

# Power to Live By

**Studies from the Book of Acts**

A Creative Living International Publication

**POWER TO LIVE BY  
STUDIES FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS**

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# Power to Live By

## Studies from the Book of Acts

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## ***Before you begin . . .***

The Book of Acts is action-packed and fun to read in one or two sittings. In this book, that meticulous gatherer of details Dr. Luke records what has become the most reliable source of information about the beginnings of the Christian church. While his treatise is not an exhaustive historical account of the early church, he gives us enough information to see that the spreading of Christianity throughout the Roman world was nothing short of miraculous.

What people in the early church experienced was not unlike what we face today as we seek to know Christ and practice godly living. They yearned for others to know the living Lord, were rejected and sometimes persecuted for their faith, and faced daily problems that sought to overwhelm their trust in God.

In our study of the divinely inspired work of Dr. Luke, we will concentrate on finding *power to live by*. We will seek to answer the daily questions about commitment to Christ and the living out of that commitment in today's world. We will seek to learn from the early believers about how to experience supernatural power in the battles of life and faith.

It is my prayer that this study will help you discover or rediscover the incredible power that God makes available to us through the indwelling of His Spirit. But more importantly, may knowing that Power accomplish its purpose: to bring you and, through you, others to know God's boundless love and care through Jesus Christ.

Diana Schick  
Author  
Creative Living Bible Studies

## ***PART I***

### ***JERUSALEM AND SAMARIA***

#### **LESSON 1**

##### **INTRODUCTION**

The Book of Acts is fast-moving and definitely one of the most exciting books in the Bible. It is the second book in a two-part series written by a physician and missionary named Luke. The first of the series, the book of Luke, records the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Acts then gives an historical account of the early church as it spread across the Roman Empire in the first century A.D.

Luke traveled with the apostle Paul and probably wrote Luke and Acts during Paul's imprisonment in Rome between 63 and 70 A.D. Luke's writings are addressed to a Roman aristocrat named Theophilus, who most likely helped pay for publication costs. The Lucan series encouraged the faith of believers in Christ while it displaced ill-founded reports about Christianity to the unbelieving world.

Luke did not attempt to give an exhaustive historical account of the early church in the book of Acts. However, his careful compilations form the chief source book regarding first century Christianity and provide firm historical foundations for the Christian faith.

# THE RISEN LORD

## Acts 1

Acts begins with the forty days during which Jesus appeared to His disciples<sup>1</sup> after His resurrection. During this time, Jesus explained Messianic prophecies<sup>2</sup> about Himself found throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. That Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah<sup>3</sup> of Israel was such good news--it would have to be proclaimed! However, Jesus instructed the believers to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit<sup>4</sup> came upon them to empower them as witnesses to the truth about the resurrected Christ.

After this, Jesus ascended into heaven before their eyes, and angels appeared to declare that the Lord would return in the same way He left! The disciples were filled with awe and joy as they returned to Jerusalem to pray and wait for the coming of the promised Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

### Read Acts 1:1-11.

1. What did Luke write about in his first book to Theophilus (1:1-2)?
  
2. How long did Jesus appear to the disciples after His resurrection, and what did He do during this time (1:3; Luke 24:44-45)?
  
3. During a meal together, what command did Jesus give the disciples (1:4-5)?

**References:** Notes 4 and 5 on the *Holy Spirit*, pp. 8,9.

4. What was Jesus' answer to the disciples' question regarding the kingdom (1:6-7)?

5. Onto what did Jesus encourage the disciples to turn their focus? What did He promise regarding the Holy Spirit (1:8)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 8.

6. What events took place after Jesus made this promise (1:9-11; see also Luke 24:50-53)?

## **Read Acts 1:12-26.**

7. a. Who joined the apostles as they gathered in the upstairs room (1:14)?

**Note:** *the women* (1:14) possibly refers to the wives of the apostles and some of the women who had traveled with Jesus and ministered to Jesus and His disciples out of gratitude (Matthew 27:55, Luke 8:2-3).

b. What occupied the disciples' time (1:14a)?

8. a. Peter showed how prophecy pointed to the death and replacement of Judas as an apostle (Psalm 69:25; 109:8). What requirements did Peter propose for the new apostle (1:21-22)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Apostles, Disciples*, and Note 3, *Messiah*, p. 8. See also *Major Prophecies Concerning Jesus*, p. 10.

- b. How did the disciples seek God's leading in choosing another apostle (1:23-26)?

**Note:** The casting of lots was used in Old Testament times to determine God's will. With the indwelling of believers by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, casting lots for guidance was never needed again.

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### When the Task is Too Big

Imagine, if you can, what the disciples experienced as they walked with Jesus during His earthly ministry. They witnessed crippled people straightening their backs and blind men suddenly receiving sight. They saw the sores on ten lepers healed simultaneously and watched as Jesus fed five thousand people from five loaves and two fish. A man named Lazarus walked out of his grave at the command of Jesus, and the only son of a widow sat up in his coffin. Jesus walked on the water of the Sea of Galilee before their very eyes and calmed a ferocious storm with the words, "Quiet, be still!" The list of miracles could go on, but in recent days, they had witnessed the most incredible of all. For forty days they had walked and talked with Jesus after His *resurrection from the dead*. During that time, He had opened the Scriptures to explain prophecies written hundreds of years before that were fulfilled through His life. There was no doubt in their minds: He was the Messiah, Savior and King of creation.

If you had been one of those disciples, you might have thought that everyone would want to know the wonderful truth about the Christ. But Jesus knew that while many *would* want to know, countless others would not, and persecution would come. For this reason, the 120 disciples were instructed to wait until they were given God's power to accomplish the humanly impossible task of spreading the truth about Jesus Christ. The

triumphant spread of Christianity throughout the world in the face of bitter persecution would be nothing short of supernatural.

We all face tasks that overwhelm us from time to time, and many of us seem to have difficult challenges before us most of the time. Words and phrases such as, "It's over my head," "unattainable," "out of the question," "too much..." bombard our minds evoking negative emotions which drain our energy and hasten defeat.

One of the main themes of the book of Acts is that God can give us supernatural power to face the seemingly impossible challenges of life. It is appropriate to begin our study on *Power to Live By* with some observations about facing the impossible task.

1. a. What kind of impossibilities can overwhelm our lives?

b. What types of emotions do these challenges elicit?

c. What are the results of these negative emotions?

2. a. What did Jesus promise the early believers as they prepared to undergo the humanly impossible task before them?

Matthew 28:20b

Acts 1:8

b. What do these truths suggest about difficult tasks we face today?

3. Hebrews 11:33-34 speaks of godly people gone before us who accomplished humanly impossible feats of courage and strength through faith in God. What truths do you observe in these verses?

4. What do the following verses say about strength?

Psalm 46:1

Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah 41:10

Ephesians 3:16, 20

5. What is important to know about seemingly impossible tasks?

Luke 1:37

II Corinthians 12:9-10

Philippians 4:13

6. a. We cannot expect God to enable us to do something that is not in our best interests. What do the following verses say about God's character that encourage us to seek His best for our lives?

Psalm 36:5-9

b. What was the Psalmist's continual prayer?

Psalm 25:4-5

c. What do the following verses encourage us to do as we seek God's strength for the impossible task?

Proverbs 3:5-6

Psalm 119:105

## **Summary**

7. a. What tasks in your life today seem humanly impossible?
  
- b. What truths in this lesson stand out to you as you contemplate your situation?

## **LESSON 1 NOTES**

**1** *Apostles and disciples.* A *disciple* is a pupil of a certain teacher. New Testament *disciples* were those who followed Jesus and were committed to his teachings. From such disciples, Jesus chose twelve men to be his *apostles*, meaning "ones sent with a special commission." The apostle named Judas Iscariot committed suicide after betraying Jesus, and Matthias was appointed to take his place (Acts 1:12-26). Paul was also called to be an apostle after his conversion. The apostles took seriously their commission to lay the foundations of the Church. The majority died as martyrs.

**2** *Major Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ*, see p. 10. *Prophecy* is given by God through prophets in both Old and New Testaments who preach, exhort, explain or, as in this case, foretell.

**3** *Messiah* (Hebrew/Greek), *Christ* (Greek/English), *Son of David*. The meaning of the word Messiah or Christ is "anointed one." The term Messiah or Christ refers to the anointed one promised by God to deliver Israel from their enemies and establish them as *the* world power. Old Testament prophecy described the Messiah as a King and Savior who would come from the line of David. (I Chronicles 17:11-15). Those Jewish people who did not recognize Jesus overlooked prophecy that their Messiah would be a suffering servant who must suffer and die for the sins of the world (Isaiah 53; John 1:29). For other Messianic prophecies, see chart, p. 10.

**4** *Holy Spirit*. God has made Himself known in the Bible as a Trinity, three divine persons with the same essence as God. The Holy Spirit, known as the Third Person of the Trinity, indwells every person who personally receives

Christ (John 1:12, John 14:16,17). When we ask God (Luke 11:13) to "fill" us with His Spirit (Ephesians 5:18b), He responds by supernaturally instructing and empowering us to live the Christian life (Ephesians 3:16-20; Ezekiel 36:26,27). Sometimes the Bible refers to this as "Christ in us", as in Colossians 1:27b. Luke mentions the Holy Spirit 57 times in the book of Acts; this is why Acts is sometimes referred to as the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*.

**Reference:** Note 6, *Trinity*.

**5** *Holy Spirit's coming.* The Holy Spirit did not come initially at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is eternal God, omniscient and omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-10), the Holy Spirit appears from the beginning of Scripture (Genesis 1:2). In the Old Testament, as in the New, He came upon individuals to empower them to accomplish certain God-given tasks (ex: David, I Samuel 16:13; Peter, Acts 4:8). Before His death and resurrection, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26) would one day indwell His disciples as Comforter, Counselor and Advocate. At Pentecost, God would fulfill this promise (Acts 2), thus beginning a new phase in God's revelation to man.

**6** *Trinity* (God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). While "Trinity" as a word is not in the Bible, Christian doctrine historically has used this term to describe God as He has revealed Himself. The Bible explains that God is one God in three equal persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Certain passages in the Old Testament hint of a plurality in God (Genesis 1:26-27, 3:22, 11:7; Isaiah 6:8). The Old Testament also speaks of someone coming from God who is God (i.e. Christ, Isaiah 7:14, 9:6). The New Testament clearly portrays Jesus Christ as God (John 1:1; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:8) and the Holy Spirit as God (Luke 1:35; Acts 5:3-4; Matthew 28:19; II Corinthians 13:14). All three persons of the Trinity share the divine characteristics of holiness, power, goodness, omniscience, omnipotence, etc. While they all may be involved in an activity such as teaching, for instance, each is associated with certain specific works. The Father is associated with the work of creating, the Son with the work of redeeming, and the Holy Spirit with the work of sanctifying believers. In many New Testament passages, mention of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit occurs in the same sentence (Jude 20-21; Ephesians 4:4-6, I John 4:2; I Peter 1:2; Titus 3:4-6; II Thessalonians 2:13; Galatians 4:4-6; Romans 5:5-6; John 15:26).

***Major Prophecies Concerning Jesus and Their Fulfillment***  
***Arranged Chronologically***

Description of Prophecy	Prophecy	Fulfillment
Would be the "Offspring of a Woman"	Gen 3:15	Gal 4:4
Promised Offspring of Abraham	Gen 18:18	Acts 3:25
Promised Offspring of Isaac	Gen 17:19	Mt 1:2
Promised Offspring of Jacob	Num 24:17	Lk 3:34
Will descend from the tribe of Judah	Gen 49:10	Lk 3:33
The Heir to the throne of David	Isa 9:7	Mt 1:1
Place of birth	Mic 5:2	Mt 2:1
Time of birth	Dan 9:25	Lk 2:1-2
Born of a virgin	Isa 7:14	Mt 1:18
Slaughter of Infants	Jer 31:15	Mt 2:16
Escape into Egypt	Hos 11:1	Mt 2:14
Ministry in Galilee	Isa 9:1-2	Mt 4:12-16
As a Prophet	Dt. 18:15	Jn 6:14
His rejection by Jews	Isa 53:3	Jn 1:11
Some of his characteristics	Is 11:2	Lk 2:52
His triumphal entry	Zec 9:9	Jn 12:13-14
Betrayed by a friend	Ps 41:9	Mk 14:10
Sold for thirty pieces of silver	Zec 11:12	Mt 26:15
Money to be returned for a potter's field	Zec 11:13	Mt 27:6-7
False witnesses accuse him	Ps 27:12	Mt 26:60-61
Silent when accused	Is 53:7	Mt 26:62-63
Struck and spit on	Is 50:6	Mk 14:65
Hated without cause	Ps 69:4	Jn 15:23-25
Suffered vicariously	Isa 53:4-5	Mt 8:16-17
Crucified with sinners	Isa 53:12	Mt 27:38
Hands and feet pierced	Ps 22:16	Jn 20:27
Mocked and insulted	Ps 22:6-8	Mt 27:39-40
Given gall and vinegar	Ps 69:21	Jn 19:29
Hears prophetic words repeated in mockery	Ps 22:8	Mt 27:43
Prays for His enemies	Ps 109:4	Lk 23:34
His side to be pierced	Zec 12:10	Jn 19:34
Soldiers cast lots for his clothes	Ps 22:18	Mk 15:24
To be buried with the rich	Isa 53:9	Mt 27:57-60
His resurrection	Ps 16:10	Mt 28:9
His Ascension	Ps 68:18	Lk 24:50-51

## **LESSON 2**

### **PENTECOST--THE CHURCH IS BORN**

#### **Acts 2:1-41**

The day of Pentecost<sup>1</sup> was a busy one in Jerusalem. Tens of thousands of devout Jews and Gentile converts<sup>2</sup> from all over the Mediterranean world and Middle East filled the streets of the city to celebrate this Jewish holiday.

It was on this day, fifty days after the crucifixion, that the disciples, numbering one hundred twenty (1:15), were gathered together in a house in Jerusalem. Suddenly the place was filled with the reverberation of a mighty wind, and what appeared to be tongues of fire separated and rested on each one there. Simultaneously, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit<sup>3,4</sup> and began to speak in languages unknown to them.<sup>5</sup>

The sound attracted a curious crowd as the believers moved to the street, continuing to praise God in other tongues. People from various parts of the world heard their native languages and were filled with wonderment about what was happening.

The twelve apostles rose to give explanation to the people. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter became the apostles' spokesman. He explained that the tongues phenomena was evidence that the Spirit of God was in their midst bearing witness of the truth about Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Peter proceeded to confront the crowd of thousands with facts about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The events of which Peter spoke had happened in the presence of many who were living in Judea during their occurrence, and no one disputed his words.

By referring to Old Testament prophecy regarding the resurrection of the Messiah (Psalm 16:8-11; Acts 2:25-31), Peter was able to show that Jesus of Nazareth and the Jewish Messiah were one and the same Person.

Pierced by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, people in the crowd asked what their response should be to these truths. Peter instructed them to repent,<sup>7</sup> receive God's forgiveness and be baptized<sup>8</sup> in the name of Jesus Christ. The repentance of which Peter spoke required a revised perspective about Jesus; He was not just a carpenter or a religious impostor but the divine Lord and Messiah. After this change of heart, the act of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ symbolized one's identification with the message of Jesus and His people.

The result of Peter's preaching and the work of the Holy Spirit was no doubt incredible to the initial band of disciples: three thousand new believers were baptized that day.

### **Read Acts 2:1-13.**

1. For what were the believers waiting (1:4-5)?

**Reference:** Notes 4,5, *Holy Spirit*, pp. 8,9.

2. a. Who was in Jerusalem at the time (2:5)?

b. How did God equip the disciples to reach the individuals in Jerusalem during Pentecost (2:4, 6-11)?

c. What characterized the responses of the crowd (2:7, 12-13)?

**Read Acts 2:14-21.**

3. a. Who stood before the crowd (2:14)?
- b. Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 (Acts 2:17-21) to explain that the phenomenal miracle the people were witnessing was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy regarding the time after their Messiah had come. To what promise did Peter refer (2:17,18)?
- c. After the Messiah had come, what had Joel prophesied that would allow one to receive salvation (2:21)?

**Read Acts 2:22-41.**

4. a. What major signs did God give to identify Jesus as the promised Messiah (2:22-24)?

- b. Of what crime did Peter remind the people (2:23)?

5. a. Referring to Old Testament prophecy as he spoke, what explanation did Peter give for the fact that people were hearing the words of the disciples in their native tongues (2:31-33)?

**Note:** The Jews listening understood this prophecy as the words of the Messiah spoken through David, i.e. the words of the Messiah from David's mouth.

b. After showing how the death and resurrection of Jesus matched the prophecy about the death and resurrection of the Messiah, what was Peter able to intelligently proclaim to his Jewish brothers (2:36)?

6. How did the people respond to Peter's words (2:37)?

7. a. What two things did Peter encourage them to do, and what two gifts would they receive in return (2:38)?

**Note:** Biblical repentance involves turning from sin to righteousness and always results in the forgiveness of God.

**References:** Note 7, *Repent*, and Note 8, *baptized*, p. 19. Also, Notes 3, 4 on the Spirit, p. 18.

8. a. What did Peter continue to do (2:40)?

b. What resulted (2:41)?

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### Power to Live By

Anyone who seriously studies the life of Jesus finds a model to emulate. He was kind, patient and compassionate, but firm about the truth. He had access to the infinite wisdom of God and was able to at once see the spiritual world as well as the physical. He was a whole person, at peace with God and Himself and able to unselfishly serve the needs of others.

All of us want to be whole as Jesus was...we yearn to function as God created us to function...at peace within and significant to the lives of others. Yet we often find it impossible to overcome fear, self-doubt, anxiety, indecisiveness and selfishness. As hard as we may try, we find it impossible to be like Jesus.

Peter was such a man. The fearless Peter we find in Acts 2 is far different than the one who 50 days earlier had lacked the courage to confess his association with Jesus. He denied even knowing the Man he had been close to for the past three years (Luke 22:54-62).

What made the difference in Peter? How had he overcome his fear, inconsistency, self-doubt, anxiety? The Scriptures make it clear that the source of Peter's strength came from the risen Christ, living His life through Peter in the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit.

If we learn nothing else from our study of Acts than the truth that the Holy Spirit allows Jesus to live His life through us, this would be enough. Let us look at what the Bible has to say about the incredible *power to live by* that God makes available to each of us.

1. a. Compare Luke 22:54-62 with Acts 2:14,36-41. What emotions did Peter struggle with in Luke?

b. What characterized him in Acts?

2. What emotions do we fall prey to today that hinder our relationships with God and others?

3. What promises had Jesus made about the Holy Spirit?

John 14:16-17

John 14:26

John 15:26

4. How is the working of the Holy Spirit described in the following?

Ephesians 3:16,20

Philippians 2:13

5. In John 15, Jesus used the analogy of a vine abiding in a branch to illustrate how Christ can live His life in and through us in the power of the Holy Spirit. What does Jesus say about trying to live the Christian life apart from Him (John 15:5)?

6. a. How does Galatians 5:22-23 describe the characteristics the Holy Spirit seeks to produce within us?

b. How does Romans 8:26-27 further describe the Holy Spirit's help?

7. What changes does God make in our lives through His Holy Spirit according to the following?

Ezekiel 36:26-27

Ephesians 1:13-14

8. How can we choose to be filled with the Holy Spirit according to the following?

Acts 2:38

Luke 11:13

## **Summary**

9. Are there areas in which you are struggling to be more Christlike? What hope is offered in this lesson? What one or two verses would you like to claim for your situation?

10. a. Have you ever imagined Christ living His life in you through the power of the Holy Spirit? What difference would it make in your home, workplace, neighborhood?

b. What is your prayer regarding the Holy Spirit and your life? If you have never asked Christ to fill you with His Spirit, perhaps you would like to ask Him for the first time now.

## LESSON 2 NOTES

**1 Pentecost.** This was a Jewish holiday that occurred 50 days (7 weeks) after the celebration of the *Passover*. The *Passover* was the first of the annual feasts of Israel and celebrated God's miraculous deliverance of the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt. *Pentecost* celebrated the Law being given to Israel on Mt. Sinai as Moses communed with God.

It is appropriate that Jesus, the Savior and deliverer, died on the Passover eve, and the Holy Spirit, who gives the believer power to fulfill the laws of God, came on the day of Pentecost.

**2 Gentile converts** were non-Jews by birth (Gentiles) who observed all of the Mosaic law and were thus enabled to fellowship with the Jews.

**3 Reference:** Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 8.

**4a Baptized with the Holy Spirit** (Acts 1:5), *filled with the Holy Spirit* (2:4). **Baptized with the Holy Spirit.** On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to baptize the disciples into the Body of Christ, thus welding them as a unit into the risen Lord and Head of the Church (Acts 11:15-16; I Corinthians 12:13). This is experienced by each individual at the moment he personally accepts Christ (see also Romans 8:9-11).

At Pentecost, the Spirit also inaugurated His permanent relationship of *indwelling* all believers in fulfillment of the Jesus' promise recorded in John 14:17.

**4b Filled with the Spirit.** Pentecost was the beginning of the age of the Spirit whereby believers can, *through choosing to completely yield to God's will, experience the unhindered working of the Spirit in their lives*. Luke uses the

words *filled with the Holy Spirit* when people initially receive power from the Spirit to equip them for God's work (Luke 1:15, Acts 9:17); also when the Holy Spirit gives one the words to speak (Acts 4:8,31; 13:9). Other passages describe being filled with the Spirit as a continuous process (Acts 13:52, Ephesians 5:18) whose corresponding state is being full (Luke 4:1; Acts 6:3,5; 7:55; 11:24). These Scriptures collectively seem to indicate that *baptism* (Acts 1:5, 11:16) with the Spirit occurs when one personally receives Christ, is baptized into the body of Christ and receives the indwelling Holy Spirit, as did the disciples at Pentecost. (Romans 8:9-11; I Corinthians 12:13). All recurring experiences of receiving special power from the Spirit are referred to biblically as being *filled with the Spirit*.

Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 69.

**5** *languages unknown to him* (2:4). The ability to speak in *other tongues* (literally *other languages*) referred to in Acts 2:4, 11, 10:46 and 19:6 is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. One New Testament passage deals with this spiritual gift extensively (I Corinthians 12-14). Different commentators interpret the tongues spoken of in four different ways: 1) in Acts 2 they are the human languages of the various nations, but in I Corinthians 12-14 they are non-human, heavenly languages; 2) both Acts and I Corinthians refer to human languages not known to the speaker, 3) both Acts and I Corinthians refer to non-human languages; 4) I Corinthians alludes to languages both of "men" and of "angels" (13:1), while Acts portrays only the languages of men not known to the speaker. *Life Change Series, Acts*, Navpress, p. 37.

**6** *Messiah, Christ*, note 3, p. 8.

**7** *Repent* (2:38; 3:19). "Repentance is a change of mind and will arising from sorrow for sin and leading to transformation of life." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1649.

**8** *baptized* (Acts 2:38). Water baptism was not new to the Jewish community. It had been practiced since Old Testament times as an initiation rite. John the Baptist transformed the meaning of baptism from a rite to a moral act initiated by an individual making a commitment to personal holiness. The meaning of baptism took on yet new meaning when Jesus inaugurated baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Baptism always quickly followed one's conversion in New Testament times. The action symbolized identification of the new believer with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:1-4); i.e. it depicted dying with Christ, being cleansed of sin, and being raised to newness of life in Him.

## **LESSON 3**

### **HEALING OF A LAME MAN**

#### **Acts 3:1-4:4**

The first Christians were all Jews who continued to worship regularly at the temple, gathering in a section called Solomon's Colonnade. One day, as Peter and John were on their way to the temple, they walked by a lame man who begged them for money. The forty-year old man (4:22) had been lame from birth, and every day he was placed by the temple gate to beg. Peter explained he had no money, but by the authority of Jesus Christ commanded the man to walk.

The lame man rose to his feet and started walking, jumping and praising God. He clung to the apostles as the crowds gathered. Peter seized the opportunity to tell the people about Jesus Christ. Once again, the apostle turned to the Old Testament promises and prophecies to show that Jesus of Nazareth was their fulfillment.

While ignorance may have caused the Jews to crucify Jesus, Peter left his audience with no excuse for refusing to acknowledge Jesus as Lord now. He encouraged the people to repent, turn to God, and experience forgiveness and refreshment from the Lord.

While they were speaking to the people, the priests, captain of the temple guard and Sadducees<sup>1</sup> came up. They were greatly annoyed by the apostles' teaching and seized Peter and John. The apostles were imprisoned to await trial before the Sanhedrin<sup>2</sup> the next day.

Meanwhile, many had believed Peter's words, and the number of men alone who believed in Jesus grew to five thousand.

## **Read Acts 3:1-16.**

1. What needs did the beggar have, and how did Peter meet those needs (3:1-7)?

**Note:** *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth means by the power and authority of Jesus the Messiah.*

2. What was appropriate about the beggar's response (3:8-11)?

3. a. To whom did Peter immediately give credit (3:12-13a)?

b. How might Peter have responded to the crowd differently?

4. a. What did Peter declare about Jesus to the attentive Jewish crowd (3:13b-15)?

b. What did he declare about the lame man's healing (3:16)?

**Read Acts 3:17-26.**

5. a. How did God redeem the ignorant actions of the Jewish people (3:17-18)?

b. What did Isaiah 53:7-8, 10-11 declare about the Messiah that was fulfilled in Jesus?

**Reference:** *Salvation*, Note 5, p. 35.

6. What did Peter encourage and why (3:19)?

7. Peter cited promises God had given the Jewish forefathers that referred to Jesus Christ. What did God desire Israel to do with the gift of His Son (3:22-23, 25-26)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *Abrahamic Covenant*, p. 27.

**Read Acts 4:1-4.**

8. What positive and negative results came from the lame man's healing and Peter's boldness (4:1-4)?

**Reference:** *Sadducees*, Note 1, p. 27.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Experiencing the Healing We Need**

The lame man in our story had a disability obvious to all. Often our greater areas of crippledness are not outwardly visible, however. Socially, emotionally and spiritually, we can experience painful problems.

While God can and does sometimes perform physical miracles of healing, the most important healing He performs in our lives is in the spiritual arena. He desires to use our every experience--both good and bad-- to orchestrate the healing of damaged emotions, to correct misconceptions about God and to free us to enjoy relationships with others. Let's take a look at what the Bible says about how we can experience God's healing in our lives as we trust Him.

1. What types of "crippledness" do people commonly experience

spiritually?

emotionally?

socially?

2. What kinds of feelings about self, others and life do these handicaps create?

3. a. What are some of the reasons people do not go to God with their needs in these areas?

b. What truths about God support the fact that He desires to heal us, not to hurt us?

Psalm 103:2-5

Psalm 103:8, 13-14

Isaiah 53:5 (prophecy about Christ)

Romans 8:32

4. Sometimes we believe that we are unable to come to God until we perfect ourselves. What did Jesus say about coming to Him?

Matthew 9:10-13

Matthew 11:28-30

5. How do these verses describe the healing God desires to give?

Jeremiah 33:6b

Malachi 4:2

6. Peter explained that faith in Jesus is the foundation for complete healing (Acts 3:16,19). What does Jesus invite us to do in order to begin to realize the healing He can give?

Revelation 3:20

7. How does the Lord promise to care for our damaged emotions?

Philippians 4:7

Psalm 34:18

8. How would being controlled by God's Spirit enable us to find healing in the area of relating to others? What does Galatians 5:22-23 suggest?

9. According to Ephesians 3:20, to what extent is God able to affect healing in our lives as He works within us?

## **Summary**

10. a. As we have briefly touched on the topic of experiencing the healing we need, perhaps an area of crippledness in your own life has come to mind. What truths about God's healing stand out to you from this lesson?

b. Have you begun to ask God to provide healing in this area of your life? What would you like for Him to do?

If you have never realized the spiritual healing that begins by opening the door of your life to Christ, perhaps you would like to do that now. A simple prayer might be: Lord Jesus, I open the door of my life and invite you to begin the healing that will make me the person you created me to be. Amen.

## LESSON 3 NOTES

**1 Sadducees.** Sadducees were a Jewish party that represented the wealthy aristocracy in Israel. Theologically unorthodox, they flatly rejected the strict adherence to Jewish law practiced by religious leaders known as Pharisees. The Sadducees did not believe in life after death, so Peter's teaching about the resurrection infuriated them. Because they held the majority of the priestly positions in the Jewish governing body, the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees were very powerful in national decision-making. In order to guard their prestige and possessions, they went to great lengths politically to maintain friendly relationships with Rome. Convinced that the teaching in the name of Jesus would eventually lead to public disorder and knowing that Roman authorities would deal mercilessly with such, the Sadducees desperately wanted to put an end to the apostles' teachings. While the Pharisees had posed the greatest problem to Jesus, the Sadducees became the greatest enemy of the early church.

**2 Sanhedrin.** The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews. It was comprised of *priests, scribes and elders*. The court had seventy-one members with the *high priest* as president. In former days, the position of *high priest* came by family heritage and was for life. In the Roman times, however, existing bribery and corruption brought twenty-eight high priests in and out of power between 37 B.C. and 67 A.D. Of these high priests, all but six came from four "priestly families," highly prestigious families whose members inherited priestly positions. Practically all the *priests* on the Sanhedrin were Sadducees, wealthy aristocrats devoted to preserving the status quo in Judea in order to preserve their wealth and prestige.

*Scribes* were the experts and translators of the traditional Jewish law.

*Elders* were respected men in the community who sat on the court.

While the Sanhedrin had authority to arrest, it had no authority to pass the death sentence. Barclay, pp. 38-39.

**3 Abrahamic Covenant.** Around 2100 B.C., God called a man named Abraham to become the father of the Jewish nation. The one true God would reveal Himself to these people, and from their midst would come the Redeemer of mankind. The covenant God made with Abraham is sevenfold and appears in Genesis 12:1-3. Peter quoted the seventh promise of the covenant in Acts 3:25 as he alluded to the fact that the nations of the earth were to be blessed through the Redeemer Christ of Israel.

## **LESSON 4**

### **INITIAL PERSECUTION**

#### **Acts 4:5-31**

In our last lesson, we saw Peter heal a lame beggar over forty years old who had been crippled all his life. When crowds of amazed people gathered around the apostles in the temple, Peter explained that the phenomenal healing, done in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, proved the resurrection and Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Greatly disturbed by the apostles' teaching, some Sadducees<sup>1</sup> and the temple guard captain arrested Peter and John. After a night in jail, the apostles were brought to trial before the Sanhedrin.<sup>2</sup>

When Peter presented their defense to the Sanhedrin, he was speaking to the most intellectual, wealthy and powerful men in Judea. The Sanhedrin was also the same court that had condemned Jesus to death. With the possibility of the same sentence, Peter, a simple Galilean fisherman, spoke with astounding boldness. In essence, he turned the trial back on his accusers as he stated exactly what they did not want to hear: the lame man who stood before them was healed in the name of Jesus Christ whom they had crucified and whom God had raised from the dead.<sup>3</sup> Peter quoted Old Testament prophecy that predicted the Jewish rejection of their Messiah, and boldly declared that only faith in Jesus could save them.

Peter and John were sent from the room as the Sanhedrin discussed the issue. They were amazed at the courage and eloquence of the apostles. They were simple, uneducated men whom they recognized to have been Jesus' disciples. While the miraculous healing of the lame man was undeniable, the

Sanhedrin was determined to stop the spread of teaching about the resurrection of Jesus. The healing had given Peter favor with the people, however, and a strong sentence on the apostles could lead to riots and trouble with the Roman authorities. The Sanhedrin had no choice but to severely threaten the apostles and let them go.

Summoning Peter and John back into the room, they warned them never to speak in the name of Jesus again. The apostles' response was simple: we will obey God and continue to tell what we have seen (4:19-20).

Peter and John returned to report the day's happenings to the other believers. With one accord, they lifted their hearts in prayer, acknowledging the sovereign power of God and His ultimate victory over man's resistance to His plans. Remembering the suffering and triumph of Jesus Christ, they prayed for the courage needed to witness boldly about Him. They also asked God to continue the signs and miracles that confirmed the truth of their witness.

As they prayed, the place was shaken as the Holy Spirit once again filled<sup>4</sup> and enabled the believers to speak boldly about their faith, even in the face of possible death.

### **Read Acts 4:5-22.**

1. a. Describe the court setting. Who sat in judgment (4:5-6)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Sadducees*, and Note 2, *Sanhedrin*, p. 27.

b. Who appeared as evidence (4:10,14; cf. 3:1-10)?

c. Who was on trial (4:7)?

2. What question was directed to the apostles (4:7)?

3. How was Peter able to face this sophisticated and powerful audience with boldness (4:8)?

4. a. Peter was able to turn the trial back on the Sanhedrin. What initial points did Peter make?

Acts 4:9

Acts 4:10

b. Peter quoted Psalm 118:22 which predicted Israel's initial rejection of their Messiah, who would become the cornerstone of the Christian faith. With what declaration did Peter end his defense (4:12)?

**Reference:** *Salvation*, Note 5, p. 35.

5. How did the Sanhedrin initially respond to the witness of Peter and John (4:13-15)?

6. What did the Sanhedrin privately decide and why (4:16-17, 21-22)?

7. What courageous response did Peter and John give to the threats they received (4:18-20)?

**Read 4:23-31.**

8. a. What truths did the believers acknowledge in their prayer (4:24-28)?

b. What two requests did they make (4:29-30)?

9. How did God respond to their prayers (4:31)?

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### Power Over Negative Emotions

No doubt Peter and John and the believers in Acts 4 could have panicked over their situation. Peter's earlier denial of the Lord showed that he could be shaken by fear, yet courage and boldness triumphed over his circumstances in the courtroom.

Throughout the book of Acts, we will see incredible power over potentially defeating emotions. In this wonderful book there are numerous examples of people overcoming incredible odds because they were able to control rather than be controlled by their feelings.

While even negative emotions can be helpful and are not in and of themselves bad, examples abound of paralysis and defeat that result from uncontrolled emotions. When the child inside each of us screams with fear, hurt or anger, how can we stand secure? Let's make some observations about how ordinary people did it in the book of Acts.

1. a. What are common negative emotions that can overwhelm us?

b. What can happen if we let these feelings control us?

2. a. Imagine the apostles' situation as they faced the Sanhedrin. What negative feelings could have controlled them?

b. From where did the apostles' ultimately get the power to boldly testify before the Sanhedrin?

Acts 4:8,31

c. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit,<sup>6</sup> what does He produce in our lives regardless of the situation?

II Timothy 1:7

3. The apostles' focus on Jesus gave them power over their emotions. Of what does He assure us?

John 14:27

John 16:33

4. According to the following, what can we trust God to do when we are faced with overwhelming circumstances?

Exodus 14:14

Job 42:2

Psalm 84:11

II Corinthians 9:8

5. What are we instructed to do instead of trusting our feelings, and what is the result?

Proverbs 3:5-6

6. Prayer protected the early believers from negative emotions. What does Philippians 4:6-7 command and promise?

7. Knowing God's love and care is important in controlling our feelings. How would you summarize what Matthew 6:25-34 reveals about God's care?

8. The believers offset their fear by praising God, acknowledging His power as Creator of all things (Acts 4:24). What does Isaiah tell us about God's power, love and ability to help us in our weakness?

Isaiah 40:6-8, 17,26

Isaiah 40:11

Isaiah 40:27-28

Isaiah 40:29,31

## **Summary**

9. a. In difficult situations, what can keep you from drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit to help you overcome negative feelings?

b. What prayer would you suggest for yourself at such a time?

10. What biblical truths in this lesson are most helpful to you in controlling harmful emotions?

## LESSON 4 NOTES

**1 Reference:** *Sadducees*, note 1, p. 27.

**2 Reference:** *Sanhedrin*, note 2, p. 27.

**3 Resurrection evidence.** Had the Jewish leaders been able to produce the body of Jesus, they certainly would have done so. The fact that they did not refute Peter's claims about the resurrection of Jesus in this trial is further evidence of its historicity.

**4 Reference:** Note 4b, *Filling of the Spirit*, p. 18.

**5 Salvation.** The Jewish belief was that the blood sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament represented the death penalty necessary to be forgiven and saved from sin (Genesis 2:16,17; Romans 6:23; Leviticus 17:11,14; Hebrews 9:22). The Old Testament sacrifices established the principle that shedding of blood is necessary for forgiveness of sins. They also point to the blood of Christ shed on the cross as He became "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). His death on the cross for the sins of those who would believe in Him paid the penalty for sin. Christ's death on the cross made it possible for the one who trusts in Christ to receive the forgiveness of God (Ephesians 1:7), become a child of God (John 1:12), and experience the holiness and victory of God in his life. Christ's voluntary death on the cross was the supreme example of His love for us as individuals as He made provision for our salvation from the power and penalty of sin.

**6 Reference:** Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 8.

## **LESSON 5**

### **THE FIRST CHURCH COMMUNITY**

**Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-5:16**

There was awe and great joy among the first believers in Christ. As devout Jews, they continued to keep Jewish traditions, meeting together in the temple in a large area called Solomon's Colonnade. Empowered by God's Spirit<sup>1</sup>, the apostles spoke boldly of the resurrection and Lordship of Jesus and performed miraculous signs of healing and deliverance.<sup>2</sup> Thousands had accepted Jesus as their Messiah (cf. 4:4), and the number of believers was growing daily.

The oneness among the believers was evidenced by the sharing of possessions to meet each other's needs. Some even sold property and gave the proceeds to the church. Luke records one instance, however, when a couple named Ananias and Sapphira lied about their giving. They determined that they would say they were giving the entire amount received for the sale of some property when in fact they were only giving a portion of their profit to the church. When Peter confronted them about their deceit, Ananias and Sapphira fell dead at the apostle's feet.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of this incident, a reverent fear of God gripped the church community as well as the general public. Counterfeit or halfhearted believers began to keep their distance from the committed believers in the temple (cf. 5:13). Even so, the teaching and healing ministries of the apostles continued, and the church grew steadily.

**Read Acts 2:42-47.**

1. a. What did the first Christians do in order to stay united and grow spiritually (2:42)?
- b. What continued to encourage their faith (2:43, 47b)?
- c. How did their commitment to the Lord and each other manifest itself (2:44-47)?

**Read Acts 4:32-37.**

2. After the first persecution (Acts 4), what characterized the church (4:32-35)?
3. Caring for one another's needs was a major characteristic of the oneness of the early believers. What example of such care did Luke highlight (4:36-37)?

**Read Acts 5:1-11.**

4. a. How did Ananias and Sapphira sin (5:2-3,8-9)?

b. What freedom did they have (5:4)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *Ananias and Sapphira fell dead*, p. 42, and Note 4 *Satan, demons*, p. 42.

c. What do you think motivated the evil action of this couple?

5. What did this incident prove to all about dealings with God? (See also Galatians 6:7.)

### **Read Acts 5:12-16.**

6. How did God continue to confirm the message of salvation through Christ (5:12-16)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *evil spirits*, p. 42.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Power Over Hypocrisy**

How many of us have heard someone say, "I don't believe in God because of all the hypocrites in the church." Many people are turned away from Christian faith because there is a lack of integrity in the lives of the believers they know. The duplicity in the lives of professed Christians is poison to the cause of Christ.

God knows the power of hypocrisy and throughout history has often publicly exposed the person who pretends to be holy while practicing ungodliness. God could not allow hypocrisy to begin to perpetrate itself in the young body of believers in the early church.

Hypocrisy develops subtly, and any one of us can be pulled into its grip. In this lesson, we will look at some of the roots of hypocrisy and where power is found to live the Christian life authentically.

1. a. How would you define hypocrisy?

b. How do these verses define hypocrisy?

Matthew 23:3c

Luke 6:46

2. What are some examples of hypocrisy in professed Christians?

3. What causes for hypocrisy are referred to in these verses?

James 1:22-24

Matthew 6:24

Psalm 36:2

4. Hypocrisy often comes from seeking honor for ourselves. What does the Bible warn about self-exaltation in Proverbs 16:18?

5. The reason why hypocrisy is so serious is because it mocks God and hurts the cause of truth (cf. 2 Peter 2:2; Nehemiah 5:9). Ananias and Sapphira's lie not only mocked the holiness of God but also jeopardized the life of the Christian church in its infancy. God's action with this couple was protective of the greater body of faithful believers. What do the following verses reveal about God's character that were proven in His dealings with Ananias and Sapphira?

Psalm 101:7

Proverbs 2:8

Daniel 2:22

6. What must we realize about God that will motivate us to avoid hypocrisy in our lives?

Psalm 69:5

Proverbs 16:2

Galatians 6:7

7. What does God do when we are honest about our hypocrisy?

Psalm 32:5

8. How can we avoid hypocrisy in our lives?

Proverbs 11:3

James 1:23-25

Galatians 5:16,25

9. What must be our continual prayer?

Psalm 19:12-14

## **Summary**

10. Anyone can fall into hypocritical practices as a Christian. What truths about God's holy character motivate you to maintain an honest relationship with Him?

11. While none of us will achieve perfection as Christians, what can ensure your integrity as a believer?

12. What is your desire in the area of Christian integrity? Make this your prayer.

## LESSON 5 NOTES

**1 Reference:** Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 8.

**2 evil spirits, demons** (5:16). Demonic possession was common in Jesus' day, and exists today where Satanic powers are recognized and worshipped. Demons or evil spirits are intelligences who seek to gain control of human beings as media of expression. In New Testament times, these evil spirits caused instances of seizures (Matthew 17:15), speechlessness (Mark 9:17), mental disorder (John 10:20), violent action (Luke 8:26-29), bodily disease (Luke 13:11,16) and rebellion against God (Revelation 16:14). In all these cases, the evil spirits recognized Jesus and expressed fear and hatred of Him. His authority over demons, and the authority *in His Name* given the apostles over evil spirits, was proof that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God as He claimed. See also Note 4, *Satan, demons*, this page.

**3 Ananias and Sapphira fell dead.** Pretended generosity and love for money led to the first recorded sin in the life of the church. Ananias and Sapphira could have kept all the money for the land had they chosen. To make it appear that they had given all when they had not was to lie to the Spirit of God, the unseen Guide of the early church. The death penalty seems not to fit the crime, but such action could not go unchecked. When the deceit became known, it would have appeared that dishonesty was rewarded and the Spirit could be deceived. As it was, no one doubted that God would certainly expose and deal with hypocrisy and deceit. *NIV Study Bible*, pp. 1651-1652.

**4 Satan, demons.** The Bible refers to Satan as an angelic being who led a heavenly revolt against God and consequently was cast out of heaven with his rebelling host of angels (II Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:7-9). Under his leadership, these angelic beings became known as *demons*, and are very organized in their schemes and attacks on human beings (Ephesians 6:12). Satan and his forces work to get people to worship Satan (Luke 4:7) and to prevent individuals from turning to God (Luke 4:8). Satan's defeat is promised in Genesis 3:15 and completed at the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:15). He is still a force to be reckoned with until Christ returns to judge the earth (Matthew 16:27). James 4:7 instructs believers to resist the devil (or demonic forces) by continually willing God's leadership in their lives.

# **LESSON 6**

## **PERSECUTION CONTINUES**

### **Acts 5:17-42**

As a result of the apostles' miracle-working power and the growth of the Christian movement, the high priest and Sadducees<sup>1</sup> were filled with jealousy. They had the twelve apostles arrested to face trial before the Sanhedrin.<sup>2</sup>

Their plans were interrupted, however, when an angel of the Lord<sup>3</sup> released the apostles from jail in the middle of the night. The angel instructed them to resume teaching in the temple, so the twelve men did so at daybreak.

In the meantime, the Sanhedrin assembled, only to discover the need to locate their prisoners. Angry as they may have been, the court could not use force in this second arrest because of the apostles' popularity with the people. Finally, after gathering the church leaders again, the Sanhedrin trial began.

As the trial ensued, there was no mention of the unexplained escape from prison the night before. Instead the court went directly to the business of charging the apostles with (1) disobeying their earlier orders not to speak about Jesus, and for (2) blaming the Jewish leaders for Jesus' death.

With incredible boldness, Peter and the apostles answered the charges. They first declared that God's authority in their lives came before the Sanhedrin's. With that said, they went on to proclaim Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Jewish leaders had crucified, to be the risen Christ and Savior of Israel.

The response was predictable: the Sanhedrin was enraged and ready to kill the apostles. However, Gamaliel,<sup>4</sup> a respected Pharisee and teacher of the law, prevented the Sanhedrin from harming the apostles. After having the apostles sent from the room, Gamaliel advised that the court be cautious in their treatment of the church leaders. He reasoned that if the Christian movement *was not* of God, it would dwindle and die out as had other fanatical movements. But if it *was* of God, they would be powerless to stop its growth.

Persuaded by the speech of Gamaliel, the court strictly ordered the apostles not to speak of Jesus again, had them flogged and released them. The apostles left rejoicing to have suffered for Christ. Without hesitation, they continued to teach about Jesus in private homes and in the temple.

**Read Acts 5:17-26.**

1. Why were the twelve apostles arrested (5:17-18)?
2. What divine intervention took place (5:19-20)?
3. Describe the apostles' response to the instructions of the angel (5:21)?
4. What did the Sanhedrin discover (5:22-26)?

**Read Acts 5:27-42.**

5. Of what did the high priest accuse the apostles (5:28)?

6. a. What truths did Peter and the apostles declare in answer to the Sanhedrin's charges (5:29-32)?

b. What was the Sanhedrin's response (5:33)?

7. a. Summarize Gamaliel's advice to the Sanhedrin (5:34-39).

b. How did the Sanhedrin respond (5:40)?

8. What was the apostles' response to the persecution they had experienced (5:41-42)?

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### **Dealing With Jealousy**

Jealousy is listed among the greatest evils in the Bible. It is closely associated with envy, anger, greed and the desire to monopolize or control. It was jealousy that caused the Jewish leaders to crucify Jesus, and it was jealousy that brought persecution to the early church leaders.

Jealousy is often the real motive behind cruel actions that claim to be dealing with another's wrongdoing. For example, the high priest's jealous actions toward the apostles were disguised as pious dealing with the "criminal" actions of the apostles. The jealous person often becomes suspicious and imagines criticisms about the one of whom he is jealous. He then believes his imaginations and seeks to carry out punishment. The true problem is jealousy, which manifests itself in the desire to tear down the other person. While jealousy may not always surface so obviously, it may reveal itself quietly with a hidden delight over someone else's bad fortune.

When we are the recipient of jealousy, we often do not recognize this evil motive behind another's cruel actions. We may find that person distant and generally difficult to deal with, but we are not sure why. Their suspicion and hidden agendas seem to intend to hurt us, but the reasons behind such actions do not make sense. Knowing our own faults and weaknesses, we may never conceive of being the source of another person's jealousy. However, that person has their eye on a strength we possess, and wants to neutralize that strength. Because it is carefully disguised, jealousy is very difficult to confront and deal with honestly.

Devious, deceitful and very destructive, jealousy is indeed a monstrous emotion. For this reason, the Bible clearly warns us not to permit jealousy in our lives. It also gives some principles that can help us deal with jealousy when it comes our way from another. Let's take a look at what the Bible has to say about dealing with jealousy.

1. a. Even though the apostles had been supernaturally delivered from prison, the officials of the Sanhedrin refused to address this reality. Because of jealousy, what did the religious leaders miss?

b. What does this reveal about jealousy?

2. a. Why were the religious leaders jealous of Peter and the apostles (cf. Acts 5:12-16)?

b. What did their jealousy reveal about their character? What would a healthy response to the apostles have required?

3. a. What are some of the ways jealousy toward another can affect our lives?

b. How can we be hurt by the jealousy of another person?

4. a. What do the following verses reveal about jealousy?

Proverbs 27:4

James 3:14-16

b. What "company" does jealousy keep in the following?

Romans 13:13

c. Wherein lies the power to overcome jealousy according to Romans 13:14?

5. a. Jealousy is born out of pride, selfishness and greed. What answers for the problem of selfishness are found in the following?

Romans 12:10

Romans 12:16

b. Wherein lies the power to make these choices?

Romans 8:5-6

**Reference:** Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 8.

6. a. What prayers did the Psalmist pray that would allow God to help us identify and overcome hidden jealousy in our lives?

Psalm 119:29a, 36

b. What are the result of such choices?

Psalm 119:45

7. Why is jealousy directed toward us often difficult to detect?

8. When we know someone is jealous, what is the healthy response?

Romans 12:14

Romans 12:17-18

Romans 12:19

9. What constructive responses did the apostles practice in the face of jealousy?

Romans 12:11, 21

## **Summary**

10. What negative effects can jealousy have on your life?

11. a. Can you identify any jealousy in your life at this time?

b. What choices can you make to overcome jealousy?

12. What are healthy responses to the one who is jealous of you?

**Note:** The healthy attitudes referred to in this lesson are not natural. According to the Bible, only Christ, living His life through us in the power of the Holy Spirit, can enable us to practice these principles. For further help, see note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 8; also Building on the Basics, Lesson 2, "Power to Live By."

## LESSON 6 NOTES

**1 Reference:** Note 1, Sadducees, p. 27.

**2 Reference:** Note 2, *Sanhedrin*, p. 27.

**3 Angel of the Lord** (Acts 5:19; 7:30,38; 8:26; 12:7-10,23). "Angels are spiritual beings, created by God early in creation. Though we know only three by name--Michael, Gabriel and Satan--the Bible refers to numerous ranks and divisions. Satan is the leader of the company of evil angels while good angels are under the authority of God."

Angels, like human beings, have been created to serve their Creator. They have many duties: (a) to praise and worship God; (b) to bring messages from God to mankind; (c) to protect God's people; (d) to carry out God's will; and (e) to punish God's enemies, including Satan." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 1367. See also note 6, *angels*, p. 128.

**4 Gamaliel.** The most famous Jewish professor of the time, Gamaliel was respected and very popular with the Jewish people. Saul (Paul) was one of his students (Acts 22:3).

## **LESSON 7**

### **STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR**

#### **Acts 6:1-8:3**

At the time of the early church, Jerusalem was made up of two types of Jews. The Grecian, or Hellenistic, Jews spoke Greek and were originally from countries outside of Palestine. The Hebraic, or Palestinian, Jews spoke Hebrew or Aramaic, were native Palestinians and observed all the customs of Judaism.

We do not know how much time had gone by since the close of Acts chapter 5,<sup>1</sup> but the church had grown vastly. At this time, all the believers in Christ were Jewish, either Hebraic or Hellenistic. The Hellenistic Jews complained that their widows<sup>2</sup> were being neglected in the daily distribution of relief money. Overloaded with responsibility, the twelve apostles allowed the multitude of believers to elect seven godly men to assume administrative responsibilities. The Seven, as they were called (Acts 21:8), were named by the people and commissioned into service by the apostles. They all had Greek names and were probably Hellenistic believers.

One of the Seven, Stephen, became a powerful teacher, particularly among the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem. With signs and miracles, God confirmed Stephen's words about the Christian faith. However, when a certain group of non-believing Hellenistics called Freedmen<sup>3</sup> failed in their attempts to oppose Stephen, they caused an uprising of the people. Falsely accused, Stephen was seized and brought to trial before the Sanhedrin.<sup>4</sup> Stephen was charged with speaking against the temple, changing the law of Moses and blaspheming against God.

With "the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15), Stephen answered the court with the longest sermon recorded in the book of Acts. As he carefully traced the history of the Jewish faith from Abraham to Jesus, Stephen showed how the Jewish

people had always rebelled against God and the leaders God had given them. Stephen's main point is found in verse 51, "You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!" Stephen then charged the Sanhedrin with the rejection and slaying of Jesus Christ.

The furious court gnashed their teeth and covered their ears to avoid hearing any more of what they considered blasphemy. Rushing on him, the angry group dragged Stephen from the city to stone him. In the midst of the chaos, Stephen remained serene as he gazed heavenward at a vision of the risen Lord standing at the right hand of God. After praying that the Lord would receive his spirit and forgive the sins of his executors, Stephen died.

On the sidelines during the commotion was a young man named Saul, who held the witnesses' clothing and gave approval to the stoning of Stephen. Although vehemently opposed to Christianity at this point, Saul would soon take up where Stephen left off in proclaiming the gospel to Hellenistic Jews and Gentiles.

**Read Acts 6:1-7.**

1. a. Why did the apostles delegate the administrative responsibilities of the church (6:2,4)?

b. What were the qualifications of the leaders the congregation was to choose (6:3)?

c. What did the new organization in church leadership promote (6:7)?

**Read Acts 6:8-15.**

2. How was Stephen described (6:5,8)?

3. a. What motivated Stephen's opposition to conspire against him (6:9-10)?

**References:** Notes 3, *Freedmen*, p. 58, and Note 8, *Synagogue*, p. 59.

b. What characterized the assault against Stephen (6:9-14)?

**Reference:** Note 5, *the false accusations against Stephen*, p. 58.

4. a. How was Stephen described as he faced the Sanhedrin (6:15)?

b. Why do you think the Sanhedrin was unimpressed by Stephen's holy countenance? Compare John 3:19-21.

### **Read Acts 7:1-53.**

5. Stephen's speech was a clear summary of Jewish history.<sup>6</sup> From the time of Abraham to that of Christ, Stephen highlighted unfaithful Jewish leaders persecuting faithful ones. What actions of the Jewish people did Stephen highlight with regard to Joseph (7:9)?

Moses (7:35-36,39-41)?

**Reference:** Note 6, *Stephen's speech*, p. 59.

6. Of what perspective on the temple did Stephen remind the court (7:48-50)?

7. How did Stephen compare his accusers to unfaithful Jewish people of the past (7:51-53)?

**Reference:** Note 9, *Circumcision*, p. 59.

**Note:** *Angels* (7:53). The Jews of the time believed God had spoken to Moses through angels, although this is not how Exodus 3:2 records that the Lord appeared to Moses.

### **Read Acts 7:54-8:1a.**

8. What final proclamation by Stephen brought about his public execution for blasphemy (7:55-56)?

**Note:** *Son of Man* was a term Jesus used to refer to Himself. Daniel used this term to prophesy about the Messiah (Daniel 7:13-14).

9. How did Stephen die (7:57-60)?

10. Whom did Luke point out at the stoning of Stephen (7:58b, 8:1a)?

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### **Victory When You Cannot Win**

There are times when it seems one cannot win, and it was such a time for Stephen. Humiliated by his wisdom, Stephen's opposition was intent on his destruction, and the Sanhedrin was looking for a way to scatter the Christian movement and banish it from Jerusalem.

It is a common experience to face a no-win situation. It could have to do with a difficult job situation or lack of a job; financial disaster; marital, family or dating relationship problems that seem unresolvable; or health problems that are beyond our control. The common denominator in the no-win situation is that there is no way to avoid pain and loss; there is no acceptable solution, perhaps not even a preferable choice.

But the Bible gives us principles that can help win even in a no-win situation. In fact, for the believer, no situation is truly "no-win." Let's look at the principles and promises from the Word of God that assure ultimate victory, even in no-win situations.

1. How would you describe a "no-win" situation? Can you think of an example?

2. a. What would it have taken for Stephen to win the approval of the Sanhedrin and his accusers?

b. What might have happened if Stephen had made this choice?

c. What did Stephen choose instead?

3. a. What does God instruct us to do in the midst of a no-win situation?

I Peter 5:6-7

Deuteronomy 31:6

b. If we continually walk with God through a no-win situation, what does He promise?

Psalm 32:8, 10

Romans 8:28

Philippians 4:19

I Peter 5:10

4. If we are filled with the Spirit as Stephen was, what will be our Christian conduct, no matter what the situation?

I Corinthians 13:3,5

I Peter 3:9-11

I Corinthians 15:58

5. How can we grow from no-win situations?

Romans 5:3-5

6. a. All of us will eventually face death. Why was death not a threat to Stephen?

I John 5:11-12

John 11:25-26

b. According to these verses, how can we know power over death?

7. a. No matter what our circumstances, what does the Psalmist say cannot be taken from us as we walk through life with the Lord?

Psalm 73:24-26

b. What does God promise, regardless of the situation?

Jeremiah 29:11

## **Summary**

8. In your opinion, what made Stephen victorious in the no-win situation he faced?

9. Are you facing any no-win situations right now? What biblical principles and promises help you know victory?

## LESSON 7 NOTES

**1** *Time lapses in Acts.* "It is easy to assume that the first 12 chapters of Acts cover a span of only a few weeks, because the writer does not tell us when the various incidents took place. The episodes seem to follow each other naturally. But, in fact, from Acts 2 to the end of Acts 12, at least 15 years elapse." This time element is figured by Jesus' birth in 5 B.C. plus his lifetime of 33 years = death, resurrection and the beginning of the church in 29 A.D. The death of Agrippa I (King Herod) recorded in Acts 12:20-23 historically occurred in 44 A.D. There is an obvious lapse of 15 years between the beginning of Acts (29 A.D.) and the death of Agrippa (Herod) recorded in Acts 12 (44 A.D.).

The absence of Roman intervention in the illegal execution of Stephen might indicate that it occurred during the time Pilate was recalled by Tiberias Caesar in 36 A.D. This would place the events of Acts 6 and 7 about 6 to 7 years after Pentecost. Eddy Swieson, Bible Study Aid, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 68-69.

**2** *Widows* (6:1) were vulnerable because wage work was scarce and there were few legal rights for women at the time. Many of the Hellenistic widows who had moved to Jerusalem from other parts of the world did not have family to rely on and had to depend on the church's care rather than the synagogue when they became Christians.

**3** *Freedmen.* These were persons Rome had freed from slavery. They came from *Cyrene* in north Africa, *Alexandria* in Egypt, *Cilicia* in southeast Asia Minor near Syria, and *Asia*, a Roman province in western Asia Minor.

**4 Reference:** Note 2, *Sanhedrin*, p. 27.

**5** *The false accusations against Stephen* greatly resembled those against Christ (Matthew 26:61). Stephen declared worship of God was not confined to the temple (Acts 7:48-49) which gave his opposition opportunity to accuse him of attacking the temple, attacking the law of Moses and ultimately blaspheming God. In his teachings, Stephen may have referred to Jesus' words in John 2:19 which his opposition misinterpreted (Acts 6:14) to support their charges against Stephen, as at the trial of Jesus.

**6** *Stephen's speech on Jewish history.* Stephen's speech may be difficult for those who aren't fully versed in Israel's history and Jewish attitudes toward the Law and the Temple. In short, Stephen's speech highlighted a pattern of men rejecting the Deliverer whom God had chosen. He observed that the Jews were treating the manmade Temple like man-made idols (7:41,48).

Against the Jews' pride in Jerusalem, he stressed God's activity in Ur, Egypt, and the "holy ground" of Sinai. Against their pride in the Law, Stephen discussed the promises to Abraham that predated that Law by over five hundred years. He was accusing them of idolizing the temple, being proud of God's Word but disobeying it and boxing God into their traditions. It would have taken a great deal of humility and repentance for them to have responded to Stephen positively. Navpress Life Change Series, *Acts*, p. 84.

**7** *Laying on of hands* "was used in the Old Testament period to confer blessing (Genesis 48:13-20), to transfer guilt from sinner to sacrifice (Leviticus 1:4) and to commission a person for a new responsibility (Numbers 27:23). In the New Testament period, laying on of hands was observed in healing (Acts 28:8), blessing (Mark 10:16), ordaining or commissioning (Acts 6:6; 13:3) and imparting of spiritual gifts (Acts 8:17; 19:6)." NIV Study Bible, p. 1654.

**8** *Synagogue.* Ten or more adult Jewish men could form their own synagogue for study of the Scriptures and worship. People preferred to join with others of like background in relatively small groups; mass meetings were for the temple. There were about 400 synagogues in Jerusalem at the time of the early church, probably a handful of which were Freedmen.

**9** *Circumcision* was the cutting off of the foreskin, a practice which originated in various western Semitic cultures as a religious act. The Hebrew rite was instituted by God as a sign of the covenant between Him and Abraham. God commanded Abraham and all his household to be circumcised. The rite was required of every male Jew (descendant of Abraham) and any foreigner joining themselves to the Hebrew nation. This act assured the recipient of admittance to the fellowship of the covenant people and of a share in the promises of God to Israel. Circumcision metaphorically symbolized cutting away "pride and sinfulness of the heart" (Leviticus 26:41, Deuteronomy 10:16, Jeremiah 4:4, Acts 7:51). Marshall, p. 147. Because circumcision predated the Law or the Temple, the heart attitude behind this act was first and foremost true faith in God.

# **LESSON 8**

## **THE JOURNEYS OF PHILIP**

### **Acts 8**

Immediately after Stephen's death, great persecution of the church began. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem where the church went underground. Most of the other believers scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, sharing their faith as they went. Consequently, the church experienced growth in numbers and expansion in territory.

Philip, one of the Seven in the Jerusalem church, journeyed to Samaria where he became a powerful preacher of the gospel.<sup>1</sup> He was enabled by the Holy Spirit to perform miracles of healing and deliverance<sup>2</sup> in the name of Jesus Christ, and many Samaritans believed and followed Philip.

Previously, a man named Simon had dazzled the Samaritans with his sorcery and led many to believe he was a chief representative of God. When his followers became believers in Christ through Philip's ministry, Simon also claimed to accept Christ and began to follow Philip. He was amazed and intrigued by the miracles Philip was able to perform through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Upon hearing of the awakening in Samaria, Peter and John came from Jerusalem. When the apostles laid hands<sup>3</sup> on the new Samaritan<sup>4</sup> believers, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit<sup>5</sup> which the Jews had received at Pentecost. When Simon saw this, he tried to bribe the apostles to give him the power to impart the Holy Spirit. Simon's request clearly revealed the selfish motives of his heart, and Peter strongly rebuked him, exhorting Simon to repent and ask God's forgiveness.

After Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, an angel of the Lord<sup>6</sup> led Philip south about 50 miles on the road to Gaza. There the Spirit led him to the chariot of an Ethiopian eunuch, an official of the Queen of Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup> The eunuch was either a Jewish proselyte or a God-fearing Gentile<sup>8</sup> who had been to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. As Philip joined him, he was reading in the book of Isaiah (53:7,8), and welcomed Philip's help in understanding the prophecy. Philip explained that the prophet spoke of Jesus of Nazareth, a Person whom the Ethiopian no doubt had heard much about in Jerusalem. The Ethiopian eagerly accepted Jesus Christ, asked to be baptized, then went on his way rejoicing.

Immediately, the Spirit led Philip away to preach the good news in Azotus and various towns all the way to Caesarea. It was there the evangelist eventually made his home (cf. Acts 21:8).<sup>9</sup>

**Read Acts 8:1-8.**

1. What happened to the church when persecution erupted (8:1b,4)?

2. What drew the people of Samaria to Philip (8:5-8)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *evil spirits*, p. 42.

**Read Acts 8:9-25.**

3. Through his sorcery, how had Simon presented himself to the people (8:9-11)?

**Note:** In early Christian literature the 'sorcerer' (Simon Magus) is described as the arch-heretic of the church. *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1658.

4. a. What did Simon offer to buy from the apostles (8:18-19)?

b. How did Peter describe Simon (8:20-23)?

**Read Acts 8:26-40.**

5. After Peter and John left for Jerusalem, whom did Philip instantly obey (8:26, 29)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *angel of the Lord*, p. 50.

6. a. What means did God use to introduce the Ethiopian eunuch to Jesus Christ (Acts 8:26-35)?

b. What resulted from the eunuch's encounter with Christ (8:36-39)?

**BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

**Benefiting from Hardship**

Hardship can come in many forms. However, hardship in any form always involves change and loss which tend to depress the human spirit. For this reason, hardship often creates fear of the future and the additional pain it may hold. After a tragedy, it is especially hard to risk involvement with situations or relationships that could produce similar grief.

The tragedy of Stephen's death gave the early believers reason to fear the future, especially with regard to being associated with and living for Christ.

The seriousness of the situation was intensified by the fact that they had to move their families in order to survive the persecution. Yet the early Christians remained positive and courageous, sharing their faith wherever they went. The hardship they encountered with its changes and losses did not defeat them.

Wherein lies the power to "get up on the horse and ride again" when we have suffered the severe fall? Let's take a look at the biblical principles and perspectives that give power to resist the undertow of hardship and move forward in its benefits.

1. a. What hardships did the early Christians experience?

b. What are examples of hardships we encounter over the courses of our lives?

c. What is often our initial reaction when we face hardship? What negative affects can hardship have on our attitudes:

toward God?

toward others?

toward ourselves?

2. a. How would you describe the response of the early Christians to the hardship they faced?

b. What was the result of their response to hardship?

3. What did Jesus promise to those who would experience persecution for their faith in Him?

Matthew 5:11-12

Matthew 19:29

4. While God did not cause the persecution of the early church, we can be sure He used it in the lives of the early Christians. How does God use hardship to build our spiritual lives based on the following?

Hebrews 12:11

Psalm 119:67

I Peter 1:6-7

James 1:2-4

5. What can we know about God when we suffer hardship?

Psalm 34:18

Romans 8:38-39

6. What are we encouraged to do in order to reap benefits from hardship?

Joshua 1:9

Psalm 62:8

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Luke 6:47-48

7. What is important that we do with others who are experiencing hardship?

I Thessalonians 5:11,14

8. In spite of the trauma they experienced, what did God do for Stephen and the early believers? II Corinthians 2:14

## **Summary**

9. What truths does the Bible encourage you to embrace in times of hardship?

10. Are you facing hardship right now in your life? What can you expect as you move through hardship with God? How can you benefit from hardship?

11. Where is God when you are hurting?

## LESSON 8 NOTES

**1** *gospel* is an Old English word that means "good news." It translates the Greek word euangelion (eu-, "good" and angelion, "message"). The first four books of the New Testament--Matthew, Mark, Luke and John--are called Gospels. These books are documentaries of the words and deeds of Jesus Christ written by contemporaries. Gospel is also used to simply refer to the "good news" about Jesus Christ; that through Him, one can know God personally and inherit eternal life (John 3:16; 14:6).

**2** *Deliverance.* See note 2, *evil spirits, demons*, p. 42.

**3 Reference:** Note 7, *laying on of hands*, p. 59.

**4** *Samaritans...received the gift of the Holy Spirit.* The reason the Samaritans did not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when they accepted Christ as did the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2) was to unify them with the Jewish believers. Samaritans were half Jew, half Gentile and had their own rival worship system. Orthodox Jews considered Samaritans "unclean" and did not associate with them. When the laying on of hands by the apostles (Jewish believers) brought the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Samaritans became united with Jewish believers. In this way the Spirit broke down the barriers between Samaritan Christians and Jewish believers, unifying the infant church as it grew to include Samaria. Charles C. Ryrie, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 52.

**5 References:** Notes 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 8.

**6 Reference:** Note 3, *angel of the Lord*, p. 50.

**7** *Ethiopia* at this time was all of Africa south of Egypt.

**8 Reference:** Note 1, *God-fearing*, and Note 2, *Gentile*, p. 82.

**9** *Jesus had told the disciples* their witness would be to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Because of the persecution in Jerusalem, the gospel spread to Judea and Samaria. With Philip's faithful witness, the gospel began to reach the ends of the earth.

# **LESSON 9**

## **SAUL'S CONVERSION**

### **Acts 9:1-31**

While the church grew and spread throughout Judea and Samaria, a zealous young Pharisee named Saul continued to pose a deadly threat to the believers. He went to great lengths to capture, imprison and even put to death (cf. Acts 22:4; 26:10) the followers of Christ. But, in an incredible encounter with the risen Lord, Saul was converted to the faith he had bitterly opposed. As he neared Damascus with plans to capture Christians there for trial in Jerusalem, he was halted and blinded by heavenly light and the voice of God. Falling on his face, Saul asked who spoke. The answer: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

From this moment on, the zeal of this young Pharisee would be channeled into obedience and service to Jesus Christ. The Lord led a disciple named Ananias to minister to Saul as a new believer, restoring his sight and baptizing him. After several days with the believers in Damascus, Saul, also known as Paul (Acts 13:9),<sup>1</sup> began to preach Christ in the synagogues where people were astonished at his conversion.

At this point, as he later states in Galatians 1:17-18, Paul spent three years in Arabia, perhaps reorienting his faith to match his Damascus Road experience. When he returned to preach in Damascus again, he was more powerful than ever, and the Jews plotted to kill him. To save his life, some of the disciples let him down over the city wall in a basket during the night. From there, Saul went to Jerusalem.

Initially, the believers in Jerusalem were afraid of Saul, but a man named Barnabas testified on his behalf and helped Saul to be accepted. For fifteen days (cf. Galatians 1:18), Saul witnessed primarily to the Hellenistic Jews in

Jerusalem (whom he had previously helped to plot Stephen's death). Because of his effectiveness, Saul's life became the target of yet another deadly conspiracy. Fellow believers helped him escape to Caesarea, from which he sailed for his hometown of Tarsus. It is believed Paul spent about ten years there before Barnabas invited him to help with the ministry at Antioch.

**Read Acts 9:1-19a.**

1. What showed the intensity of Saul's hostility toward the Christians (9:1-2; see also 8:3)?

2. How did Jesus change Saul's direction (9:3-9)?

3. a. What did the Lord instruct Ananias to do (9:10-12)?

b. Why did Ananias question the Lord's instructions (9:13-14)?

c. In reply, what did Jesus declare about Saul (9:15-16)?

4. How did Ananias minister to Saul in his Christian infancy (9:17-19)?

**Read Acts 9:19b-31.**

5. a. What did Paul do immediately after his conversion (9:20)?

b. What resulted (9:21-25)?

**Note:** *after many days* (9:23) referred to three years Saul spent in Arabia (Galatians 1:17-18), probably reorienting his theology to Christianity.

6. a. How was Saul received by the believers in Jerusalem (9:26-27)?

b. Again, what did Saul do (9:28-29a)?

**Reference:** *Grecian or Hellenistic Jews*, Lesson 7, paragraph 1, p. 53.

c. What resulted from Saul's witness for Christ (9:29b-30)?

7. What was the state of the church at this time (9:31)?

**Note:** *fear of the Lord* (9:31) means "reverent trust" in the Lord.

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### Facing Big Mistakes

Sometimes it is hard to face ourselves and God with the big mistakes of the past. We tend to avoid even thinking about times when our actions were shameful, and we fear God is more upset about them than we are. Consequently, we "stuff" our guilt and shame, continually trying to hide the failures from ourselves and God.

As Saul sat for three days in blinded silence, he was faced with the fact that he had brought about the death of innocent believers in Jesus Christ, the living Lord. His Damascus Road experience dramatically revealed the fact that he had been fighting against God and His faithful servants. Surely, he could still see the faces of Stephen and other Christians martyrs who died for their faith.

But the Lord had chosen the apostle Paul<sup>1</sup> to impact the world for Christ unlike anyone else who has ever lived. He led the evangelistic ministry to the Gentile peoples. His letters to various churches, which make up much of the New Testament, have discipled believers around the world over the last two-thousand years...all because Paul moved beyond the shame to know forgiveness and freedom from his sin.

While we do not want to remember big mistakes, God wants to face them with us and move us beyond the shame and guilt we prefer to bury. Rather than living in guilt and feeling we could never be used of God, the Lord wants to use our negative experience to make us stronger servants of Him and others. In this lesson, we will take a look at the power that can emerge from practicing biblical principles in dealing with big, as well as small, mistakes.

1. What big mistakes did Saul have to face during his days of blindness  
(cf. Acts 8:1a,3; 9:5; 22:4; 26:10)?

2. While his sin must have grieved him deeply, what did Paul know about God from Old Testament Scriptures?

Isaiah 43:25

Daniel 9:9

Isaiah 1:18

3. a. What did Paul know about sin and God's forgiveness of sin from the Old Testament Scriptures?

Isaiah 59:2

Leviticus 17:11

**Note:** *atonement* refers to payment for sin.

Hebrews 9:22b

b. What did Isaiah 53:3-6 prophesy about the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ?

4. a. What did Paul declare as he began preaching Christ?

Romans 5:8

Ephesians 1:7

**Note:** *redemption* refers to being bought out of slavery to sin.

b. What is the one thing Paul explained we must do in order to be declared righteous before God?

Romans 1:17, 3:22-24

5. The Bible says that it is always the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ that procures our forgiveness from sin. In order to experience this forgiveness, what must we continually do?

II Chronicles 7:14

I John 1:7, 9

Matthew 6:14

6. Sometimes we find it hard to forgive ourselves. After receiving God's forgiveness in Christ, what did Paul determine to do with his life?

Philippians 3:12-14

II Corinthians 5:20-21

## **Summary**

7. a. Are there any situations you have never taken before God to receive His forgiveness?

b. Perhaps you would want to take a moment to do that now.

8. To begin to experience God's forgiveness, you may want to get alone, take a sheet of paper and write out past sins that come to mind. After completing the list, thank God for His forgiveness through the blood sacrifice of His Son. Write I John 1:7, 9 and Isaiah 1:18 over the list and destroy it.

## **LESSON 9 NOTES**

**1** *Paul or Saul.* The apostle Paul's Hebrew name was Saul. He referred to himself as Paul in his ministry to the Gentile world (Acts 13:9). As a Jewish Roman citizen who grew up in Tarsus, Paul most likely bore both the names Paul and Saul from youth.

*Note: Because of the reading involved in this lesson, it may take a little longer to complete.*

## LESSON 10

### PETER GOES TO GENTILES

#### Acts 9:32-11:18

After the believers scattered, Peter traveled about Palestine visiting the various churches. In Lydda, God enabled Peter to heal a man paralyzed for eight years. In Joppa, his prayers brought a much-loved believer named Dorcas back to life. As the word spread about these miracles, many placed their faith in Jesus, and Peter stayed in Joppa for an extended time.

Luke's narrative moves thirty miles north to the Caesarean home of a Roman centurion named Cornelius. Commander of a hundred men in the Italian band of the Roman army, Cornelius was a generous and God-fearing Gentile.<sup>1-2</sup> During prayer one afternoon, Cornelius had a vision of an angel<sup>3</sup> of God who instructed him to send for a man named Simon Peter in Joppa.

As Cornelius' men began the journey to fetch Peter, the Lord began to prepare Peter to accept his mission to the Gentile home of Cornelius. He gave Peter a vision of a sheet descending from heaven, full of animals considered unclean to the Jew (Leviticus 11). Along with this vision, the voice of the Lord instructed Peter not to call unclean that which God had cleansed. The sheet descended and Peter heard the Lord's command three times; then the vision ended. As Peter pondered the meaning of the vision, the Holy Spirit instructed him to go with Cornelius' men who were now at the door.

The next day, Peter arrived in Caecarea to find Cornelius waiting with relatives and friends. As the godly centurion told Peter about the angel's

appearance to him, Peter understood the meaning of his own vision: faith in Christ would cleanse Jew and Gentile alike from sin.

Peter began to tell his audience about Jesus Christ when the Holy Spirit filled those who were accepting the message. As they began to speak in tongues and praise God, no doubt was left in the Jewish believers present that these Gentiles had received salvation<sup>4</sup> through faith in Jesus. With this, the new believers were baptized.<sup>5</sup>

When the word spread that Peter had shared Christ with uncircumcised<sup>6</sup> Gentiles, he was highly criticized. The church until this time was made up only of believing Jews who still considered Gentiles unclean. But when Peter told the whole story to the other apostles and Christians in Jerusalem, they had no further questions. Praising God, they rejoiced that He would grant salvation through faith in Jesus to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

### **Read Acts 9:32-42.**

1. What miracles did God bring about through Peter in Lydda and Joppa and what resulted (9:32-34, 36-37, 40-42)?

### **Read Acts 10:1-7.**

2. a. Describe Cornelius (10:1-2).

**Reference:** Note 1, *God-fearing*, p. 82.

- b. What was Cornelius' response to the angel's instructions (10:3-8)?

### **Read Acts 10:9-23.**

3. a. The Lord knew His command to eat animals declared unclean by Jewish law (Leviticus 11) would be repulsive to Peter. Interaction with Gentiles would be just as wrong to the apostle. What did the Lord declare (10:15)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *Gentiles*, p. 82.

b. How would God cleanse the Gentiles from sin as He had the Jews (I John 1:7); see also note 5, *Salvation*, p. 35.

4. a. How did the Holy Spirit further prepare Peter to minister to Gentiles (10:19-20)?

b. What was the first step Peter took toward accepting Gentiles (10:23)?

### **Read Acts 10:24-48.**

5. Because Peter was God's messenger, Cornelius fell in reverence at the apostles feet. How did Peter quickly respond (10:26)?

6. Soon Peter found himself in the midst of many Gentiles. What was his declaration (10:28)?

7. After repeating the story of his encounter with the angel, what did Cornelius explain they were gathered to hear (10:33)?

8. What great truth about God's character did Peter first proclaim (10:34-35)?

9. What main points stand out to you from Peter's clear presentation of the gospel (10:36-43)?

10. a. Before Peter finished speaking, what happened (10:44,46)?

b. How did Peter respond (10:47-48)?

**Read Acts 11:1-18.**

11. After Peter gave the complete account of what had taken place with Cornelius, how did the Jewish believers in Jerusalem respond (11:18)?

**Reference:** Note 7, *brothers*, p. 82.

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### The Power of a Teachable Spirit

Sometimes we are blinded to new truth because we are cemented into old ways of thinking. Because we are finite and God is infinite, we can only hope to understand part of His infinite mind as He unfolds truth to us over time. We need to be humble and teachable at all times in order to continue to grow in our understanding about ourselves and God.

Peter was open to God's new revelation, even though it went against a lifetime of learning. As a result, this leader of the early church opened the doors of evangelism to the Gentile world.

The Christian life is not meant to be stagnant, rather a dynamic, abundant learning experience. If we are open to God's truth, there is no end to the Christian growth process. In this lesson, we will look at the powerful results of developing and maintaining a teachable spirit before God.

1. a. Why might we tend to stop learning? What does learning require?

b. While God's plan to reach the Gentiles would not have been thwarted, what would Peter or Cornelius have missed had they been unteachable?

2. a. Not all new ideas are true. It is important that new spiritual understanding be in line with the Word of God. What do the following verses say about this?

Psalm 119:160

Proverbs 30:5-6

b. According to Acts 17:11, what did people do when they received the new truth about Jesus Christ?

c. How did the new truth Peter received about going to the Gentiles line up with Scripture?

Isaiah 42:6-7 (prophecy about Christ)

Genesis 12:3b

**Reference:** Note 3, *Abrahamic covenant*, p. 27.

3. What does the Bible encourage us to do continually in order to grow in truth?

James 1:21-22

Proverbs 1:5

4. What are the results of a teachable heart before God?

Proverbs 2:1-7

Ephesians 1:17-19a (Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers)

5. What can happen if we cease to maintain a teachable heart before God?

Proverbs 15:12

6. Without a teachable spirit toward God, what happens to a society?

Romans 1:21

Romans 1:28-32

7. a. According to this parable of Jesus, what works against a teachable heart?

Luke 8:11-14

b. How is the teachable heart described by Jesus in Luke 8:15?

c. What gives us this heart according to Ezekiel 36:26-27?

Romans 8:5-6?

## **Summary**

8. What part does the Word of God play in helping us discern truth in the spiritual realm?

9. What are the dangers of feeling you have learned everything spiritually?

10. a. Have you ever experienced spiritual blindness because you lacked a teachable heart before God? What are the benefits of maintaining a humble teachable heart toward God?

b. What is your prayer today?

## **LESSON 10 NOTES**

**1** *God-fearing* (10:2). "The term used of one who was not a full Jewish proselyte but who believed in one God and respected the moral and ethical teachings of the Jews." *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1662.

**2** *Gentile* or non-Jew. Gentile nations were people that were not descendants of Abraham. God had set apart the nation of Israel to carry the knowledge of Him to the world (Genesis 12:1-3). Although this nation was to be a means by which Gentiles could become believers in the one true God through circumcision, Jews were strictly ordered not to intermarry with non-Jewish people. By the time of Christ, many Jewish leaders looked at Gentiles as unclean, thus the thought of God's blessing on them was despicable. Peter's reaction to the non-kosher foods (Acts 10:9-16) depicted the Jews current feeling toward the Gentiles. Peter's statement in Acts 10:28 declared the law of the day regarding Jews and Gentiles.

**3 Reference:** Note 3, *Angel of the Lord*, p. 50.

**4 Reference:** Note 5, *Salvation*, p. 35, Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 8.

**5 Reference:** Note 8, *baptism*, p. 19.

**6 Uncircumcised** (11:3). "The Gentiles who would not observe the laws of clean and unclean food and would violate Jewish regulations concerning food preparation." *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1666. See also Note 9, *circumcision*, p. 59.

**7 brothers** (11:1). "At times 'brothers' is used to refer to those of common Jewish lineage (2:29; 7:2), but in Christian contexts it denotes those united in Christ (6:3; 10:23b)." *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1666.

# **LESSON 11**

## **HERODIAN PERSECUTION**

### **Acts 11:19-12:25**

The persecution that broke out after the martyrdom of Stephen scattered believers as far as Phoenicia (where Tyre and Sidon are located), Antioch and Cyprus. Wherever they went, they told others about Christ, and the church grew rapidly. In Antioch, some believers from Cyprus and Cyrene began to share the gospel message with Greek Gentiles, and a great number accepted Christ.

When news of the conversion of many Gentiles in Antioch reached the church leaders in Jerusalem, they sent one of their best men, Barnabas, to investigate the new church. Finding a great movement of God there, Barnabas brought Paul from Tarsus to help in the ministry. Together, Barnabas and Paul taught the large congregation for a year as it continually grew in numbers.

With the prophecy<sup>1</sup> that there would be famine in the Roman Empire, the believers at Antioch collected money for the believers in Jerusalem and sent their gift by way of Barnabas and Paul.

Meanwhile in Jerusalem, King Herod<sup>2</sup> had begun to oppress the Christians. He arrested some and beheaded the apostle John's brother, James. When he saw the delight of the Jews at his actions, Herod also arrested and imprisoned Peter to be tried publicly after the Passover.

However, during the night before Peter's trial, an angel of the Lord<sup>3</sup> arrived to release Peter. Somehow the four guards on duty were made oblivious to what was happening as Peter's chains fell off and the angel guided him through the prison gates to the street. Peter thought he was seeing a vision

until the angel left him in the street, at which time the apostle realized that the Lord had brought about his escape. Peter went straight to Mary's home<sup>4</sup> where many believers had gathered to pray. They were, of course, astonished to see Peter and hear his story. He stayed a short time, then left for a secure place of hiding. The next day, Herod searched unsuccessfully for Peter and had the guards who had been in charge put to death.

The king had decided to settle for awhile in Jerusalem when the people of Phoenicia sought public audience with him. They needed his support and flattered him by acclaiming his divinity. He accepted the compliment, so an angel of the Lord struck him to the ground where he was eaten by worms.<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime, the church continued to grow in numbers as the believers shared their faith in Christ everywhere they went.<sup>6</sup>

### **Read Acts 11:19-30.**

1. Locate Antioch, Cyprus and Phoenicia (Tyre and Sidon) on the map at the front of the book. How did the people in these cities come to know Jesus Christ (11:19)?

2. How did great numbers of Greek Gentiles in Antioch become Christians (11:20-21)?

3. a. The church leaders in Jerusalem were prepared for the movement among Gentiles because of Peter's experience with Cornelius (11:18). How did they help the new church at Antioch (11:22-24)?

b. How did Barnabas further accommodate the needs of the huge church in Antioch (11:25-26)?

**Reference:** Note 7, *Christians*, p. 90.

- c. Why did the believers at Antioch send help to those in Jerusalem (11:27-30)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Prophecy*, p. 90.

**Read Acts 12:1-19a.**

4. a. Who began to persecute the Christians, and what did he do (12:1-4)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *King Herod*, p. 90.

- b. How did Peter escape (12:5-11)?

**Reference:** Note 6, *angels*, p. 128.

5. The believers at Mary's home were gathered to pray. What happened in answer to their prayers for Peter (12:12-17)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *Mary's home*, p. 90.

**Read Acts 12:19b-25.**

6. How did Herod die (12:21-23)?

**Reference:** Note 5, *eaten by worms*, p. 90.

7. How were the believers encouraged in their faith (12:24)?

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### When the Doors Shut

As chief leader of the early Christians, Peter found himself locked in prison, chained between two guards and awaiting public trial before Jews who yearned for his death. There was nothing humanly possible that could be done to save Peter. Even so, God was not ready for Peter's death and supernaturally intervened. All at once, Peter was free, Jesus Christ was again glorified by the miracle, and the believers were encouraged to keep praying about their needs!

We all face times in our lives when we see doors of freedom or opportunity shut before us. Even though we cannot see beyond the closed door, the Bible promises that God will *always* lead the way forward for those who trust Him. As we contemplate the miraculous deliverance of Peter, let's observe some biblical principles related to trusting God when the doors shut.

1. Try to imagine being in Peter's place in prison. Why do you think he was sleeping peacefully before his trial the next day?

2. Peter's deliverance was a picture of how God frees each one who puts faith in His Son. How does Isaiah 42:6-7, a prophecy about Christ, depict what Jesus does when we accept Him?

3. What can the Lord do when doors seem to be shut to our need? What do these verses suggest?

Isaiah 42:16

Isaiah 45:2-3

4. What are we encouraged to do in order to receive God's provision and guidance?

Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah 41:10

Isaiah 43:18-19

5. Of what can we be assured in the face of the shut doors in our lives?

Jeremiah 29:11

Psalm 84:11

**Note:** *blameless* does not mean perfect, rather forgiven in Christ.

Romans 8:28

6. What prevents people from finding God's better way when faced with shut doors?

Acts 28:27

Ephesians 4:18

7. What constructive choices does the Bible instruct us to make when we face disappointments?

Philippians 2:14

Proverbs 3:5-6

Psalm 27:14

## **Summary**

8. What, if any, doors seem to be shut before you at this time in your life?

9. What do you see in Peter's experience that encourages you in your own?

10. What is the constructive way to face the shut doors?

11. What can you know about God amidst your situation?

## **LESSON 11 NOTES**

**1** *Prophecy* is given by God through prophets in both Old and New Testaments who "preach, exhort, explain or, as in this case, foretell." *NIV*

*Study Bible*, p. 1667. The prophecy given by Agabus (Acts 11:28) was actually fulfilled during the reign of Claudius (41-54 A.D.) when shortages abounded continually.

**2 King Herod** (Acts 12) or *Agrippa I* was the nephew of Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist (Matthew 14:3-12) and tried Jesus. Agrippa I was also the grandson of Herod the Great, a ruthless man who murdered his wife, three sons, many relatives and numbers of others, including the babies in Bethlehem at Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:16). The King Herod in Acts, also known as Agrippa I, ruled over Samaria, Judea and some other territories until his death in 44 A.D. recorded in Acts 12.

**3 Reference:** Note 6, *angel of the Lord*, p. 50.

**4 Mary's home** (12:12). This Mary was John Mark's mother and Barnabas' aunt (Mark and Barnabas were cousins--Colossians 4:10). Apparently her home was a gathering place for Christians. It may have been the location of the upper room where the Last Supper was held (Mark 14:13-15; Acts 1:13) and the place of prayer in Acts 4:31." *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1667. Mary's son, John Mark, wrote the Gospel of Mark and accompanied Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey.

**5 eaten by worms** (Acts 12:23). "A miserable death associated with Herod's acceptance of acclaim to be divine, but may also be seen as divine retribution for his persecution of the church." *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1669.

**6 Progress reports on the growth of the church:** Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20.

**7 Christians** (Acts 11:26). Latin for "those of the party of Christ," as "Herodians" means "those of the party of Herod" (Matthew 22:16). To the Jews, "Christ" was a sacred title--the Messiah--so they would never have used it in a nickname. The Gentile Antiochenes probably thought *Christos* was someone's name. "Christians" seems to have been what outsiders called the group; they called themselves "believers," "brethren," "those of the Way," or "disciples." "Christian" rarely occurs in the New Testament, and only in a possible context of ridicule (Acts 26:28, I Peter 4:16). I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 203, Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in the Book of Acts*, p. 99.

## **PART II**

### ***ANTIOCH TO ROME***

In His last words, Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would enable them to be witnesses for Him in Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). In the first twelve chapter of the book of Acts, Luke's primary focus is on the ministry of Peter to the Jews in Judea and Samaria. He concludes this part of his account with the phenomenon of the new Gentile church in Antioch.

In chapters 13-28 of Acts, Luke turns his focus to the spread of Christianity to "the ends of the earth." In this portion of his record, Luke concentrates on the ministry of Paul and the expansion of the church to the Gentiles. The author carefully records the travels of Paul as he preached about Jesus Christ in the cities of Phrygia, Galatia and Europe, and finally in Rome, the most powerful city of the first century world.

## **LESSON 12**

### **PAUL & BARNABAS IN ASIA**

#### **Acts 13**

Antioch was the third greatest city in the Roman Empire, ranking after Rome and Alexandria. When Christians from the island of Cyprus began telling the Greeks in Antioch about Jesus Christ, a spiritual awakening occurred (Acts 11:20-26). As a result, a large, predominantly Gentile, church formed.

It was from this important Roman city and this congregation that Paul embarked on three missionary journeys across the Roman Empire. The first occurred after Paul had been teaching in the Antiochene church for more than a year. At that time, the Holy Spirit directed the church leaders to send Barnabas and Paul to spread the gospel in unreached territories. As they began the first trip, Barnabas' cousin, John Mark, went with them as a helper.

Setting out from the Antiochene harbor of Seleucia, Barnabas and Paul traveled to:

Cyprus (Salamis and Paphos) Acts 13:4-12  
Pamphylia (Perga) Acts 13:13  
Pisidia (Antioch) Acts 13:14  
Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (of Lycaonia) 14:1-7; 20-21  
Attalia (port of Pamphylia) Acts 14:25

In Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas began proclaiming Christ in Salamis. They traveled nearly 100 miles across the island to Paphos, the headquarters for the Roman rule on Cyprus. There, Sergius Paulus, the chief Roman official, wanted to hear the apostles' message from God, so he sent for them. But the proconsul's attendant, a Jewish sorcerer named Elymas, tried to discourage Sergius from believing the apostles' words. Paul told Elymas that his heart was evil and he would be stricken blind for a time. Immediately Elymas could not see. The miracle firmly established Sergius' faith in Christ.

Paul, Barnabas and John Mark traveled on to Perga, the capital of the coastal province of Pamphylia in Asia Minor. From there, John Mark went home to Jerusalem while Paul and Barnabas went north to Antioch in the province of Pisidia. Speaking in a synagogue on the Sabbath, Paul outlined the recent events concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and declared forgiveness of sins for all who would place their faith in Him.

The response to Paul and Barnabas' message was positive; the people invited them to speak again the following Sabbath. On that day, almost all the people in Pisidian Antioch came out to hear the apostles speak. When the Jews saw the crowds, they became jealous of the apostles and began to speak against their message. Paul and Barnabas met the opposition boldly, declaring that Jew and Gentile alike who put faith in Jesus Christ would receive eternal life.

Many Gentiles became believers, and a Christian movement spread throughout the region. However, the Jewish opposition managed to turn politically powerful men and women against Paul and Barnabas, and they were banned from the district. Paul and Barnabas moved on to Iconium in central Galatia, leaving behind many joyful new believers in Jesus Christ.

### **Read Acts 13:1-12.**

1. How did the church leaders in Antioch come to commission Barnabas and Paul for their missionary journey (13:2-3)?

**Note:** *the Holy Spirit said...* (13:2). The Holy Spirit probably communicated through those who were prophets. *the work to which I have called...* (13:2). Paul had been commissioned to evangelize the Gentiles at his conversion (9:15; 22:21).

**References:** Note 1, *fasting*, Note 3, *prophecy*, p. 100, Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 8.

2. a. Locate Salamis and Paphos in Cyprus on the map at the front of the book. Also locate Perga in Pamphylia and Antioch in Pisidia. What happened as Paul and Barnabas preached throughout the island of Cyprus (13:6-7)?

- b. What did Elymas the sorcerer do (13:8)?

3. Summarize how Paul dealt with Elymas and helped establish Sergius Paulus' faith in Jesus Christ (13:9-12)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *Satan*, p. 42.

### **Read Acts 13:13-43.**

4. When Paul visited a new city, he always preached in the synagogue first. There, an audience of God-fearing Jews and Gentiles who knew the Old Testament Scriptures could readily hear Paul's message about Christ.

In Acts 13:16-41, we see an example of a typical initial.. sermon by Paul. After giving a summary of Old Testament Jewish history through David's reign (13:17-22):

- (1) Paul declared that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's well-known covenant with David (13:23).<sup>2</sup>
- (2) Then Paul referred to a recognized contemporary Jewish prophet, John the Baptist, who declared that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah (13:25; John 1:29-30,34).
- (3) After this, Paul focused on the current events concerning Jesus: his suffering, death and resurrection which had all been predicted in the Old Testament Messianic prophecy (13:26-37).
- (4) Finally, Paul warned his audience that prophecy also spoke of those who would scoff at the truth about which he spoke, and perish (13:40-41; Habakkuk 1:5). Paul entreated them to believe in Jesus, the Messiah..

At the end of his sermon, what good news did the apostle declare (13:38-39)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *Justified*, p. 100.

5. How did the audience in Pisidian Antioch respond to the message of Paul and Barnabas (13:42-43)?

**Read Acts 13:44-52.**

6. a. When so many Gentiles showed up on the following Sabbath, what caused the Jews to begin opposing Paul's message?

**Note:** *Jews were filled with jealousy* (13:45). The Jews were not jealous of Paul's popularity, but of their superiority as God's chosen people. As long as they perceived Paul's message was for them only, the Jews were receptive. However, when they realized the evangelistic message about forgiveness of sin and God's blessing through Jesus Christ included Gentiles, they became jealous.

b. The Isaiah prophecy Paul and Barnabas quoted (13:47) predicted that the Messiah would bring salvation to all people (cf. Luke 2:32; Isaiah 49:6). How did the Gentiles respond (13:48)?

**Reference:** Note 5, *all who were appointed*, p. 100.

7. Unfortunately, the Jews incited politically powerful people in Pisidian Antioch to expel Paul and Barnabas from the region. But whom did the apostles leave behind (13:52)?

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### Dealing With Life's Uncertainties

Paul and Barnabas were a great team. Paul was a gifted teacher and evangelist, and Barnabas, a gifted encourager. Together they embarked on a mission trip only God could make successful. The two men went on foot into cities they knew nothing about, to people they had never met, with a story only the Holy Spirit could confirm in individual hearts. Apart from God's supernatural working, Paul and Barnabas would appear to the Jews and Gentiles with whom they spoke as fanatical fools. Not only this, but they also needed protection from illness, accident, robbery, and persecution as they traveled about Asia Minor preaching Christ.

It is hard to imagine how the apostles handled the numerous uncertainties they faced. However, we are challenged with just as many unknowns daily in the fast-paced culture in which we live. Adding the continual changes of a high-tech age to the already constant changes of life can be overwhelming. Often, we may find it impossible to do more than narrowly survive the pressure to keep up.

Just as Paul and Barnabas depended on the supernatural provision and protection of God as they worked the first missionary journey, so can we as we face the overload of pressures we encounter today. God's supernatural provisions are not just for those in special service, but for each of us as we face the anxieties and unknowns of life where we are. Let's make some observations about power to deal with the uncertainties we face, whatever they might be.

1. a. What fears and anxieties could Paul and Barnabas have been obsessed with as they traveled?

b. How are those fears and anxieties like ones we face today?

2. a. Where do people tend to put their trust in facing the overwhelming pressures of life?

b. What do these verses suggest?

Proverbs 11:28

Proverbs 28:26

Psalm 146:3

c. Why is such trust often disappointing?

3. The Bible instructs us to trust God with every pressure we face. Such trust does not produce an irresponsible attitude, but requires a conscious decision to accept God's leadership based on an understanding of who He is. Why can we trust God according to these verses?

Romans 8:32

Hebrews 13:5b

Lamentations 3:22-23

4. What benefits of trusting the Lord's leadership are suggested in Psalm 23?

5. When we trust God with the challenges and responsibilities that would overload us, how does He promise to meet our specific needs?

a. When we feel inadequate: II Corinthians 9:8

b. When we are fearful: Isaiah 41:13

c. When we need courage: II Timothy 1:7

d. When we need stability: Psalm 40:1-3

e. When we are anxious: Matthew 6:25-34

f. When we need peace: John 14:27

g. When we are discouraged or weary: Matthew 11:28-30

h. When we are confused/need direction: James 1:5

6. After inviting Christ to come into our lives, we must continually talk to Him about the pressures of our lives. As we make a decision to do this, thanking Him for His protection and provision for our needs, what is the result according to Isaiah 26:3-4?

## **Summary**

7. a. How did trusting God for supernatural help free up Paul and Barnabas?

b. What difference can trusting God make as we deal with the pressures that load us down today?

8. a. Trust is a choice. In what area(s) would you like to declare your trust in the Lord today?

b. What does Psalm 22:5 promise?

## LESSON 12 NOTES

**1** *fasting* (13:2). Fasting, the refraining from food for a period of time, had several purposes biblically. In Old Testament times, it was used in rituals, in mourning, in showing sorrow for sin or in demonstrating devotion to God in times of national need. In the Old and New Testament, fasting is used to aid personal prayer and meditation and in seeking God's guidance in making important decisions.

**2** *Davidic covenant*. God's promise to King David, found in II Samuel 7, was to provide Israel with the leadership they needed through David and his family after him. David's dynasty lasted only 400 years, but God's promise to Israel was "forever" (II Samuel 7:16). After the fall of the dynasty in 587 B.C., the promise that a king from David's lineage would fulfill God's purposes for Israel was never abrogated, and so held out hope in hard times as they looked forward to the Messiah (see Amos 9:11). David's descendant long after the fall of his dynasty was Jesus Christ, the Messiah and anointed King, whose reign knows no end. It is no coincidence that the New Testament emphasized that Jesus was "the son of David" (Matthew 1:1; Acts 13:22-23), particularly when speaking to the Jew. Those Jewish people who have not recognized Jesus as Messiah are still expecting a Messianic King from the line of David who will bring security to Israel.

**3** *Prophecy*, the gift. "A communication of the mind of God imparted to a believer by the Holy Spirit. It may be a prediction or an indication of the will of God in a given situation." NIVSB, p. 1750. See also Note 1, *Prophecy*, p. 90.

**4** *Justified* (13:39). As a legal term, *justified* means acquitted of guilt. In Romans 3:21-24, Paul defines justification as God's free gift of righteousness and restored relationship with Him that results from His forgiveness of sins. This justification is given to all who put faith in Jesus Christ.

**5** *all who were appointed*... (Acts 13:48). The Bible says that eternal life is given to those who respond to God's invitation to receive Christ (John 1:12; Revelation 22:17). It also states that because of man's sinful nature, no one would come to faith in God apart from His help (Romans 3:10-12). It teaches that God chooses to give faith to some (Ephesians 1:4-5), those He "elects." Some theologians emphasize God choosing the *elect* in eternity past while others see election as God knowing beforehand who would believe in Christ. For many, the issue of man's freedom to accept or reject Christ and that of God electing believers is a complete mystery.

This author appreciates the following depiction: when believers in Christ enter heaven, if they were to walk through an archway, one side might read, "Come! Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17). After walking through that archway, one would look back to read the words on the other side: "Chosen before the foundations of the earth."

The certainty we can have is this: (1) no one who chooses to accept God's Son, Jesus Christ, will be denied salvation, and (2) no one will be prevented by God from making that decision.

**6** *Jews were filled with jealousy* (13:45), repeat of note under Question 10 above. The Jews were not jealous of Paul's popularity, but of their superiority as God's chosen people. As long as they perceived Paul's message was for them only, the Jews were receptive. However, when they realized the evangelistic message about forgiveness of sin and God's blessing through Jesus Christ included Gentiles, they became jealous.

# **LESSON 13**

## **MORE PAUL AND BARNABAS**

### **Acts 14**

After leaving Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas moved on to Iconium, where Paul spoke so effectively that a great many people, both Jew and Gentile, accepted Jesus Christ. However, unbelieving Jews began to slander Paul and Barnabas, and the whole city took sides either for or against the apostles. Paul and Barnabas discovered a plot to stone them and fled to the Galatian cities of Lystra and Derbe.

In Lystra, Paul healed a man lame from birth, and the people decided Paul and Barnabas were the Greek gods Hermes and Zeus paying a visit to their city. The local priest of Zeus and a crowd brought bulls to sacrifice to the apostles, who were shocked at the people's response. Even though Paul and Barnabas tried to help them understand about the one true God, the crowd remained confused.

About this time, Jewish opposition from Antioch and Iconium came to further upset the apostles' mission. They turned the crowd against Paul and Barnabas and convinced the people to stone Paul. Thinking they had killed him, they dragged Paul out of the city. When believers in Christ gathered around him, Paul got up and went back into Lystra. He and Barnabas left for Derbe the next day.

In Derbe, many people believed in Jesus Christ as Paul and Barnabas faithfully proclaimed the good news. The apostles then retraced their steps through Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, encouraging the new Christians and appointing leadership in their churches. Afterwards, Paul and Barnabas sailed back to Antioch in Syria, where they reported to their commissioning church how God had worked mightily among the Gentiles.

**Read Acts 14:1-7.**

1. What was the initial response to Paul's preaching in Iconium (14:1)?

2. a. What problem arose in Iconium, and how did Paul and Barnabas respond (14:2-3)?

b. Why did Paul and Barnabas finally leave the city (14:4-7)?

**Read Acts 14:8-20.**

3. a. What brought about the healing of the crippled man in Lystra (14:8-10)?

b. How did the Lycaonians respond (14:11-13)?

4. When Paul and Barnabas realized the people had mistaken them to be their pagan gods, what did they try to do (14:14-18)?

5. What led to Paul's and Barnabas' departure from Lystra (14:19-20)?

## **Read Acts 14:21-28.**

6. What encouraging events took place in Derbe (14:21a)?

7. What did Paul and Barnabas do before returning to Antioch in Syria (14:21b-23,24)?

8. On this first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas had endured the unexpected. They had dealt with a Jewish sorcerer (13:8f), watched young Mark decide to go home, faced bitter opposition from the Jews, and been honored as Zeus and Hermes. Even worse, Paul was almost stoned to death. Certainly these stories were told, but on what did the apostles concentrate as they reported to the Antiochene church (14:27)?

### *Highlights of the journey:*

Cyprus: The Roman proconsul received Christ (13:12).

Pisidian Antioch: Great response among Gentiles (13:48-49,52).

Iconium: Many Jews and Gentiles believed (14:1).

Lystra: Lame man healed (14:8-10).

Derbe: Many new disciples (14:21).

Lystra, Iconium, Antioch: churches organized (14:23).

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### In Times of Rejection

Paul was a man who had been successful before his conversion. He described himself as a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:6): and was a Pharisee<sup>1</sup> of high standing among the Jewish people. As he followed the Lord's will for him to reach Gentile people with the gospel, however, Paul would be viciously rejected by fellow Jews. While many Jews believed the message of Christ, many others would turn against Paul, finally costing him imprisonment in Rome (Acts 21:27-26:32).

We may experience rejection for our faith in Christ or for our belief in biblical principles that do not make sense to the non-believing world. Or we may be rejected by family and associates for any number of reasons. Rejection is always painful, and it is very important that we respond to that pain correctly.

Obviously, Paul responded correctly, because the rejection he experienced did not hinder his course. Let's look at some of the New Testament writings of Paul as well as other Scriptures to find healthy ways to respond to rejection.

1. What are common sources of rejection?
  
  
  
  
  
2. What are some unhealthy ways people respond to rejection?

3. a. As vividly seen in the teen world, conformity in spite of convictions is a common way of avoiding rejection. How can trying to please people in order to avoid rejection sometimes be unhealthy and even dangerous?

b. What do the following suggest about a conformity that is certain to be healthy and constructive in the end?

Romans 12:2

Psalm 119:24

Psalm 119:32

Psalm 119:137-138

4. a. Another response to rejection is hatred. Why are hatred and bitterness unhealthy?

b. What does Paul teach in Romans 12:14,17-19 about the healthy response to the one who wrongs us?

5. Forgiveness toward one who is rejecting us is a difficult response. To forgive means we have to absorb the pain of another's actions. Paul did this by focusing on how Jesus Christ forgave his sins, absorbing the pain of those sins on the cross. As he reminded himself of the forgiveness of Christ toward him, Paul could forgive others. How does Paul state these truths in his letter to the Colossians?

Colossians 2:13-14

Colossians 3:12-13

6. What did Jesus teach us to do when we have been rejected because we have wronged another person?

Matthew 5:23-24

7. What other healthy and unhealthy responses to rejection are suggested in the following?

Proverbs 15:1

Proverbs 22:24-25

Proverbs 29:11

8. While these responses are difficult, what does the Bible promise will result when we resist wicked ways to choose God's ways?

Psalm 1:1-3

Psalm 119:45

9. a. It is unnatural to respond in the biblical way to the pain of rejection. Where is the power source of healthy choices?

Galatians 5:22,23,25

b. What was the tough-natured apostle Paul able to do through the power of the Holy Spirit?

I Corinthians 4:12-13a

**References:** Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 8, and *Building on the Basics*, Lesson 2, *Power to Live By*, p. 15.

## **Summary**

10. What unhealthy responses are you prone to make in response to rejection?
  
11. a. What healthy choices can you make as the Holy Spirit gives you the power?  
  
b. What will result?

## **LESSON 13 NOTES**

**1 Reference:** *Pharisees, Judaizers*, p. 117.

## **LESSON 14**

### **JERUSALEM COUNCIL**

#### **Acts 15**

On the heels of Paul and Barnabas' exciting journey, a serious problem arose in the church at Antioch. Pharisee<sup>1</sup> believers from Judea came to Antioch and began to teach the Christians that Gentiles had to convert to Judaism and be circumcised<sup>2</sup> before they could be saved by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul and Barnabas had seen many Gentiles become Christians without first becoming circumcised Jews, and the church at Antioch was full of such believers. Consequently, Paul and Barnabas disagreed sharply with the visiting teachers. To resolve the issue, the church sent them to Jerusalem to get the counsel of the apostles and elders there.

As the council met in Jerusalem over the dispute, Peter spoke first. He recalled his experience with Gentile converts who had received the Holy Spirit without first converting to Judaism (Acts 10,11). Peter stated his conviction: salvation<sup>3</sup> for Jew and Gentile alike is a free God-given gift received by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul and Barnabas followed the testimony of Peter as they told the apostles and elders about all God had done among the Gentiles in Cyprus and Asia Minor. Paul and Barnabas also attested to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Gentiles who had received Jesus Christ but never been circumcised.

With this, James, the half-brother of the Lord and leader in the Jerusalem church, proposed a solution to the Jew and Gentile dilemma.<sup>4</sup> James suggested that they not make it difficult for the Gentiles whom God was obviously adding to the family of believers. He proposed that a letter be written to the Antiochenes (1) confirming the fact that salvation came by

faith in Christ apart from Jewish laws and (2) stating certain guidelines needed to be followed in order for Jews and Gentiles to fellowship comfortably together. While Gentile believers were not required to be circumcised and observe all the Mosaic laws, they were asked to abstain from practices that particularly repulsed the Jew. These included sexual immorality, eating meat that had been offered to idols, and eating meat prepared with its blood.

All agreed to James' plan, and the letter was written. The apostles, elders and entire church at Jerusalem chose two of their leaders, Judas and Silas, to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch. There, the Jerusalem letter brought clarity and great encouragement to the Gentile Christians.

### **Read Acts 15:1-21.**

1. a. What were the Jews who came from Judea teaching the Antiochenes (15:1)?

b. What happened after Paul and Barnabas disagreed sharply with the visiting teachers (15:2)?

2. How were Paul and Barnabas received by the Phoenician, Samaritan and Jerusalem believers (15:3-4)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Apostles*, p. 8.

3. Upon what did the Pharisaic Jewish believers insist (15:5)?

4. a. What did Peter state about God's work among the Gentiles (15:7-9)?

b. In light of this, what did Peter declare (15:10-11)?

**Note:** *Grace* (15:11) refers to God's unmerited favor, or **God's Riches At Christ's Expense** (*Ephesians 2:8-9*).

5. What additional evidence did Paul and Barnabas present to confirm that salvation had come to the Gentiles apart from Jewish Law (15:12)?

6. a. Who resolved the issue, and what main point did he bring to light (15:13, 19)?

**Note:** James was the half brother of Jesus and a leader in the Jerusalem church. The apostle James, brother of John, had been put to death by Herod (12:1-2).

b. What did James suggest be done to help facilitate the new relationship between Jew and Gentile believers (15:20)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *Jew and Gentile dilemma*, p. 117.

## **Read Acts 15:22-35.**

7. a. Who carried the Jerusalem council's letter to Antioch (15:22)?
  
- b. How did the Gentile believers in Antioch respond to the guidelines they received (15:31)?

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Resolving Disagreement**

The church was only 20 years old when the first major doctrinal disagreement arose. The Jerusalem Council's resolution to the conflict made clear for Jew and Gentile that salvation is an unearned gift from God. Faith in Jesus Christ, not "works" or one's ability to follow a list of rules, was established as the basis for being made right with God. The decisions of the council allowed Gentile believers to grow in grace and Jewish believers to be respected for their moral convictions. The outcome: Jew and Gentile could fellowship together freely; the "dividing wall" between Jew and Gentile was brought down (cf. Ephesians 2:11-18). Godly men practiced godly principles and brought resolution to a difficult conflict.

Life is full of disagreements between individuals, groups and nations. How we handle disagreement can have long-term effects that we may not foresee at the moment of conflict. Wrongly handled disagreements have caused, among other things, scarred or broken marriage and family relationships, dissolved friendships, church splits, civil wars and world wars. The underlying problem lies in the fact that we are *not* prone to handle disagreements wisely. In order to avoid the pitfalls of unconstructive actions, it is essential that we know and practice godly principles in dealing with conflict of opinion. Let's take a look at some biblical concepts that apply to resolving disagreement.

1. a. What are some of our natural negative reactions toward those who disagree with us? with whom we disagree?
- b. What would happen if we followed our natural inclinations toward people we disagree with? What if those who disagree with us followed theirs? What negative results can come from natural responses to conflict of opinion?

2. While rarely our natural inclination, practicing biblical principles in response to disagreement brings about the best results. What do the following verses suggest with regard to resolving conflict of opinion?

Ephesians 4:15

Proverbs 10:19;13:3

Proverbs 18:13; Ecclesiastes 3:7

Proverbs 12:15

3. What do the following suggest about avoiding quarrels?

Proverbs 17:14; 20:3

Proverbs 18:19

Proverbs 15:1

Proverbs 14:29

4. If a quarrel is unavoidable, what choices can help us avoid destructive results?

Psalm 141:3

Luke 6:31

Philippians 2:4

Ephesians 4:29

Ephesians 4:31-32

5. When it comes to standing up for the godly way, what guidelines are given in I Corinthians 16:13-14?

## **Summary**

6. Practicing biblical principles in times of disagreement requires supernatural help. In the moment of reaction, we must ask the Holy Spirit to empower us to make godly choices.

What do you feel are the most important biblical principles to follow in times of disagreement?

7. a. Is there a disagreement you are encountering in your life today with a person or group of people?

b. What principles from this lesson stand out to you as you contemplate this disagreement? What would be your prayer for yourself as you face this difference?

## LESSON 14 NOTES

**1 Pharisee, Judaizer.** The name *Pharisee* means "separated ones." This was a Jewish legalistic and separatist group who strictly, but often hypocritically, kept the law of Moses and the unwritten "tradition of the elders." They numbered about 6,000 in Palestine, about one percent of the population. Pharisees, although nowhere appointed by God, were respected by people as the "unofficial religious leaders." They were teachers in the synagogues, religious examples in the eyes of the people and self-appointed guardians of the Old Testament law and its proper observance. Their "interpretation" of the laws, handed down as traditions for generations, was regarded by them to be as authoritative as the Scripture itself.

Some Pharisees became Christians and brought their Judaic beliefs with them. These posed a great problem in Antioch and with other early predominantly Gentile churches as they sought to make Gentile converts be circumcised and keep Mosaic law. While the apostle Paul had been a Pharisee before his conversion, his greatest difficulties in his mission to Gentiles would be with these *Judaizers*.

**2 Reference:** Note 9, *circumcision*, p. 59.

**3 Reference:** Note 4, *Salvation*, p. 35.

**4 Jew and Gentile dilemma.** The Jews were raised to keep laws of holiness given by God through Moses (Leviticus 17-18). Even though many accepted Jesus as the Christ, the rules of their religious teachings had been ingrained in them since birth, especially laws regarding circumcision, sexual immorality and dietary laws which defined certain foods as unclean.

Disregard for these Jewish laws was repulsive to the orthodox Jew and prevented their fellowship with Gentiles who practiced them.

The question facing the Jerusalem council was twofold: (1) Did God require all Christians (Jew and Gentile) to follow Jewish laws? and (2) If not, should Gentile Christians follow Jewish laws anyway in order to have fellowship with Jewish believers? The former question had to do with hindrance to Gentile believers, the latter with hindrance to Jewish. After reviewing the facts given by Peter, Paul and Barnabas regarding the obvious salvation of Gentile peoples apart from circumcision, the council, led by James, established that salvation was by faith apart from the Law of Moses (cf. Acts 15:8-11; Romans 3:28, Ephesians 2:8,9). However, they agreed that in order to promote fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers, the Gentile Christians should abstain from practices particularly repulsive to the Jews. These included sexual immorality and the eating of meat offered to idols or prepared in its blood.

Even after the council at Jerusalem, however, some Jewish believers still could not see salvation apart from circumcision and keeping Mosaic law. These became known as Judaizers and were a great hindrance to Paul in his ministry to the Gentiles. See Note 1 above.

**5** *Grace* (15:11) refers to God's unmerited favor, or:

God's

Riches

At

Christ's

Expense (Ephesians 2:8-9).

# **LESSON 15**

## **JOURNEY OF PAUL AND SILAS**

### **Acts 15:36-16:40**

Paul and Barnabas decided to take a second missionary journey to see how the churches in Asia Minor were faring. A sharp disagreement arose, however, when Barnabas wanted to take his cousin, John Mark. Paul felt this was unwise because Mark had deserted<sup>1</sup> them on their first journey (13:13). Unable to resolve their difference, Barnabas took Mark and left for Cyprus, while Paul and Silas went by land to the Galatian cities previously evangelized.

In Lystra, Paul and Silas were impressed with an outstanding young disciple named Timothy who was invited to join them in their travels. On their visits to the various churches, Paul and Silas always shared the letter written by the Jerusalem Council to Gentile believers (cf. Acts 15:23-29). The letter provided the Galatian believers with guidelines and a sense of belonging to the larger body of Christians everywhere. The visits from Paul, Silas and Timothy were a great encouragement to the churches, causing their faith and numbers to grow.

After completing their work with established congregations, Paul and his men were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to travel north to Mysia or south to Asia. Then, Paul had a vision in the night of a man from Macedonia pleading for help. Through this vision, the Holy Spirit directed them to the continent of Europe. Immediately, they sailed from Troas to Neapolis and traveled by land to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of Macedonia.

In Philippi, there was no synagogue, which indicated less than ten male Jews in the city. On the Sabbath, Paul and his men went to the river where a group of God-fearing women met to pray. There, Lydia, a business-woman from nearby Thyatira, became the first European believer. She led her entire household to faith in Jesus Christ and provided a place for Paul and his men to stay.

Paul and Silas continued to witness about Christ in Philippi, and many other people believed. A troublesome problem arose, however, when a slave girl, possessed by a demon who allowed her to make money for her masters through fortunetelling, began to follow Paul and Silas. For days, she cried out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Annoyed by this negative source of publicity, Paul cast the demon<sup>2</sup> out of the girl, which infuriated her owners. They seized Paul and Silas, dragged them to the Roman authorities and accused them of promoting treasonous actions among the Philippians. The entire marketplace crowd began to attack the missionaries.

After being beaten and bound in stocks in prison, Paul and Silas found comfort in the night by singing hymns and praising God. All at once, an earthquake opened the prison gates and released the prisoners' bands. The prison keeper was about to commit suicide<sup>3</sup> when Paul stopped him, calling out that the prisoners were still there. The man, obviously convicted by the testimony of the missionaries and the events of the night, begged Paul and Silas to tell him how he could be saved. That night, the prison keeper took Paul and Silas to his home, where he and all his household believed and were baptized.

When the magistrates sent word the next day to release Paul and Silas, Paul declared that he and Silas were Roman citizens. The authorities were shocked, because it was not lawful for a Roman citizen to be beaten and imprisoned without trial as Paul and Silas had been. Chagrined and apologetic, the magistrates came to personally escort Paul and Silas out of the jail.

After paying an encouraging visit to Lydia and the believers, the missionaries left the city of Philippi.

**Read Acts 15:36-41.**

1. What did Paul and Barnabas decide to do (15:36)?
  
2. What resulted from the sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark (15:37-41)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Mark's desertion*, p. 127.

**Read 16:1-10.**

3. a. Who was Timothy (16:1; I Timothy 1:2-4; II Timothy 1:4-5)?
  
- b. What did Paul do to make Timothy an effective missionary to the Jews (16:3)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *Timothy's circumcision*, p. 128.

4. What were the results of the visits Paul, Silas and Timothy paid to the churches (16:5)?

5. When the Holy Spirit stopped the missionaries from going to Asia or Mysia, what caused them to go to Macedonia (16:6-10)?

**Read Acts 16:11-15.**

6. a. Locate Philippi in Macedonia on the map at the beginning of the book. Also locate Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth and Ephesus. These were the major new cities Paul reached on his second missionary journey.

b. Describe Philippi (16:12).

c. Describe the small beginning of the church in Europe (16:13-15)?

**Read Acts 16:16-40.**

7. How did Paul deal with the slave girl (16:18)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *demons*, p. 42.

8. a. Of what did the slave girl's owners accuse Paul and Silas (16:20-21)?

**Reference:** Note 5, *Customs unlawful*, p. 128.

b. What happened as a result of the slave owners' actions (16:22-24)?

9. Bleeding and bruised from the floggings, what did Paul and Silas do in the prison (16:25)?

10. a. What amazing event brought the prison keeper to a point of suicide (16:26-27)?

b. What happened to the prison keeper instead (16:28-34)?

11. What did Paul demand of the magistrates (16:35-39)?

12. What did Paul and Silas do before leaving Philippi (16:40)?

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### Maintaining Faith in Hard Times

Paul and Silas had been faithfully serving the Lord when they were dragged before the authorities, falsely accused, publicly stripped and severely beaten. In a bruised and bloody condition, they were fastened in stocks on the cold floor of a prison cell. At this point, one would not expect them to be praising God.

But they were! In the midst of a terrible turn of events, praising God elevated Paul and Silas to a positive frame of mind, turned their own circumstances to good, brought about the salvation of the prison keeper and his family, and encouraged the new believers in Philippi!

There is indeed power in praising the Lord in the midst of the most difficult of circumstances. Regardless of what we feel emotionally, praising God can bring the decided victory of faith. In this lesson, we will take a closer look at how to maintain faith during hard times and the power that comes from praising God.

1. a. What would have been the expected response of Paul and Silas to the injustice they endured?

b. If they had focused on these types of feelings, how might it have negatively affected the outcome of their situation?

2. a. When we go through a hard time, it is natural to have doubts about God's faithfulness. If we begin to believe in our *doubts*, however, what can happen?

b. Of what did the Psalmist remind himself in the midst of doubts?

Psalm 27:13-14

Psalm 42:11

3. Paul later wrote the Philippians from imprisonment in Rome while awaiting a possible death sentence. Briefly list his instructions for responding to times of difficulty.

Philippians 4:4-8

4. What are we to do in times of suffering according to I Peter 5:6-7?

5 a. Who seeks to hurt us, especially during times of suffering (I Peter 5:8b)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *Satan*, p. 42.

b. How can we protect ourselves from harm (I Peter 5:8a, 9)?

6. a. *Praise* is a broad term for words which exalt and honor God. Some of the Hebrew and Greek words synonymous with praise in the Bible are translated as *thanksgiving, blessing* and *glory*. The Psalms, especially 113-118 and 145-150, are full of praise to God. They express thanks to God and acknowledge His divine attributes such as faithfulness, compassion and goodness.

Most importantly, praise is a way of expressing our faith in God, especially when we feel fearful, confused or hopeless. For what can we praise God according to the following?

Lamentation 3:22-23

Zephaniah 3:17

b. What gifts can we thank God for that cannot be taken from us?

Psalm 103:17 (also Romans 8:38-39)

Titus 3:5

John 10:27-28

7. If we maintain faith in hard times, what does God promise?

Exodus 14:14

Psalm 34:7

**Reference:** Note 6, *angels*, p. 128.

## Summary

8. Why do you think worship is beneficial to the human spirit?
9. How can praise change a person's circumstances?
10. What does it mean to praise the Lord?
11. What difference can praising God make as you face the challenges in your life today?

## LESSON 15 NOTES

**1** *Mark's desertion* (15:37). "We don't know why Mark left the team in Pamphylia (13:13), nor why Paul thought his desertion was so serious. We do know that Mark was blessed to have such a cousin as the Son of Encouragement (Barnabas), for after some years evangelizing with Barnabas, Mark proved himself a worthy saint. He worked with Peter in Rome and wrote his Gospel [Mark] from Peter's memories (I Peter 5:13); he helped Paul during the apostle's first imprisonment in Rome (Colossians

4:10, Philemon 24); he eventually impressed Paul so much that he asked Mark to come during his final days in prison (2 Timothy 4:11)." *Acts, Life Change Series*, NavPress, p. 133.

**2 Reference:** Notes 2, *evil spirits, demons*, p. 42.

**3** A prison keeper who allowed his prisoners to escape was usually executed (example: Acts 12:19).

**4** *Timothy's circumcision* (16:3). Although he was raised Jewish by his mother, Timothy's Greek father probably did not allow him to be circumcised. This would cause Jews to discriminate against him, which would hinder his attempts to minister among them with Paul.

Paul's focus was not on the practice or non-practice of Jewish laws. He cared only to do what would bring Jew and Gentile to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. See also note 1, *Pharisee, Judaizer* and note 5, *grace*, p. 118.

**5** *Customs unlawful* (16:21), *the Roman view of Christianity*. "The Romans were officially not supposed to practice foreign cults, although in practice they might do this so long as these did not offend against Roman customs. The principle was clearly a flexible one which could be invoked as necessary." The real issue for the slave girl's owners was economic loss, but they appealed to the authorities' prejudice against Judaism, an "un-Roman" superstition. The Romans viewed Christianity as one of the dozen Jewish sects of the time. Claudius had just expelled all Jews from Rome (18:2), showing the scorn for Jews at this time. Marshall, *Acts*, p. 270.

**6 Angels** (Psalm 34:7). See also note 3, *Angel of the Lord*, p. 50.

According to the Bible, angels surround us continually. They are created immortal beings who serve God and believers. An angel is physically powerful; for example, one angel effortlessly moved the huge stone from the tomb of Jesus, a stone three men would struggle to displace. An angel closed the mouth of the lion in Daniel 6:22. Angels are usually invisible to our eyes, but they can become visible (ex.: Genesis 16:7; Numbers 22:23; Luke 1:28). When angels do appear, they are usually glorious and stunningly beautiful so as to cause amazement in those who witness their presence (Luke 1:11; Matthew 28:2-3; Daniel 10:6; Revelation 10:1). II Corinthians 11:14 states that Satan can make himself appear as an angel of God. "Whether visible or invisible, however, God causes his angels to go before us, to be with us, and to follow after us. All of this can be fully understood only by believers who know that angelic presences are in control of the battlefield about us, so that we may stand (Isaiah 26:3) with complete confidence in the midst of the fight." Billy Graham, *Angels, God's Secret Agents*, p. 45.

# LESSON 16

## ATHENS AND CORINTH

### Acts 17:1-18:17

Leaving Luke in Philippi, Paul, Silas and Timothy traveled along the Egnatian Way about 100 miles to Thessalonica, the capital city of Macedonia. It had a population of over 200,000, which included a colony of Jews and a synagogue.

Paul preached for three sabbaths in the synagogue of Thessalonica, reasoning from the Scriptures that the Messiah, or Christ, was prophesied to suffer and die, then be resurrected from the dead.<sup>1</sup> It was rumored that one named Jesus had risen from the dead at Jerusalem, and Paul explained that this Jesus was the promised Messiah.<sup>2</sup> As a result, some Jews, a large number of God-fearing Gentiles and many prominent women put their faith in Jesus Christ.

However, the Jews of the city became jealous. They gathered some "bad characters" from the marketplace and staged a riot before the city and its officials. Unable to find Paul and Silas, the Jews dragged Jason and some other believers before the authorities, who made them post bond and let them go. That night, under cover of darkness, Paul and Silas left for Berea.

In Berea, many Jews and God-fearing Gentiles believed Paul's message as they searched the Scriptures daily to discern the truth about Christ. A number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men also became Christians. However, the Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea to create mob violence against Paul and Silas. Believers escorted Paul to Athens while Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea.

In Athens, Paul noticed the city was full of gold, silver and stone idols to every conceivable pagan god. The Athenians even had a structure *To An Unknown God* in case they had omitted one. In the synagogue and marketplace, Paul began reasoning daily from the Scriptures about Christ with anyone who would talk with him. Finally, some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers took Paul to the meeting of the Areopagus where Greek officials met to govern the religious and moral innovations of the culture. There, Paul declared that he knew about the Unknown God they worshipped. Paul described the Creator and sustainer of all things who would one day judge all people. He bid the Athenians to repent of sin, turn to God and believe in the resurrected Christ.

With mention of the resurrection of Jesus, Paul lost credibility with most of his audience at the Areopagus. Some sneered at Paul, but others asked Paul to tell them more. As a result, a few Athenians, including a member of the Areopagus, became followers of Jesus Christ.

From Athens, Paul went on to Corinth<sup>3</sup> where he met a couple named Aquila and Priscilla who, like Paul, were tentmakers by profession. They were Jews who had moved to Corinth when Claudius ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul worked with them on weekdays and spoke in the synagogue each sabbath.

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, however, Paul began full-time preaching and teaching. The Jews began to oppose and abuse Paul, so he began ministering only to Gentiles, working out of the home of Titus Justus. The synagogue ruler, Crispus, and his whole household believed in the Lord Jesus, as well as many other Corinthians.

The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision one night, instructing him to continue speaking in Corinth without fear because there were many who would believe there. Accordingly, Paul stayed one and a half years in the city. Once during this time, the Jews took Paul to court before the proconsul Gallio who refused to judge a case regarding Jewish law. The Greeks then took hold of Sosthenes,<sup>4</sup> the synagogue leader, and beat him, but Gallio<sup>5</sup> simply ignored the commotion.

## **Read Acts 17:1-15.**

1. a. Paul began by showing the Thessalonians Old Testament prophecy about the suffering, death and resurrection of the Messiah, thus proving Jesus of Nazareth to be the Christ. What was the result (17:4)?
- b. How did Paul later describe those who became Christians in Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 1:6-10)?

2. a. Of what did the unbelieving Jews accuse Paul and the disciples (17:6-7)?

**Reference:** Note 6, *Jews were filled with jealousy*, p. 101, and note 5, *customs unlawful, the Roman view of Christianity*, p. 128.

- b. What resulted (17:8-10a)?
3. a. How did the Bereans receive the message of Paul and Silas (17:10b-12)?

- b. When Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea to stir up trouble, what was Paul compelled to do (17:14-15)?

**Read Acts 17:16-34.**

4. a. What was unique about Athens (17:16)?
- b. To whom did Paul speak about Jesus and the resurrection (17:17-18)?
5. At the Areopagus, how did Paul, a Jew, bridge the cultural gap between him and the Athenian pagan worshipers (17:22-23, 28b)?

**Note:** The Areopagus was a court that considered themselves the custodians of religious, cultural and educational matters in Athens. They heard Paul as a promoter of a new religion.

6. a. What truths about God did Paul initially declare to the Athenians (17:24-25)?
- b. Contrary to the contemporary Epicurean thought that all is by "Chance," what did Paul proclaim about the "unknown" God (17:26-28)?

7. Of what did Paul warn the Athenians (17:29-31)?

8. What was the result of Paul's testimony (17:32-34)?

**Read Acts 18:1-17.**

9. a. How did Paul support himself as he preached from Sabbath to Sabbath in the Corinthian synagogue (18:1-4)?

b. How did this change when Silas and Timothy came (18:5)?

**Note:** Silas and Timothy may have brought a monetary gift to Paul from the Philippians, allowing him to preach and teach full-time.

10. In the face of Corinthian Jewish abuse, Paul declared that he would begin preaching Christ only to the Gentiles (18:6-7). Even so, what happened (18:8)?

11. a. How did the Lord motivate Paul to continue his ministry in Corinth (18:9-11)?

b. How was the Lord's promise of Paul's safety fulfilled when the Jews took Paul before the Roman court (18:12-17)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *Sosthenes*, and Note 5, Gallio, p. 139

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### Facing the Enemies of Faith I

Sorcery and occult practices were common in the time of the early church, even among Jews (Acts 8:11; 13:6; 19:17-19). This was especially true in cities such as Philippi, Corinth and Ephesus where idolatry was very much a part of everyday life. This idolatry allowed Satan to get evil footholds in those cultures. For this reason, demon possession and other occult practices were commonplace in the first century. Magical practices intrigued the masses more than faith in the one true God. The problems produced by this intrigue made exorcism a significant part of the miracles of Jesus Christ and of the ministry of the apostles in the early church..

The Bible from beginning to end reiterates the fact that idolatry brings ruin to a society. The worship of created things--whatever they might be, leads to increased temptation, encouragement to sin and fascination with occult practices. In such an environment, the "spiritual warfare" waged against the believer is heightened.

What is spiritual warfare, and how can we, as the apostle Paul and early Christians, be victorious in the battle waged against our faith? While the subject is uncomfortable for some, it is one which we need to be knowledgeable about as we seek to have *Power to Live By*. As we continue our study, let's make some observations about how to be victorious as we face the enemies of our faith.

1. *Spiritual warfare* might simply be defined as the never-ending battle over our relationship with God. The Bible identifies three main forces that come against our faith: the *world*, or worldly perspectives, our own sinful nature or *flesh*, and *Satan*. We will look at these one at a time, the first two this lesson and the latter in Lesson 17.

a. What does the *world* lead us to believe will make us happy?

b. What are some ways in which the thinking in our society can pull us away from faith in Christ?

2. a. How do the following define worldly thinking?

Ephesians 4:17-19

I John 2:16

b. The Bible states that God wants us to enjoy the blessings of life (I Timothy 6:17b). What do you think it means to "love the world" (I John 2:15), and why is this a hindrance to a close relationship with God?

3. a. What principles are given in the following verses regarding worldly possessions, whether they be material goods, power or prestige?

I Timothy 6:17-19

b. What did Jesus tell us about God's provision for our needs?

Matthew 6:31-33

4. In his letters, what helps for resisting deceptive worldly thinking did Paul suggest?

Ephesians 4:22-24

Ephesians 5:8-11

Ephesians 5:17-18

Romans 12:2

5. The second area of spiritual warfare is with our own sinful nature, or the *flesh*. How is this battle described in Galatians 5:17?

James 1:13-15

**Note:** the word "death" biblically refers to *spiritual separation from God or wrong existence* (existence apart from God's plan for mankind).

6. What are we instructed to do in order to win the battles with our flesh, or sinful nature?

II Timothy 2:22

James 5:16

Galatians 5:16, 22-23,25

**Reference:** Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 8.

7. The external forces of worldly thinking and the internal force of a sinful nature, will *never* stop challenging our faith in God. However, what does the Bible promise those who persevere in the battle against these enemies of faith?

II Corinthians 2:14

## **Summary**

8. How would you define the two areas of spiritual warfare studied in this lesson?

9. Have you identified specific areas of battle for you under these categories?

10. What principles are most important to you as you seek victory in these areas of spiritual warfare over your relationship with God?

## LESSON 16 NOTES

**1** Prophecies of the Old Testament that showed the Messiah as a suffering servant who would redeem us from sin are found on the chart on p. 10. The main Old Testament prophecy on this subject is Isaiah 53.

**2 Reference:** *Messiah, Christ*, p. 8.

**3** Corinth had a population of 250,000 free persons and 400,000 slaves which included Roman colonists, Greeks, Jews, Syrians and other nationalities. The city was located one and a half miles from the narrow isthmus joining central Greece with the Peloponnesus. Sea cargoes were hauled overland across the strategic four-mile strip to avoid the hazardous 200--mile trip around Cape Malea to the South.

The vices of lust and material gain plagued the city of Corinth. Its existence as a hub for traders, tourists and business travelers fostered materialism. The entrenched cult of Aphrodite, a fertility goddess of Syrian origin known as the goddess of love (lust), fostered extreme sexual immorality. The temple of Aphrodite housed more than a thousand "male and female slaves dedicated to holy prostitution for men of whatever taste." The "voluptuous and vicious forms of the goddess' worship" made Corinth a notorious center of sexual perversion. Greek terms such as "to corinthianize" and "Corinthian sickness" grew out of the immorality of the city. *Unger's Bible Handbook*, , p. 591, *Acts, Life Change Series*, NavPress, p. 153.

**4 Sosthenes.** "It is not clear whether the Greeks beat Sosthenes, seeing the occasion as an opportunity to vent their feelings against the Jews, or the Jews beat their own synagogue ruler because he was unsuccessful in presenting their case--probably the former. A Sosthenes is included with Paul in the writing of I Corinthians (1:1). Perhaps he was the second ruler of the synagogue at Corinth to become a Christian in response to Paul's preaching (see v. 8)." *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1681.

**5 Gallio** was known for his fairness and calm demeanor. He was proconsul in Achaia in 51-52 A.D. *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1681.

# **LESSON 17**

## **MINISTRY IN EPHESUS**

### **Acts 18:18-19:41**

Paul had spent a year and a half in Corinth when he left the city. He took Priscilla and Aquila<sup>1</sup> with him as far as Ephesus, where the couple took up residence. Paul spoke once in the Ephesian synagogue, then set sail for Caesarea in Judea. He paid a visit to the church at Jerusalem, then returned to Antioch. The apostle's second missionary journey was officially completed.

Here in the text, Luke introduces Apollos, an Alexandrian (Egyptian) Jew who became a great spokesman for the cause of Christ. A well-educated man thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures, Apollos came to Ephesus and began to speak boldly in the synagogue about Jesus and the baptism of John the Baptist (18:25, 19:4).<sup>2</sup> Priscilla and Aquila drew Apollos apart to explain salvation through Christ<sup>3</sup> to him. With a new and complete understanding of the gospel, Apollos went to Corinth in the province of Achaia and began proclaiming the gospel there.

After a time in Antioch, Paul embarked on his third missionary journey. He first visited the churches in Galatia and Phrygia, encouraging the believers. Afterward, he came to Ephesus, where he worked for over two years.<sup>4</sup>

Ephesus was a large and beautiful city of about 250,000 people. It was the center of commerce in Asia Minor and prided itself as the temple keeper of the Roman fertility goddess Diana, (in Greek, *Artemis*). The huge temple of Artemis outside the city was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It took 220 years to build and was made of the purest marble. It had 127 columns 60 feet high standing on an area 425 feet long and 220 feet wide. A

many-breasted black figure said to have fallen out of heaven was on a pedestal in the middle. The temple was the center of heathen worship for the province of Asia. The spiritual climate thus created produced occult activity as well, with sorcery common even among the Jews of the area.

When Paul first arrived in Ephesus, he began teaching in the synagogue. However, Jewish opposition forced him to abandon the synagogue and begin daily discussions in a lecture hall. It is believed that Paul made tents during the morning and evening hours, then taught between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., when workers were on midday break.

As Paul ministered in this pagan city, God empowered him to perform great miracles of healing and deliverance from demonic spirits.<sup>5</sup> Such incredible wonders took place that the message of Christ became known all over the province of Asia. Great numbers of people became Christians, turning completely from Artemis worship and sorcery practices. At one point, Christians made a bonfire of their occult scrolls of magical writings corporately valued at 50,000 drachmas (the equivalent of 140 years of wages for the average working man of that day).

Paul's ministry was so powerful that Ephesus quickly became the center of Christianity in the Western world. With the conversion of so many people to the Way, however, business had fallen off for tradesmen whose products related to the worship of Artemis. As a result, a silversmith named Demetrius called together business associates, declaring that Paul's teaching was damaging the civic standing and pride of Ephesus--worship of Artemis. He stirred up his cohorts who in turn aroused the entire city to become a violent mob. They grabbed two of Paul's disciples and rushed by the thousands into the city theatre shouting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Paul wanted to speak to the crowd, but both Christian and non-Christian friends forbade him from entering the theatre.

Finally, the city clerk, an Ephesian executive officer responsible to Rome for the conduct at such meetings, silenced the crowd. He reminded them that the Christians had committed no crime, but they were acting unlawfully in their riot and were answerable to Rome. With this, the official sent the people away.

Soon after this, Paul bid farewell to the Ephesian believers and went to encourage the new churches in Macedonia.

## **Read Acts 18:18-28.**

1. a. After having his head shaved to indicate completion of a vow,<sup>6</sup> Paul sailed for Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila. Where did Paul go from there (18:21-22)?

**Note:** The words "went up" and "went down" (18:22) indicate Paul's visit was to the church at Jerusalem, which was 2,500 feet above sea level.

1. b. Locate Corinth, Ephesus, Caesarea, Jerusalem and Antioch on the map at the front of the book.

2. a. Describe Apollos (18:24-25).

**Reference:** Note 8, *baptism*, p. 19.

2. b. What was admirable about the way Priscilla and Aquila dealt with Apollos (18:26-28)?

## **Read Acts 19:1-22.**

3. How long did Paul stay in Ephesus? Describe his ministry (19:8-10).

4. How did God confirm Paul's teaching as truth (19:11-12)?

5. a. What brought additional reverence for the name of the Lord Jesus (19:13-17)?

b. What did a group of Christians do as a result (19:18-19)?

6. What was the state of the church in the province of Asia (19:20)?

**Read Acts 19:23-41.**

7. a. While money was really his concern, how did Demetrius get the people of Ephesus agitated (19:27)?

b. What was the result (19:29,32)?

c. Who prevented Paul from going before the crowd (19:30-31)?

8. How did the city clerk disarm the crowd (19:35-41)?

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### Facing the Enemies of Faith II

In the last lesson, we observed the fact that sorcery and occult practices were common in the time of the early church, especially in cities where Paul traveled on his missionary journeys. Philippi, Athens, Corinth and Ephesus prided themselves in their worship of idols and/or dealings in demonology and the occult.

We might see these as trends of an ancient society, unrelated to today. However, the Bible declares that worship of created things, whatever they might be, allows Satan to obtain easy access into any culture. The result is heightened spiritual warfare against faith in Christ.

We defined spiritual warfare as the battle against our relationship with God. There are three main sources of spiritual warfare: the *world*, or worldly perspectives, our own *sinful nature*, and, finally, the unseen forces of *Satan*. We observed the first two sources of battle in Lesson 16, and will now look at biblical statements about the third source of conflict.

Some people are uncomfortable with the topic of Satan, finding it frightening, or perhaps incredible. However, the Bible has much to say about this grand adversary of God and man and presents great truths about

the complete victory we have in this arena of spiritual warfare. It is important to be knowledgeable and secure in what the Word of God has to say about facing this enemy of our faith.

As we continue our study of *Power to Live By*, let's make some observations about what the Bible has to say about facing "the enemy."

1. a. The third spiritual battlefield that the Bible describes is with Satan and unseen forces of evil under his leadership. (Notes 2 and 4 on p. 42 give biblical definition to this foe.) In his letter to the Ephesians, what did Paul say about this battle?

Ephesians 6:11-13

b. What single *words or phrases* from each of the following verses describe the "armor" that protects us in this battle?

Ephesians 6:14-18

2. a. Self-condemning thoughts, lies about God, and discouragement are often evidence of Satanic attack. His attack is usually directed at our vulnerable areas. What keys to victory over these attacks are found in the following?

Ephesians 6:10

James 4:7

I Peter 5:6-9

3. The apostles dealt with Satan *in the name of Jesus Christ*. (ex: 16:18).  
What does the following say about the authority of Jesus Christ?

I Peter 3:22

4. What can prayer accomplish in spiritual conflict over our relationship with God?

II Corinthians 10:4,5

5. Of what are we assured when we allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives?

I John 4:4

6. What other provision for the battle against unseen forces does the Bible promise?

Psalm 34:7 (Example II Kings 6:8-17)

**Reference:** Note 6, *angels*, p. 128

Exodus 14:14; 15:3,18

7. When did Jesus Christ ultimately defeat Satan in the battle against the believer?

Hebrews 2:14-15 (also Colossians 2:13b-15)

8. What can we know as we persevere in faith?

Isaiah 59:19b (NIV footnote option)

Psalm 44:5

## **Summary**

9. What have you learned about winning spiritual battles as you have studied the ministry of Paul?

10. What are the three areas of battle over our faith about which the Bible speaks?

11. What keys to victory in battles of faith stand out to you?

## **Suggested Reading:**

*Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis (Macmillan)

*The Invisible War* by Donald Barnhouse

*Angels, God's Secret Agents* by Billy Graham

*This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness* by Frank E. Peretti

## LESSON 17 NOTES

**1** *Priscilla and Aquila* let Paul live with them in Corinth (18:2,3), and they went with him as far as Ephesus to begin the church there (18:18,19).

"There are inscriptions in the catacombs\* which hint that Priscilla was of a distinguished family of high standing in Rome. She is usually mentioned first." The church in Ephesus (I Corinthians 16:19) and later the church in Rome (Romans 16:3-5) met in the home of Priscilla and Aquila. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, p. 576.

\* The catacombs are underground galleries, principally around Rome, with recesses containing the tombs of between 1.8-4 million Christians from about ten generations. The galleries extend an estimated 600 miles around Rome, providing a cushion from earthquake shocks today. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, p. 149.

**2 Reference:** Note 8, *baptism*, p. 19.

**3 Reference:** Note 5, *Salvation*, p. 35.

**4** Three years is the length of time Paul stated that he ministered in Ephesus (20:31). However, Acts 19:8,10 record three months and two years. The difference is due to the fact that the Jews counted any part of a year as a year. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1638.

**5 Reference:** Note 2, *evil spirits, demons*, p. 42.

**6** *Paul's vow* (18:18) was probably a Nazarite vow to express thankfulness for God's protection amidst the dangers of Corinth. This vow usually involved abstinence from alcohol and cutting one's hair. Shaving the head marked completion of the vow (Numbers 6:1-21; Acts 21:17-26. Marshal, p. 300; *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1682.

# LESSON 18

## PAUL GIVES FAREWELLS

### Acts 20:1-21:16

Even before the riot against him in Ephesus, Paul had decided to visit the churches in Macedonia (Europe) and then depart for Jerusalem (Acts 19:21). So when things settled down in Ephesus, Paul gathered the believers and said goodbye. He traveled to cities in Macedonia and Achaia, then stayed in Greece for three months.<sup>1</sup> After this, Paul was informed of a Jewish plot against him which caused the apostle to travel back through Macedonia rather than sail directly to Syria.

Paul had encouraged a collection be taken in the various Gentile churches to help the needy in Jerusalem. As Paul traveled, he was accompanied by a delegation of godly men from these cities; three from Macedonia, two from Galatia, and two from Asia Minor. Paul's traveling companions also included the author of *Acts*, Dr. Luke, who meticulously recorded the stops and starts along the way to Jerusalem. Paul's goal was to reach that city by Pentecost, and he carefully budgeted the fifty-day time period he had to accomplish the trip.

The apostle stayed a week in Troas, and, the night before his departure, Paul carried on an all-night discussion with the believers. The meeting was in a third-floor room, and around midnight, a young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in a window, fell asleep and plunged to the courtyard below. Eutychus was pronounced dead, but to everyone's relief and amazement, God enabled Paul to bring the boy back to life.<sup>2</sup>

The next day, Paul and company left for Miletus, where the apostle gathered the elders from the church at Ephesus. Sharing what he thought would be his last words<sup>3</sup> to these men, Paul charged them to act as faithful "shepherds"

over the "flock" as they carried out their responsibilities as leaders in the Ephesian church. He reminded them that God had purchased the body of believers with the blood of His own Son (20:28), and the care of His church was a great privilege and responsibility. Paul warned the elders that "wolves" (false teachers) would come to "ravage the flock," leading many astray with wrong doctrines. Paul encouraged the elders to persevere in serving the needs of others with hard work and sacrifice as he had done in their midst.

At last, they all knelt to pray together, then wept, embraced and kissed each other good-bye. After tearing himself away from these dearly loved co-workers, Paul and the others set sail for Phoenicia. Paul spent a week with the believers at Tyre where the Holy Spirit warned that terrible trials lay ahead for him in Jerusalem. The people begged the apostle not to go, but Paul explained that he was compelled by the Spirit (20:22) to continue his journey to Judea. All the believers--men, women and children--accompanied Paul to his ship and knelt on the beach to pray with him before he left for Caesarea.

In Caesarea, Paul and the others stayed with the evangelist, Philip, (cf. Acts 8:40). He had lived in Caesarea for 25 years. During their stay, a prophet named Agabus (cf. Acts 11:27-29, fifteen years earlier), came from Judea to tell Paul what lay ahead for him in Jerusalem. The apostle would be arrested by the Jews and given over to the Gentiles. Everyone pleaded with Paul not to go on, but Paul replied that he was ready to suffer and even die for the name of the Lord Jesus. With this, Paul and the others left for Jerusalem, where they stayed at the home of a Cypriot named Mnason, one of the first believers in Christ.

## **Read Acts 20:1-12.**

1. Besides encouraging a collection for the needy in the church at Jerusalem, what did Paul do in Macedonia (20:2-3a)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Paul's stay in Greece*, p. 157.

2. Who traveled with Paul (20:4)? See also paragraph 2 above.

3. What miracle took place in Troas (20:9-10)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *Eutychus*, p. 157.

**Read Acts 20:13-38.**

4. a. In his absence, Paul had probably been slandered by his enemies in Ephesus. In his own defense, of what did Paul remind the elders concerning his relationship with the Ephesians (20:17-21)?

b. Although some of the Ephesians Paul ministered to were wealthy, what did Paul do to demonstrate the purity of his motives in preaching Christ to them (20:33-34)?

5. a. What exhortation and warning did Paul give the Ephesian elders (20:28-31)?

b. Of what did Paul finally remind the Ephesian church leaders (20:35)?

6. a. What did Paul disclose about his journey to Jerusalem (20:22-23)?

b. What was Paul's perspective on the hardship ahead (20:24)?

7. How did the elders leave Paul (20:36-38)?

### **Read Acts 21:1-16.**

8. Find Tyre in Phoenicia on the map. When the Spirit revealed the hardship ahead for Paul, what did the believers in Tyre do (21:4b-5)?

9. At Caesarea, the prophet Agabus came from Judea to warn Paul that the Jews would seize Paul and hand him over to Gentile officials. What was Paul's response to the pleas of those around him (21:12-13)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *prophecy, the gift*, p. 100.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **The Power of Wholehearted Devotion**

Some hold that the Holy Spirit was warning Paul through other believers not to go to Jerusalem. Whether or not this was the case, Paul believed that the Holy Spirit *was* leading him to go, (cf. Acts 20:22), and to do less would have violated his conscience and total commitment to Jesus Christ. Paul

moved ahead in spite of the unknown grief which he knew awaited him because he was wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord. Only one question guided his decisions: "What does the Lord want me to do?"

While Paul's surrender to Jesus Christ cost him greatly, it also brought him enormous blessing. Surrender to God's way and will can indeed be painful at times, but the Bible promises rewards that far surpass the suffering. What are the benefits of wholehearted devotion to the Lord? Moreover, what strength does such devotion provide? Let's look at the *Power to Live By* that comes from wholehearted devotion.

1. Why was the apostle's choice to go to Jerusalem painful?

2. a. Yielding to the Lord can be painful. What might we have to give up to follow the Lord?

b. What do the following suggest about the cost of following the Lord?

Galatians 5:16-17

John 15:18-21

3. What is the warning to the one who follows his own will instead of the Lord's? Proverbs 14:12

**Note:** *death* refers to spiritual separation from God.

Psalm 32:4-5

4. Each time we say "yes" to the Lord in spite of what it may cost us, what is the result according to the following?

Job 17:9 (paraphrased versions do not work here)

Luke 18:29-30

Isaiah 33:6

**Note:** *Fear of the Lord* refers to reverent trust and obedience.

5. a. What joys did Paul experience because of his complete surrender to the Lord's leading in his life?

b. What was a great source of Paul's joy according to I Timothy 1:14?

c. What does God promise to the one who honors Him?

I Samuel 2:30b

6. In Colossians 3:15, Paul instructs believers to "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (3:15). The Greek word which is translated "rule" means to "umpire" or "decide all matters." What does this mean in everyday life?

7. What power does God give to the one who follows Him, even when the way appears difficult or impossible?

II Corinthians 9:8

II Corinthians 12:9-10

James 1:5

Joshua 1:9

Proverbs 2:7-8

8. In the prayers of Paul for fellow believers, we can see sources of strength for the one who is wholeheartedly devoted to God. What can we pray for ourselves and others whom we want to experience the power of wholehearted devotion?

II Thessalonians 3:5

Ephesians 3:14-19

## **Summary**

9. What blessings have you found when you wholeheartedly committed yourself to the Lord in spite of opposition from within or without?

10. Is there an area of your life today in which you are struggling with God's direction for you? Why is it better to abandon the struggle and yield to Him regardless of the cost?

b. What benefits can you expect from this decision?

11. Is there an area of your life in which you want to know and follow God's direction? What is His promise to you in Proverbs 3:5-6?

## LESSON 18 NOTES

**1** *Paul's three month stay in Greece* was most probably in Corinth, where the church had gone through a time of rebellion. Paul wrote three letters, two before and one after this visit, rebuking the Corinthians for their conduct. We have only one of these letters, I Corinthians. Later, Paul met Titus in Macedonia (II Corinthians 2:12-13) who informed the apostle that the church had repented. Paul quickly wrote a fourth letter, filled with affirmation and genuine love. This letter is the New Testament II Corinthians.

**2** *Eutychus brought back from death.* While some debate the situation, Dr. Luke's record of the event was like his account of Peter raising Tabitha from the dead in Acts 9:40. The doctor clearly meant to document that God brought Eutychus back from the dead through Paul. The Greek word for *young man* referred to an eight to fourteen year-old. Marshall, *Acts*, p. 326.

**3** *Paul's last words to Ephesian elders* (20:25). Paul apparently was able to visit Ephesus again after his release from imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 62). After his time there, Paul left Timothy to minister in Ephesus and wrote him during what appears to be a fourth missionary journey by Paul (cf. I Timothy 1:3). II Timothy was written during Paul's final days before his execution in Rome in A.D. 68.

# **LESSON 19**

## **PAUL IN JERUSALEM**

### **Acts 21:17-23:11**

After arriving in Jerusalem for the Passover, Paul and his companions went to see James and the elders of the Jerusalem church. They all praised God as Paul reported in detail all God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. Then the elders explained the problem at hand. Many thousands of zealous Jews had become believers in Judea. They were told that Paul was encouraging Jews all over the world to abandon their laws and traditions,<sup>1</sup> and there was great hostility against him.

To save Paul, the elders of the Jerusalem church devised a plan by which Paul was to show his commitment to Jewish laws. Paul carried out the plan, but Jewish enemies from Asia Minor spotted Paul with the Greek believer, Trophimus of Ephesus (21:29), and accused him of taking a Gentile into the temple area. They aroused the whole city against the apostle so that the Roman commander, Claudius Lysias, had to stop the people from trying to kill Paul. He arrested the apostle and literally had to carry him to the Roman military enclosure in order to protect him from the angry mob.

The Roman officer was unsure who Paul was or what he had done to cause such violence. Lysias thought perhaps Paul was the Egyptian Jew who had recently led a 4,000-man revolt against Roman colonial rule. But Paul began to speak in Greek, explaining to the commander that he was a Jew from the well-known city of Tarsus. Paul went on to ask Lysias for permission to speak to the people, and the officer agreed.

Paul approached the crowd speaking in Aramaic, which identified him with the conservative Palestinian Jews. The people quietly listened as Paul told about himself. Born in Tarsus, Paul explained that he was a Pharisee<sup>2</sup> thoroughly schooled under the most respected Jewish rabbi, Gamaliel. He

was zealous for God and, as the Sanhedrin leadership knew, had once rounded up Christians for imprisonment, punishment and sometimes death. Then Paul told of his encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus and about his dramatic conversion to the Christian faith.

The crowd listened intently until Paul explained that the Lord had personally commissioned him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. With this, the people broke into a rage. The commander, who could not understand the Aramaic Paul had been speaking, seized Paul and ordered that he be scourged<sup>3</sup> and questioned to find out what he was doing to anger the crowd. But Paul announced that he was a Roman citizen,<sup>4</sup> and the stunned Lysias immediately retracted his order. By Roman law, a citizen of Rome could not be humiliated by such a punishment. Lysias released Paul and called for a meeting of the Sanhedrin the next day to determine what the Jewish people had against the apostle.

When Paul stood before the Sanhedrin the following day, he declared himself a Pharisee who had hope in life after death. The court suddenly erupted in a bitter dispute between Pharisees and Sadducees over differences in beliefs about life after death, angels and spirits. Some Pharisees actually began to come to Paul's defense. The environment was hostile. To protect the apostle, the commander took him back to the military enclosure.

Amidst the turmoil, hostility and rejection, the Lord appeared to Paul in the night to encourage him. He promised that as the apostle had testified in Jerusalem, so would he testify in Rome.

### **Read Acts 21:17-36.**

1. What was the conflict about which James and the elders informed Paul (21:20-22)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Accusations against Paul*, p.165.

2. Of what did the Asian Jews accuse Paul (21:27-30)?

3. Who saved Paul from being killed by the mob (21:31-36)?

**Read Acts 21:37-22:29.**

4. How did Paul describe himself to the crowd (22:3-5)?

5. After explaining how Jesus Christ met him on the road to Damascus, Paul told the people about his vision of the Lord in the Jerusalem temple. What did Paul testify that enraged the crowd (22:21-22)?

6. What saved Paul from scourging (22:23-29)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *Scourging*, and Note 4, *Roman citizenship*, p. 165.

## **Read Acts 22:30-23:11.**

7. How did Paul deal with the Sanhedrin (23:6-10)?

**Reference:** Note 5, *Ananais*, p. 165.

8. What did the Lord do to meet Paul's needs (23:11)?

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Dealing With Injustice**

One of the most difficult issues in life is dealing with injustice. There is a natural desire in the human heart to see justice win out. Consequently we have strong feelings toward what we see as injustice toward ourselves and others who are innocent. Injustice breeds hostility.

Paul was innocent in the face of numerous attacks against him during his missionary journeys. However, the rejection in Jerusalem by his Jewish brothers from all over the world no doubt hurt him the most. Yet Paul's physical and emotional pain did not seem to affect his faith or his response to his enemies.

What prevented Paul from being consumed by bitterness and retaliation in reaction to the many injustices he faced? What biblical perspectives helped Paul and can help us as we see and experience injustice? Let's make some observations as we continue our study on *Power to Live By*.

1. a. What did Paul continue to do in the face of the hostility that threatened him in Ephesus?

Acts 20:19-21

b. Even when public opinion is against us, what are we called to do as sincere believers?

Proverbs 23:23

Romans 12:9,11

I Peter 3:14-16

2. a. For twenty-five years, Paul had avoided Jewish plots to kill him (cf. 9:23-25, 28-30; 14:5,19-20; 17:5,10; 20:3). Once again in Jerusalem, he moved out of harm's way and accepted the protection of the Roman justice system. What does this suggest about responding to unjust abuse?

b. What did Jesus say about refusing to engage in a fight?

Matthew 5:39

**Note:** "We must not be revengeful...we may avoid evil, and may resist it, so far as is necessary to our own security; but we must not render evil for evil, must not bear a grudge, nor avenge ourselves, nor study to be even with those that have treated us unkindly, but we must go beyond them by forgiving them." Matthew Henry's Commentary, Matthew 5:39, p. 1225.

3. a. How did Paul's refusal to engage benefit him?

b. Although not always an easy response, how can refusal to engage benefit us when we are faced with unjust treatment?

4. In the face of injustice, who can we depend upon?

Deuteronomy 33:27

Romans 12:19

II Timothy 4:18

5. What can we know about God and justice?

Deuteronomy 32:4

Deuteronomy 32:35 (Romans 12:19b)

II Chronicles 19:7

6. What do these verses imply about facing the pain of injustice?

I Chronicles 16:11

Psalm 46:10

Romans 12:12

7. What other actions toward injustice did Paul encourage?

Romans 12:18, 21

8. Where did Paul find the power to forgive and love those who hated him without cause?

Galatians 5:14-16, 22-23, 25

## **Summary**

9. a. Is there an area of injustice in the society around you that disturbs you?

b. What teachings from this lesson challenge you in the midst of this situation? Which ones encourage you?

10. Is there an injustice you have been experiencing? What truths from this lesson instruct you in how to respond?

11. Where is your source of power to respond to injustice with godly wisdom?

## LESSON 19 NOTES

**1** The *Accusations against Paul* alleged that he encouraged Jews to turn away from Jewish laws and traditions (21:21). "These rumors were false, but we can understand how they arose. Paul did teach Gentiles not to keep the Law, but he insisted that Jewish believers were free to maintain their customs (Romans 14:1-15:13). He himself had circumcised Timothy because the lad was a Jew and had taken a Nazirite vow (Acts 16:3, 18:18). However, Paul's own freedom among the Gentiles (I Corinthians 9:19-23), his teaching that law-keeping did not enhance a Jewish believer's standing before God (Romans 2:25-29, Galatians 5:6), and his disparaging comments about the Law (Galatians 4:9) might have led some of his Jewish converts to give up their customs without Paul telling them to do so." *Acts, Life Change Series*, NavPress, p. 180.

**2 Reference:** Note 1, *Pharisees, Judaizer*, p. 117.

**3** *Scourged*, or flogged (22:24). The scourge was a group of leather whips with pieces of lead or bone fixed to the ends. One could die from scourging. Roman citizens could not be scourged, beaten, crucified or subjected to any form of humiliating punishment.

**4** *Roman citizenship* was not easily obtained. It could be awarded as a reward for military or other service to Rome, by bribery of Roman officials, or by birth to a family of citizens. The latter was most prestigious and the way Paul achieved his citizenship. It is unknown how his father became a Roman citizen.

**5** *Ananais*, (Acts 23:2) the high priest who ordered Paul struck in order to silence him, was in office from 47 A.D. to 59 A.D., at which time he was assassinated by other Jews, probably Zealots (see note, p. 173). He was notorious as a glutton, a thief, a rapacious robber and a quisling in the Roman service who practiced cruelty and violence. William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 164, *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1691.

## **LESSON 20**

### **IMPRISONMENT IN CAESAREA**

**Acts 23:12-24:27**

Some Jews, probably Zealots,<sup>1</sup> determined to take an oath not to eat or drink until they killed Paul. The young son of Paul's sister, however, heard of their plot and secretly informed Paul and the Roman commander, Claudius Lysias. The commander immediately ordered 470 men to accompany Paul by night to Caesarea where he was to stand trial before Governor Felix.

When the governor received Paul and the letter of explanation from Commander Lysias, he placed Paul under guard in Herod's Palace<sup>2</sup> and determined to judge the case as soon as Paul's accusers came from Jerusalem. Just five days later, the high priest Ananais, some elders and an articulate lawyer named Tertullus arrived in Caesarea to present charges against Paul.

Tertullus began with hypocritical flattery of Felix for his fine leadership.<sup>3</sup> The counsel then proceeded to accuse Paul of being a ringleader of the "Nazarene" sect who caused riots among Jews all over the world. He also claimed Paul tried to desecrate the temple.

When Governor Felix asked Paul's response to the charges, the apostle began by declaring that he had done nothing to start a riot in Jerusalem. He stated that he had gone to Jerusalem to worship and to deliver gifts for the poor, and that he had been ceremonially clean when he entered the temple area. Paul declared that none of the accusations against him could be honestly proven.

Taking into account the letter from Commander Lysias (23:26-30), Felix could see Paul was innocent. However, Felix put off deciding the case, saying he must speak again with Lysias before making a final judgment. The governor kept Paul under guard for two years, during which time he and his Jewish wife, Drusilla,<sup>4</sup> spoke with Paul often. Although Paul's talk of life after death and judgment made Felix apprehensive, the governor continued to speak with Paul, hoping for a bribe from the apostle for his release. When Felix was replaced by Festus,<sup>5</sup> Felix left Paul in prison as a favor to the Jews.

**Read Acts 23:12-35.**

1. How did Paul's nephew save his life (23:16-22)?
  
2. a. How did Claudius Lysias deliver Paul safely to Governor Felix (23:23-24)?  
  
b. What did Lysias explain in his letter to Governor Felix (23:29-30)?  
  
c. Because Paul was from the rather distant province of Cilicia, his trial could not be delegated to a nearby governor. What did Felix decide to do with the case (23:35)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *Herod's palace*, p. 173.

## **Read Acts 24:1-27.**

3. How did Tertullus attempt to persuade Felix to rule in their favor (24:1-6, 9)?

**Note:** The *Nazaren sect* was another contemporary name for Christianity.

**Reference:** Note 3, *Felix*, p. 173.

4. a. What points did Paul make in his own defense (24:11-13, 17-18)?

- b. What did Paul boldly declare (24:14-15)?

5. a. What was Felix's knowledge of the Christian faith (24:22)?

- b. How did Governor Felix delay making a decision about Paul (24:22-23)?

- c. What was Felix's behavior toward Paul after this (24:24-27)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *Felix and Drusilla*, and Note 5, *Felix's recall*, p. 173.

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### Waiting on God

Paul had been unjustly charged and imprisoned indefinitely. Jesus had promised Paul that he would testify in Rome (Acts 23:11). Yet the apostle remained in prison, guarded by an unscrupulous governor,<sup>3-5</sup> and only a few miles from Jews committed to murdering him.

At some time, most of us find ourselves in situations that feel dangerous and like a prison. It is easy to be overrun by our own impatience, doubts, fears and, worst of all, hopelessness. We may spend our energies striving to make something happen, worrying about the future or getting angry at God, ourselves and others because of our fears and discomfort.

It is at these times that the Bible instructs us to wait on God--expect, look for and hope in His deliverance, in His perfect way and time. While dashed hopes and discouragement might have threatened Paul's faith, the apostle remained confident and found constructive ways to use the waiting time. As we continue our study of *Power to Live By*, we will look at the strength that comes when we wait upon God.

1. a. What kinds of situations call for waiting on the Lord?

b. What attitudes and emotions can consume us if we do not hope in God?

2. How does Psalm 130:5-6 describe waiting on God?

3. What should we do as we wait on Him?

Psalm 27:13-14

Psalm 37:4, 7a, 8

Psalm 62:5, 7-8

4. What can we know about God that provides *peace* in the waiting time?

Psalm 3:3

Romans 8:28

Romans 8:38-39

Optional: Isaiah 49:14-16

5. What can we know about God that provides *confidence* in the waiting time?

Jeremiah 29:11

Numbers 23:19

Job 42:2

6. What do we need to remember as we wait on God?

Isaiah 55:8

Ecclesiastes 3:1

II Samuel 22:31a

Hebrews 10:23

7. What are the intangible rewards of waiting on God?

Romans 5:3-5

## **Summary**

8. Are there times in your life when you have been anxious to be delivered from a difficult situation or to have a great longing fulfilled? If you had to experience that time again, what would you do differently and why?

9. a. In your present life situation, what are you waiting on God to provide?

b. As you look back over this lesson, what is your confidence?

## LESSON 20 NOTES

**1** *Zealots* were a sect of extremist patriots of Israel who used terrorism to rebel against Roman rule. They led the revolt against Rome in 66-70 A.D. that led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Zealots were known as dagger-men because they carried sharp daggers with which they assassinated those who they perceived to be weakening Israel as a nation. This included powerful Jews who collaborated with Rome or one such as Paul, who led people to become loyal to Jesus Christ rather than the Jewish traditions that unified Israel as a nation.

**2** *Herod's palace*, once a royal residence, was now used as a Roman praetorium for imperial housing and/or business.

**3** *Felix* was infamous. He was born a slave, and rose to the level of freedman and then to governor because of his brother, Pallas, who was a favorite of Nero. He was the first slave in history to become a governor. The Roman historian Tacitus said of Felix, "He exercised the prerogatives of a king with the spirit of a slave." He was completely unscrupulous and was capable of hiring thugs to murder his own closest supporters. He was finally recalled in 59 A.D. for mishandling riots, overusing violence and other acts of incompetence and corruption.

The opening words of Tertullus toward Felix (Acts 24:2-3) were flattery and an attempt to erase any ill-feelings between the Jews and Felix so as to swing the trial against Paul. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1693, Marshall, *Acts*, p. 370, Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 168.

**4** *Felix and Drusilla*. At this time, Felix was married to Drusilla, the Jewish daughter of Herod Agrippa I. She was the third princess Felix had married. At age 15, Drusilla was married to Azizus, King of Emesa, when Felix used a Cypriot magician named Atomos to seduce her from her husband. At 16, she was married to Felix. Perhaps the immorality in their relationship made the couple uncomfortable when Paul told them about the coming Day of Judgment (Acts 24:25).

**5** *Felix's recall* (24:27). "There was a long-standing argument as to whether Caesarea was a Jewish or a Greek city and Jews and Greeks were at daggers drawn. There was an outbreak of mob violence in which the Jews came off best. Felix dispatched his troops to aid the Gentiles. Thousands of Jews were killed and the troops, with Felix's consent and encouragement, sacked and looted the houses of the wealthiest Jews in the city. The Jews...reported their governor to Rome....He was dismissed from his governorship and only the influence of his brother Pallas saved him from execution." Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 171.

## **LESSON 21**

### **TRIALS BEFORE FESTUS & AGRIPPA**

#### **Acts 25-26**

Paul had been imprisoned for two years in Caesarea when Felix was recalled and Festus was appointed to take his place as governor. Even though Paul had not been found guilty of any crime, Felix left him in prison as a favor to the Jews. During a visit to Jerusalem, Festus was approached by the Jews regarding Paul. They urgently pressed the new governor to deliver Paul to Jerusalem as a favor to them, all the while planning an ambush to seize and kill Paul while he was en route from Caesarea.

But Festus insisted that the Jews should follow him to Caesarea to press charges. They did so, but once again had no proof of their accusations. Festus, wanting to grant a favor to the Jews, asked Paul if he would be willing to stand trial in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Paul saw no point in standing trial before Festus again in Jerusalem, and, as a Roman citizen, appealed to Caesar and the highest court in the land.<sup>2</sup> With this, Festus declared that Paul *would* go to Rome, but the governor was privately perplexed as to what to put in his letter to Caesar explaining criminal charges.

A few days later, King Agrippa (Herod Agrippa II) and his sister Bernice<sup>3</sup> came to pay a complimentary visit to the new Roman governor. Festus discussed his confusion about Paul's case with Agrippa, and the king asked to hear Paul himself.

The next day, the king and his sister pompously entered an auditorium, filled with high-ranking officials, to hear Paul state his case. The apostle told of his thorough Jewish upbringing and training and of his zealous persecution of the followers of Jesus. He carefully explained his encounter

with the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, then explained prophecy that proved Jesus to be the Messiah. Paul told of the Lord's calling on his own life: to testify to Jew and Gentile alike about the risen Savior, who offered forgiveness of sin to all who believed.

When Paul spoke of the resurrection, Festus interrupted, saying the apostle's great learning and intelligence had made him insane. But Paul turned to Agrippa, who had lived in the area all his life and knew about the events of which Paul spoke. He pressed the king on his belief of what the prophets had said. The king avoided the question, asking Paul if he presumed to make him a Christian in so short a time. Paul boldly stated that he wished everyone in the room could know Jesus Christ as he did.

The king left the room, and the assembly was over. Privately, Agrippa and Festus agreed that Paul was in no way a criminal deserving imprisonment, much less death. However, because of his appeal, Paul was guaranteed an audience with Caesar.

### **Read Acts 25:1-12.**

1. Paul had been imprisoned in Caesarea for two years under Governor Felix. What did the Jews try to accomplish through the new governor, Festus (25:3)? What was Festus' answer (25:4-5)?
  
2. a. When none of the charges against Paul could be proven, how and why did Festus delay releasing Paul (25:9)?  
  
b. What set Paul's course for Rome (25:10-12)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *Paul's appeal to Caesar*, p. 182.

### **Read Acts 25:13-27.**

3. What frustration did Festus express to Agrippa and the others as he explained Paul's case (25:24-27)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *King Agrippa and Bernice*, p. 182.

**Read Acts 26:1-32.**

4. Why did Paul appreciate being heard by King Agrippa (26:3)?

5. Briefly list the main facts Paul stated about himself (26:4-5, 9-11)?

6. Paul testified that on the road to Damascus the Lord commissioned him to preach the gospel, that Jew and Gentile might receive forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ Jesus (26:16-18). What did Paul declare about his response to the Lord's commission (26:19-21)?

7. When Paul stated that Moses and the Old Testament prophets foretold the suffering and resurrection of the Messiah, what did Festus declare (26:24)?

8. a. To whom did Paul then turn and why (26:25-27)?

b. What was Agrippa's response (26:28)?

**Note:** Agrippa avoided Paul's question. If he said "Yes," Paul would press him to recognize prophetic fulfillment in Jesus Christ. To answer "No" would have brought trouble with the devout Jews.

c. What was Paul's declaration to Agrippa and the others there (26:29)?

9. Later, what did Agrippa conclude with Festus (26:32)?

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### Loving the Unlovable

How do you and I respond to haughty, unprincipled leaders? As Paul stood before Agrippa and Festus and an auditorium of powerful people, he responded to them with a sincere desire for them to know freedom in Christ.

One of the greatest evidences of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the apostle Paul was his ability to reach out to Jew and Gentile alike, regardless of the hypocrisy and ungodliness they practiced. He did not approve of godlessness and taught believers to expose evil. At the same time, he took every opportunity to share the message of Christ, which has the power to free the godless from wicked ways.

Paul did not fight his enemies, but sought opportunities to reach out to even the least likely to respond. Result: the care, humility and peace which the apostle displayed in the midst of unjust humiliation and imprisonment won an audience with pagan authorities. From Caesarea to Rome, the officials in charge of Paul showed obvious partiality toward the apostle (Acts 23:19-24; 24:24-26; 27:3; 27:42-43; 28:4). Whether they agreed with him or not, he sincerely earned their respect.

The apostle, as he allowed Christ to "walk in his shoes,"<sup>4</sup> was able to love those who would naturally have been repulsive to him. Paul stood firmly for righteousness, but the respect he showed toward the individual allowed him

to lead people entrenched in evil into a transforming relationship with the Lord.

As we draw near the close of our study of *Power to Live By*, we will look at the impact we can have for Christ as we allow the Holy Spirit to enable us to love the unlovable.

1. What attitudes cause barriers between people in general?

2. What might have been Paul's attitudes toward his audience as he testified before Agrippa?

3. How might Paul's secure and caring attitude have affected those who guarded him?

4. What did Paul continually keep in mind about the one without Christ?

Ephesians 4:17-19

I Corinthians 2:14

5. What did Paul keep in mind about himself?

I Timothy 1:15-16

6. a. What did Paul teach about behavior that has a positive impact on the non-believer?

Titus 3:1-2

b. In order to maintain love for those without a relationship with the Lord, of what must we continually be reminded?

Titus 3:3-5

7. How did Paul instruct Timothy to effectively reach out to people who did not teach the truth about Jesus Christ and those without a relationship with Christ?

II Timothy 2:24-26

II Timothy 4:2-5

8. a. According to the following, what choices bring good results?

Proverbs 3:3

Proverbs 11:17

Micah 6:8

b. What is the mark of the Christian who is controlled by the Holy Spirit?

I John 4:7

**Note:** *love* (1 John 4:7). Greek word *agape*, meaning unconditional, sacrificial love.

9. From where did Paul get the power to love the unlovable as he taught others to do?

Galatians 2:20

Ephesians 3:16-17

## **Summary**

10. While we seek to have compassion on everyone, what is to be our consistent position regarding godless actions and attitudes?

11. a. Do you have trouble at times showing mercy and compassion toward ones who are living for selfish interests and stubbornly opposing God?  
Perhaps individuals come to mind.

b. Of what truths can you remind yourself in order to resist condemning and cultivate compassion toward:

those difficult-to-love individuals?

yourself?

12. In and of ourselves, we do not have the power to love unlovable people. The Bible states that only as we allow Jesus Christ to walk in our shoes, living His life in and through us by the indwelling Holy Spirit, are we able to care and show mercy as He does. Maybe you would like to take a moment to ask Him to live His life through you that you might experience afresh the power to love the unlovable.

## LESSON 21 NOTES

**1** *Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem* (25:9)? "A question like this from a governor was effectively a decision. In Jerusalem, members of the Sanhedrin would be on Festus's official board of advisors (cf. 25:12) and could even engineer evidence and public outcry against Paul." NavPress, *Acts, Life Change Series*, p. 192.

**2** *Paul's appeal to Caesar* (25:11). Paul had much more to gain for the cause of Christ if he went to Rome rather than Jerusalem. If the highest court in the land recognized Christianity, it could become a distinct religion whereby Christians might be free of persecution for years to come. Possibly, Paul hoped to witness before Emperor Nero, although such cases as Paul's were usually delegated to representatives of Caesar. At any rate, the Lord had appeared to Paul to tell him that he was to testify in Rome (23:11).

**3** *King Agrippa* (Herod Agrippa II) and *Bernice* (25:23). Agrippa II was the son of Herod Agrippa I who died in 44 A.D. (cf. Acts 12:23, also note 2, p. 90). Agrippa II ruled, as Rome permitted, a small area in northeast Palestine. He was the official head of Judaism and had control over the high priest's appointment and priestly robes. Agrippa tried to keep peace between the Jews and Rome, to little avail. He was knowledgeable of Judaism and was a logical adviser to Festus regarding Paul's case. No doubt Agrippa wanted a good relationship with the high-ranking Roman official.

Agrippa and Bernice were also siblings of Drusilla, the wife of Felix. After Bernice's husband (and uncle), Herod of Chalcis, died, she moved in with her brother. There was rumor of incest, so Bernice married Poleman, the King of Cilicia. She left him shortly and later became a mistress for a time to Emperor Vespasian's son, Titus. Marshal, *Acts*, p. 387, Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 174, *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1694.

**4** *Christ walking in his shoes. Reference:* Lesson 2 Building on the Basics, *Power to Live By*.

*This final lesson includes an overview study which makes it longer. You may want to do the lesson in two sittings or over two consecutive weeks.*

## LESSON 22

### STORM, SHIPWRECK & ROME

#### Acts 27-28

Paul had appealed to Caesar, and even though Festus had no crime against the apostle about which to inform the emperor, the apostle had to be sent to Rome. The sail began for Paul and the other prisoners, all of whom were placed under the guard of a centurion named Julius for the first part of their journey to the capital city. Luke and Aristarchus,<sup>1</sup> a Thessalonian believer, were allowed to accompany Paul.

When the ship docked at Sidon, Julius allowed Paul to leave the ship to visit believers in the city. Then they sailed to Myra where Julius transferred Paul to a ship going directly to Rome.

It was fall<sup>2</sup> now, and travel on the Mediterranean was becoming more treacherous. Paul's ship landed on the Island of Crete at the harbor of Fair Havens. At this point, Paul warned the commanding centurion of disaster ahead and advised him not to leave the island. Disregarding Paul's advice, the centurion determined to sail around Crete to the protected harbor of Phoenix to winter there. As soon as they left Fair Havens, however, a typhoon-like wind forced the ship away from Crete and far out into the Mediterranean. For days, the ship was out of control and continually battered by the raging storm. They were forced to throw the ship's tackle and cargo overboard. At last, they gave up all hope for survival.

Then Paul stood before everyone and spoke. To persuade them to listen, he began by reminding them of what it had cost them not to take his earlier advice. Then Paul encouraged the men, telling them that an angel had appeared to him the night before, informing him that no one would die because it was God's will that he stand trial before Caesar. While the ship would run aground on an island and be destroyed, God would spare Paul and everyone on board.

In the two weeks that they had been fighting the storm, the men had been too anxious to eat. But Paul told them they needed energy for the upcoming events, so everyone ate all they could, then tossed the remaining grain overboard to further lighten the vessel.

Before long, the ship raced into a sandbar off the island of Malta and was destroyed by the pounding waves. In such a situation, the prisoners would ordinarily be killed by their Roman guards, who stood to lose their own lives should their prisoners escape. Because the centurion wanted to spare Paul, however, he trusted the prisoners not to try to escape. Everyone either swam or floated on pieces of ship to land.

Amidst the rain and cold, the islanders of Malta helped the shipwrecked group build a fire. Paul was bitten by a viper while gathering kindling, and the islanders waited for him to become sick and die. They perceived that he was a criminal who was receiving just reward from the goddess, Justice. When nothing happened to Paul, they decided *he* was a god.

The chief official on the island, Publius, entertained everyone from the ship at his estate for three days. During this time, God enabled Paul to heal Publius' father of fever and dysentery. The news spread, and before long everyone who was sick on the island came to Paul and were healed! During their three-month stay on Malta, the islanders honored Paul and those with him and completely stocked the Alexandrian ship which took them to Rome once the weather permitted.

Shortly after leaving Malta, they landed at Puteoli, the chief port of Rome some 75 miles from the capital city. The centurion let Paul spend a week with the believers there. Then, as they journeyed by land to Rome, Paul was greatly encouraged, because the Roman Christians who heard he was coming traveled as far as the town of Forum of Appius (43 miles) and Three Taverns (33 miles) to greet the apostle.

In Rome, Paul was allowed to live in a house by himself with a Roman soldier guarding him. At first, he invited the Jews of the city to come and hear the message of Jesus Christ. Typically, some believed and others refused to believe Paul's words about the Messiah. In the two years that followed, Paul welcomed everyone who came to see him, continually teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Read Acts 27:1-26.**

1. What kindness did the centurion commander, Julius, show to Paul (27:3)?

2. Why did the centurion on the second ship refuse Paul's advice (27:9-12)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *Fall*, p. 194.

3. When everyone lost hope for survival, what was Paul able to proclaim (27:21-26)?

**Reference:** Note 6, *Angels*, p. 128.

**Read Acts 27:27-44.**

4. How did Paul prevent the sailors' attempted escape? (27:30-32)?

5. a. What further instructions and hope did Paul give the 276 men on board the ship (27:33-37)?

b. What prevented Paul's death when the ship was wrecked (27:42-44)?

**Read Acts 28:1-10.**

6. a. How did the Lord continue to prove Himself to the men of the ship and the islanders of Malta (28:3-6, 7-9)?

b. How did the Maltese people respond (28:10)?

**Read Acts 28:11-31.**

7. How was Paul encouraged along the way to Rome (28:14-15)?

8. What was Paul's situation in Rome (28:16)?

9. What did Paul teach, and how did the Jews respond (28:23-24)?

10. How did Paul spend his time in Rome (28:30-31)?

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Living on Higher Ground I**

The ending drama in the Book of Acts can be seen as a picture of life. There are continual dangers, threats and unexpected challenges. The hopelessness of the men, who did not know God as the storm raged and the ship wrecked, can be compared to the hopelessness felt by those who do not have a personal relationship with Christ. In contrast, Paul's close walk with the Lord allowed him to have an entirely different experience. He had security, hope and peace while the storm raged. Not only this, but his faith brought hope, guidance and blessing to those around him.

As we walk closely with the Lord through life's ups and downs, our experience will be very different from the one without a relationship with Him. We can maintain hope and give hope to those around us. Let's take a closer look at the perspectives that can lift us to higher ground during the storms and shipwrecks of life.

1. What could have been Paul's response to the storm raging about him?

2. How would negative responses on his part have been harmful to those around him?

3. a. When we are in the midst of the storms of life, where can we find safety? What do the following suggest?

Mark 4:35-41

Matthew 7:24-25

Isaiah 26:4

b. What model prayer did the Psalmist pray?

Psalm 61:2

4. a. In the storm, Paul declared his faith in God. When we declare our faith amidst the storms of life, how may it benefit others?

b. How did Paul's response resemble that of the prophet Habakkuk?

Habakkuk 3:17-19

5. a. In the storms of life, as on the open sea, Paul had eternal hope; he knew a better and eternal life awaited him. How can this perspective strengthen us as we go through difficulties?

b. Related verses: Romans 8:38-39

II Corinthians 4:16-18

Philippians 1:21

## **Summary**

6. In the storm, Paul knew Christ as his Rock of security. In the storm, Paul declared his faith, giving hope to others. And in the storm, Paul had eternal perspectives about this life and death.

a. What difficulties are you facing at this time in your life?

b. How can the perspectives in this lesson allow you to face these difficulties on higher ground?

7. a. Which of these perspectives is hardest for you to maintain?

b. What would be your prayer in the midst of the storm?

## ***Power to Live By* Overview Study**

### **Living on Higher Ground II**

If anything stands out from the book of Acts, it is the fact that it is possible to rise above difficulty and use hardships as stepping stones to greater good.

The early Christians survived arduous testing. Their world was unstable, with fickle, unscrupulous Roman rulers, widespread immorality and pagan worship, and religious leaders who would resort to murder to accomplish their purposes. On a human plane alone, the church could not have survived the odds against it. But on a higher plane, through the power of the Holy Spirit, each trial only caused the first believers to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ and increase their resolve to spread the gospel. As they stayed the course of faith and godly living, in spite of the odds against them, hundreds of thousands came to know Christ in their world, and they changed the course of history.

We also live in perilous times. There are those who seek to stamp out any trace of Christian faith and principles in our world today. But the words of Jesus are to us as much as they were to those who saw the nail prints in His hands: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-10).

As we close our study of *Power to Live By*, we will review the basic principles that empowered the first believers to persevere in faith and spread the good news throughout the world. It is indeed God's desire that we, too, experience the adventure of living on higher ground with Him, knowing triumph in daily life and Christian witness. Let's take a final look at the basic biblical principles which allow us to stay the course of faith and impact our world with the life-changing love of Jesus Christ.

1. Where did the power to live on higher ground begin for the early Christians, and where does it begin for us today?

Acts 2:38; 3:19

Romans 3:21-24

2. a. What source of power did Jesus promise to enable us to live the Christian life?

John 14:16-17, 26

Acts 1:8

b. What must be our choice continually?

Galatians 5:16, 25

Ephesians 5:18b

c. What can we expect from the Holy Spirit and His work in our lives?

Ezekiel 36:26-27

Galatians 5:22-23

3. As we continually ask God to fill us with His Spirit, how will we grow spiritually?

Ephesians 1:17-19a

Ephesians 3:16-19

Philippians 1:9-11

4. a. When we sin, how does it affect our relationship with the Lord?

Isaiah 59:2

b. When we sin, what can we do to restore our relationship with God?

I John 1:9

c. What allows a just God to forgive us each time we confess our sin?

Isaiah 53:5-6 (prophecy about Christ; cf. Romans 6:23)

5. What truly marks the Spirit-controlled Christian and makes him a powerful witness in the world?

John 13:35

I Corinthians 13:1-8, 13

6. What is the Lord's timeless commission for our lives as Christians?

Matthew 5:13a,14,16

Matthew 28:18-20

## **Summary**

7. As you reflect upon your study of Acts, what will you remember about the early Christians?

8. From your study of *Power to Live By*, what stand out to you as the most important principles for daily living?

9. a. What difference has knowing the Lord made in your life?
- b. What difference can He make in the lives of others and in our world today?
- c. What is the powerful benediction on your life as you seek to live for Jesus Christ?

Jude 24-25

## LESSON 22 NOTES

**1** *Aristarchus* was a Thessalonian believer who traveled with Paul to Jerusalem and later to Rome where he ministered to the apostle while he was under house arrest (cf. Acts 19:29; 20:4; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24).

**2** *Fall* is the established season because Acts 27:9 mentions the Fast, the Jewish Day of Atonement, which fell in the latter part of September or in October. The Jews would sail between Pentecost (May-June) and Tabernacles, five days after the Day of Atonement (Fast). The Romans considered sailing after September 15 doubtful and after November 1 suicidal. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1698.

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