properly cared for and nurtured.

Paul Reminded the Elders of His Life and Ministry in Ephesus

Read Acts 20:18-19.

First Paul reminded them of how he lived his life and did his work in Ephesus. The Jews continually persecuted Paul; however, Paul continued to trust God and live his life in such a way to provide a godly example to all. When we go into other areas to preach the gospel, we can also trust God to be careful to live in such a way that draws people to Christ. Even though Paul suffered greatly for preaching the gospel, he still faithfully served and trusted the Lord. After reminding them of how he had lived among them, he now reminds them of his teaching.

Read Acts 20:20-21.

It's interesting to note Paul's comment that he first "showed" them and then "taught" them. It's not always easy to tell people the truth; but if they see truth lived out in our lives, they are often more receptive to truth. As believers walk by faith and rest in who God has made them to be, Christ will live His life out through us allowing others to see Christ in us. Paul told them everything God wanted them to know; he didn't hold back anything that would be profitable to them. Notice Paul's dedication—he not only taught them in meetings, but also went to their homes to teach one on one.

Paul made it his business to warn Jews and Gentiles alike that there is only one way for sinners to come to God. That way is to agree that we are sinners in God's sight and to trust in Christ's death to pay the debt.

Paul Predicted His Future

Read Acts 20:22-25.

If it was God's will, Paul was even willing to die for the gospel. Paul trusted God and knew that He would never abandon him. Paul's heart was determined, for he knew he could trust God.

Paul was so convinced of the heart of God that he preferred Christ and suffering over an easy life. He says, "*I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself.*" What was more

important to him was walking by faith and enjoying Christ and sharing the gospel with those God gave him the contact with. Could we experience the peace that Paul had, even knowing that eventually we would be arrested and possibly executed for our faith? Yes! The same Holy Spirit who gave Paul the grace to bravely face such hardship dwells in us. When and if we are placed in the position to suffer for His name's sake, we will also be given the grace to endure with joy.

Read Acts 20:26-31.

Paul shared that he had warned and taught the people of Ephesus. His conscience was clear; if anyone failed to trust Christ it was not because he had neglected to warn them. Because Paul was leaving them and wouldn't be back, he was now handing over the responsibility of overseeing the church to these elders. In God's Word, elders are compared to shepherds. Just like we have to watch over and care for our animals, in the same manner elders must care for the church, God's people.

Paul said he explained the full council of God. He had taught them for many years and had begun from the beginning of God's eternal plan and unfolded for them God's plan of salvation for justification, sanctification, and our future glorification. He had communicated to them the full purposes of God. We need to trust God to do the same with those to whom God has given us the opportunity to minister.

In Bible times there were savage wolves that often tried to kill and eat the sheep. If a shepherd was not watching for the wolves, his flock could be torn to pieces. Paul said there are false teachers just like those wolves who will come into the church to try to lead the people astray. The elders must protect the church against such teaching, and like a shepherd, lead, guide, feed and protect.

Paul told them they must be on guard against anyone who would come in and teach contrary to his teaching or those who might be among them who will teach false doctrines and try to lead people astray. We must pray that God will raise up men to be elders who will watch over the church in this way (***1 Peter 5:2-3***).

Paul's Farewell

Read Acts 20:32-36.

Notice what Paul points them to. It is God and His grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance. As always, the emphasis is God and the work He can do, not the people and their own abilities and strength. Though Paul would no longer be with them, he reminded them that they still have God's Word, and the Holy Spirit would use it to teach and guide them into all truth. Sometime in the future, we too may find ourselves alone; but we have God's Word and we can depend upon the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us into all truth.

Lesson 13

God's Work in Paul's Life After He Is Arrested

After Paul leaves the Ephesian elders, he finds himself arrested and on trial before many people. Beginning in Chapter 21 and continuing through the end of the book, we clearly see that because God had revealed Himself to Paul, he was able to walk by faith in the hope that He gives and that God was faithfully and divinely intervening in Paul's life. Let's take a look at what God was doing during this time and some of the comments Paul was making.

- In Chapter 21 we see Paul spending several days with the disciples who were there. A man comes to him and tells him not to go to Jerusalem because harm is going to come to him; but because Paul is confident in the goodness and faithfulness of God, he says he wants to go to Jerusalem anyway. When he arrives in Jerusalem, he was able to give a report of the great work that God was doing. As was his custom, Paul went to the temple to tell of the great things of God. People who opposed him began to stir up the crowd with false accusations, and they took him into their custody. They were about to kill him, but God divinely intervened by sending the Roman soldiers to find out what was taking place. They rescued him from the mob who was against him.
- As we finish reading Chapter 21 and move into Chapter 22, we see God's divine intervention. The Roman soldiers moved in and rescued Paul from the mob, giving him the opportunity to share his testimony with the Roman authorities. Again, God was working it out according to His ways. Paul was about to be beaten, but he asks them if it is lawful to beat a Roman citizen. In God's sovereign plan, God had him born a Roman citizen because He knew what it would mean for Paul later on in his life.
- As we move into Chapter 23, we see that God is divinely intervening to give Paul the opportunity to share his story and the story of Christ with a large group of people. In verse six it is mentioned that Paul knew there were Sadducees and Pharisees in the group, and Paul tells them that he too at one time was a Pharisee. We can see God's sovereign predetermined plan at work here in choosing Paul, who was previously a Pharisee, to be able to understand and talk with the Pharisees. Unfortunately, that did not guarantee they were going to accept his message. In verse 11 we see God's faithfulness and divine intervention by directly encouraging Paul and telling him, *"Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My case at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."* A few verses later we see where God faithfully intervenes again and allows Paul's nephew to learn of the plot to kill him, and Paul is then brought faithfully to Caesarea.

- In Chapter 24 we see where God again gives Paul the opportunity to share his testimony and tell people about God. In verse 15 he specifically talks about *“having a hope in God”* which the prophets had. The chapter continues to tell us that Felix was familiar with the faith and therefore gave Paul leniency with prison. Again, this shows the faithfulness and divine intervention of God because God did not have to have a person in charge who had an understanding of God, and God gave Paul the opportunity to share more with Felix and his wife Drusilla.
- As we look at the remainder of the book, we continue to see God working things out in such a way that, even though Paul is a prisoner, he is able to share God’s message with more and more people and often with people of high reputation. In Chapter 25, God works it out so that Paul is able to appeal his case even to Caesar. In Chapter 26, God faithfully and divinely intervenes so that Paul is able to share his testimony and tell of the greatness of God to King Agrippa and others. Agrippa himself acknowledged as he heard Paul tell him about God that *“In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.”* God was using Paul’s words to convict even King Agrippa’s heart. Time and time again we have seen that God worked it out so that Paul as a prisoner was able to share the greatness of God with different groups of high ranking officials.
- In Chapter 27, when they are on a ship and in the middle of a storm, we see God faithfully and divinely encouraging Paul. In verse 23 it says that Paul was talking to the other people on the ship and told them, *“For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul, you must stand before Caesar, and behold God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.’”* Paul is encouraging everyone on board the ship with these words from the angel that they will make it and that no one will die. God did not have to give Paul these encouraging words but He did. Then in Chapter 28 they are shipwrecked on the island of Malta. There Paul is bit by a snake and the people of the island think he is going to die; but when they see that he does not die, they think that he is a god. This gives Paul the opportunity to tell them about the one true God, and the people believe in God. The shipwreck episode was about God’s faithful divine intervention—allowing them to crash into Malta, allowing Paul to get bit by the snake, and all so that some people on the island can hear the gospel and get saved. The book concludes with God carrying out what God said he would do which is take him to Rome. God always does what He says He will do and He is always faithfully and divinely intervening on the behalf of mankind. To God be the Glory.