



UNHINDERED

THE BOOK OF ACTS

A 40 DAY BIBLE STUDY

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“Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.” Acts 28:31

In the book of Acts, we see believers expand Jesus’ disciple-making mission. As the early church was established, those believers did not keep the Gospel to themselves; they boldly proclaimed hope of Christ to all people. Despite persecution, Christians testified to the truth of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This is the same call we have today.

The book of Acts is a rich account of the early church, sharing the story of what it means to be a bold witness, empowered by the Spirit, anchored in prayer, strategic in mission, and faithful amid suffering.

The BOOK OF ACTS – A 40 DAY BIBLE STUDY is provided as a free resource to help explore through this incredible book. Use it for private devotional study, small group discussions, or even as the basis of an 8-week teaching series (5 readings per week).

DAY 1

Read: Acts 1:1-11

THE FINAL EARTHLY MINISTRY OF JESUS BEFORE RETURNING TO HEAVEN.

Q.1. What further information did Luke add to his Gospel, written to Theophilus? For what promise were they waiting to be fulfilled? – (Acts 1:1-5 c.f. Lk.1:1-4; 24:49; Jn.14:23-25)

Dr Luke not only earned his 'doctorate in medicine', but also in 'theology'. This becomes plain from both his introductory remarks to the books he wrote. In the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, he composed his thesis – 1 ... about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven ... and all He continued to do – by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen (Acts 1:1-2). He was meticulous, as he recorded the resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples – 3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). Though Jesus clearly unveiled details of the future coming kingdom of God, He also disclosed that they were going to be empowered for an intervening time on His mission when there would be proclamation of the gospel to the whole world – 4 Gathering them together, He commanded them ... to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; 5 for ... you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:4-5). They would have remembered the promises Jesus had given them about the coming indwelling Holy Spirit, in the upper room in John chapters 14-16 (see Jn.14:16-23 c.f. Jn.7:39).

Q.2. How did Jesus answer the disciples' question about the coming kingdom? How did Luke explain their new mission? What special assistance could they count on? – (Acts 1:6-8)

Some interpret the response of Jesus to the question by His disciples about the promise of Israel's restoration and His millennial reign, to be a

cancellation of the kingdom of Israel. However, Luke reported that in the initial teaching when Jesus – *45 opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem ... that He was – ... speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Lk.24:45-47 & Acts 1:3).* This would have clarified many of the as yet unfulfilled prophecies relating to Israel’s future kingdom. Jesus unveiled a delay rather than negate the coming kingdom which was under the control of His Father – *He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority (Acts 1:7).* Christ had come to usher in a new era of salvation to all people, through the preaching of the gospel – *... when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).* There would be a time lapse before the establishment of the Millennial Reign of Christ. During this time, there would be opportunity for countless people to believe in Christ and join His eternal Kingdom. All this would occur through them, a group of disciples who had all but failed. This was because the Holy Spirit would descend upon them, remain in them, and empower them for the coming task (see Acts 1:8).

Q.3. How did Jesus depart from His disciples? What explanation was given to them? What promise was made? To whom was the promise made? – (Acts 1:9-11)

Jesus had appeared, disappeared, and re-appeared before His disciples for some forty days. This final event was different. Jesus was lifted up out of their sight into a cloud (Acts 1:9). Two angels brought the divine explanation – *... “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).* This formed the basis of the Early Church’s, and our belief in a separate PRIVATE return of Christ for His own. This will be independent of the PUBLIC second coming of Christ as recorded in Revelation 19:11-16. That is so because the only ones to see the ascension of Jesus were believers, not the world at large. Consequently, this declaration that Christ will return in the same way is a promise to believers consistent with the

revelation that the apostle Paul gave to the Thessalonians – *15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord* (1 Thes.4:15-17). The coming of Christ to earth as King of kings and Lord of lords is a separate, public, and later event when – *Every eye will see Him* (Rev.1:7 c.f. Zech.12:10-14; Phil.2:10-11).

DAY 2

Read: Acts 1:12-26

WITNESSES TO THE NATIONS OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

Q.1. Where did the disciples go after Christ's ascension? Why? Who was present? What were they doing? (Acts 1:12-15 c.f. Acts 1:4)

In some of His final words, Jesus had reiterated that His kingdom reign was postponed and that they were to be His witnesses throughout the world. However, before they could do this, they were to wait for the empowerment from the indwelling Holy Spirit in Jerusalem (see Acts 1:4 c.f. Mt.28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Therefore, they returned to the upper room where Jesus had washed their feet and where they had celebrated the Passover together (see John.Chpts.13-16). Joining the Eleven apostles were other disciples – *along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers ...* totaling some 120 (see Acts 1:14-15). It seems almost certain that Jesus appeared to His own half-brothers personally during the forty days after His resurrection (see Acts 1:3; 1 Cor.15:6-7). Whatever, and however – *These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer ...* (Acts 1:14). They were waiting on God to touch them and direct them.

Q.2. Who led the proceedings? How did they view Judas? What added insight do we have about his death? – (Acts 1:15-19 c.f. Mt.27:3-10)

Peter had been reinstated as the recognized leader of the chosen apostles and believers (see Lk.22:32; Jn.21:15-19). Impressed on his mind were the Scriptures that showed that they were to keep the number of the Twelve apostles intact by replacing Judas. Judas had made the worst decision in history since he had been – *... counted among us and received his share in this ministry*” (Acts 1:17). Matthew explained the circumstances of the Field of Blood where Judas had committed suicide. Peter added more details about the tragic way in which his life ended in loneliness and darkness.

Q.3. On what basis did Peter advise that Judas should be replaced among the Twelve? What qualification was the replacement to have? How was the choice made? – (Acts 1:20-26)

Some have queried whether Peter should have sought a replacement for Judas, since Paul claimed apostleship (see 1 Cor.15:8-10). However, Peter's reasons were based on the fulfilment of Scripture. The manner in which the replacement was chosen was a combination of human judgment, and the seeking of divine guidance through the casting of lots (see Acts 1:20, 23-26). Therefore, it seems likely that Matthias will have his name on the foundation stones of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb (see Rev.21:14). Most importantly, Peter clearly set forth what he understood was to be the interim role of an apostle – *21 ... it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us– 22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.*" (Acts 1:21-22). Whatever else the apostles and the continuing church were called to do – we are primarily to be witnesses to His Resurrection. I am personally convinced of this fact because: (i) Before my conversion, my religion provided no certain hope of life after death. Since my conversion, the Holy Spirit has confirmed in my heart of the reality of the Resurrection. (see Phil.3:10-11). (ii) Paul stated clearly that if there is no Resurrection, then we are without hope of life beyond the grave (see 1 Cor.15:12-22). Therefore, we should never stray from this focus of the early church in our ministry, because it forms the basis of hope for all sinners.

DAY 3

Read: Acts 2:1-35

THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH AT THE FEAST OF PENTECOST.

Q.1. When exactly was the Holy Spirit given to the church? How did the disciples know that the promised Spirit had come? How did the death of Jesus at Passover time connect with the coming Holy Spirit at Pentecost? (Acts 2:1-4 c.f. Acts 1:4-5; Dt.16:1-2, 9-12)

The coming of the Holy Spirit took place in Jerusalem amongst Jewish believers, and also the Jews of the dispersion who had gathered for the Feast of Pentecost. The fact that Jesus died as the Passover Lamb, and that the formal giving of the Holy Spirit was on the Day of Pentecost, may be lost to many Gentiles. However, it had great significance to Jews. After reminding Israel to celebrate the Passover, Moses went on to command them to keep a harvest thanksgiving seven weeks later on the fiftieth day (Greek Πεντηκοστής – Pentecost) after the Passover – 9 *“You shall count seven weeks for yourself; you shall begin to count seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain ... 12 You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes (Dt.16:9 &12).* Not surprisingly, this event would coincide with a harvest of three thousand souls on that day (see Acts 2:41). Jesus had commanded them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promised Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:4-5). How would they know He had come? The initial coming of the Holy Spirit came with dramatic signs and experiences – *a violent rushing wind, tongues of fire, and the ability to speak in other tongues (Acts 2:2-4).*

Q.2. What made this event unique? Who were present at the Holy Spirit’s coming? Was the speaking of tongues understandable to the hearers? – (Acts 2:2-13)

When people were born again of the Spirit at later times, there is no evidence that there was a mighty rushing wind, or tongues of fire. Only

on two further occasions, with two separate communities, was the phenomenon of tongue speaking repeated (see Acts 10:45-46; 19:6). The Holy Spirit came upon all those who believed in Jesus on the Day of Pentecost. This was a unique day planned by God for the birth of the church. However, since it was obligatory for Jews to return to Jerusalem for Pentecost, there were local Jews, and Jews of the dispersion present at Jerusalem – the place designated by God for celebrating the seven festivals (see Dt.16:2, 6, 11). Though the languages spoken were probably not known by the speakers themselves, the writer makes it clear they spoke languages understood by the hearers. Luke actually identified some sixteen language groups of the hearers. He described the tongues – *7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? ... we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God”* (Acts 2:7-8, 11). The tongue speaking by Cornelius and his household were also known languages – *For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God* (Acts 10:46 c.f. Acts 11:15). Genuine tongue speaking is in a language unknown to the speaker, but understandable to the hearer (see 1 Cor.14:9-12).

Q.3. How did Peter explain what had happened? What did he say about the death and resurrection of Jesus? – (Acts 2:14-28)

This event was unique and needed an explanation. Peter did not disappoint. He drew the attention of these Jews to the prophecy of Joel and concluded with God’s promise – *... that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’* (Acts 2:21). Though he held the Jews accountable for the crucifixion of Jesus, Peter made the astounding claim that the death of Jesus fulfilled God’s predetermined plan to save sinners. Since Jesus was sinless, it was impossible for Him to be held in the grip of death – *23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power* (Acts 2:23-24).

Q.4. Why was it possible for Jesus to defeat death? Why could the scriptures he quoted not be applied to King David? What does the resurrection say about Jesus? – (Acts 2:25-35)

Jesus rose from death – *because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay* (Acts 2:27). The Scriptures Peter quoted were written by King David and were generally understood to relate to David, himself. However, Peter pointed out that such an interpretation could not be sustained, since everyone knew the location of David's tomb. He stated that David was speaking prophetically about Jesus – *he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay* (Acts 2:31). Peter further stated that God accepted the atoning work of His Son and had raised and exalted Him to His right hand (see Acts 2:32-33). On the basis of the finished work of Christ, the promised Holy Spirit was poured out that day (see Acts 2:33). Peter argued that David could never have written Psalm 110:1 about himself but was making a prophecy about Jesus Christ – *For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand* (Acts 2:34 c.f. Mt.22:41-46). The Resurrection proved that Christ's saving work was accepted by the Father, and that Jesus was perfect and sinless.

DAY 4

Read: Acts 2:36-47

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE GOSPEL AT JERUSALEM.

Q.1. How did Peter conclude his gospel presentation? How did the hearers respond? What was involved in the offer Peter made? – (Acts 2:36-38)

After furnishing supporting references from their Scriptures, Peter held them responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. However, in keeping with – *... the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, He declared... let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ ...* (Acts 2:23 & 36). This had a dramatic effect upon the people – *... they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37). Peter advised them to do two things to receive two things: – *“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:37-38). They had to distance themselves from the rejection of their Messiah by the Jews and demonstrate this with action. It was extremely difficult and costly for a Jew to be baptized into any other belief since the traditional Jews prided themselves in having the truth (see Rom.9:4-5; 10:1-4). However, forgiveness could only come to those who placed their trust in the merits of the Saviour. Receiving Christ meant that they would automatically – *receive the gift of the Holy Spirit* – as Jesus had promised (Acts 2:38 c.f. Jn.14:17-18, 23).

Q.2. How do we know that Peter’s gospel appeal is timeless? What does real ‘conversion’ look like? To whom was baptism offered? – (Acts 2:39-41)

Christ’s mission was not only to Israel, but to the whole world (see Mt.28:19-20; Jn.3:16; Acts 1:8). This promise was for all people for all times – *For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself”* (Acts 2:39 c.f.

Eph.2:11-18). Peter was clear in his demand that these respondents should change and stand out from the crooked generation of whom they were a part (see Acts 2:40). This expectation has not changed. Those who received this convicting message pointing to their guilt and sin ... the message declaring Jesus as Lord and Saviour, – *were baptized that very day* (Acts 2:41). There was a harvest of some 3,000 souls of believers.

Q.3. How did the church follow up the CONVERTS? What did each activity add to the growth of the believers? – (Acts 2:42 c.f. 1:14; 1 Cor.11:26; Eph.2:20;)

The converts had a new direction and purpose – *they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer* (Acts 2:42). The church became a devoted community. The apostles passed on the Scriptures that undergirded the gospel, which had been entrusted to them by Jesus Christ (see Lk.24:25-27, 44-48 c.f. Eph.2:20). They did not neglect the centrality of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, through the regular breaking of bread. They bathed their activities in prayer. They were dependent upon the risen Christ, and on one another.

Q.4. What changes were evident? Did the early church abandon their attachment to Judaism? How did God show His approval of the church? – (Acts 2:43-47 c.f. Jn.13:34-35)

God confirmed the authority of the gospel, proclaimed by the apostles, with accompanying signs and wonders in the beginning (see Acts 2:43 c.f. Heb.2:3-4). So great was their love and their oneness, that they shared their property and possessions (see Acts 2:44-45). These early believers did not abandon their Jewishness but added home fellowship to the worship associated with the temple (see Acts 2:46 & 42). Initially they had favour with the people. God showed His approval by – ... *adding to their number day by day those who were being saved* (Acts 2:47).

DAY 5

Read: Acts 3:1-26

PETER AGAIN PROCLAIMS THE GOSPEL AFTER A LAME MAN IS HEALED.

Q.1. What was the man in the story doing at the temple gate? What was unusual about Peter's response to the lame man? How did his excitement impact the crowds? – (Acts 3:1-10)

The blind beggar was at the temple for a very different reason from that of most of the Jews who were attending – the hour of prayer ... a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple, which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple (Acts 3:1-2). From the outset, Peter took command and asked the beggar to focus on them. However, rather than give the customary alms, – Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" (Acts 3:6). He then healed the man. This man not only walked for the first time in his life, but – with a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God (Acts 3:8). The people knew the beggar well – ... and they were filled with wonder and amazement ... (Acts 3:10). The miracle was astounding enough. However, for Peter to perform the miracle in the name of the risen and glorified Jesus, the Nazarene, was staggering. It needed further explanation.

Q.2. On Whom did Peter want people to focus on following the healing? What did Peter tell the crowds about Jesus? How did he explain the man's transformation? – (Acts 3:11-16)

What Peter did next was in stark contrast to what many modern day 'healers' do. Peter didn't start a healing ministry or call on people to bring the sick and dying. What did he do? He preached the gospel and placed the focus entirely on Christ Who had orchestrated the miracle for that purpose. He started his presentation by pointing them to the prophetic Scriptures, and their recent rejection of the Saviour – 13 *The God of*

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. 14 But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead ... a fact to which we are witnesses. 16 And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all (Acts 3:13-16). Though the Prince of Life had been put to death, He was still very much alive and active in the world He had made.

Q.3. How did Peter support his message about Jesus Christ? How could the crowds enter into God's blessing? Who were candidates for the promised blessings? – (Acts 3:17-26)

Though Peter held the Jews responsible for disowning the holy and righteous Saviour, he explained – the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled (Acts 3:18). God, in His sovereign wisdom, had achieved His plan, notwithstanding their guilt. He further explained that their Messiah would usher in a time of refreshing and restoration for Israel (see Acts 3:19-21). However, as part of God's intervening program, Jesus was first taken to Heaven. They could enter into His blessing and mission, but firstly they must – 19 repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; 20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you (Acts 3:19-20). Peter then supported the gospel by quoting Moses and telling them that from the prophet Samuel and his successors onward, the Abrahamic covenant was constantly confirmed – It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways" (Acts 3:25-26). The gospel is global and therefore, for all people everywhere. Nevertheless, it started historically with Israel. on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1).

DAY 6

Read: Acts 4:1-37

A FRESH FILLING FOR ANOINTED PREACHING. THE ONENESS OF THE CHURCH.

Q.1. How did the religious leaders react to the healing of the lame man? What disturbed them most? How did people respond? What did they do to Peter and John? – (Acts 4:1-4)

This was the Jewish rulers' worst nightmare. They thought they had successfully closed down the story of Christ's resurrection (see Mt.27:62-66; 28:2-4, 11-15). Now, barely seven weeks later, His apostles – ... *were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead* (Acts 4:2). The news about the miraculous healing spread like wildfire – *many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand* (Acts 4:4). Peter and John were arrested and thrown into jail, awaiting trial.

Q.2. What did the governing rulers do? What made Peter so fearless? What claims did Peter make about the healing and about Jesus? What was the substance of his message? – (Acts 4:5-12)

All the religious leaders of the Jews were galvanized into action. They asked – ... *"By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"* (Acts 4:7). In the book of Acts, whenever reference is made to a witness being "filled with the Holy Spirit" it underscores the importance of what will follow. (Like Jesus' saying *"Truly, Truly, I say to you"* as in Jn. 3:3 & 5; 5:24, -25; 6:26-27, 32-33, 47-51; 8:58; 10:7-9 etc.). Here, Peter's boldness was explained, when the Scripture said that he was under the control of the Holy Spirit. This makes what he said to be extremely important – *9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here*

*before you in good health. 11 He is the stone, which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. 12 **There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved***" (Acts 4:9-12). Peter didn't shy away from the guilt of the Jewish leaders. He attributed the healing of the lame man to be through the power of the crucified, now risen Jesus Christ. He quoted from Psalm 118:22 and explained the miscarriage of justice perpetrated by them. He stated that faith in Jesus is the only way to Heaven. This kind of unwavering statement is still unwelcome.

Q.3. What shook the Sanhedrin about the apostles? Why were they limited in stopping the apostles? What challenge did Peter leave with them? What would change? – (Acts 4:13-22)

The Jewish leaders had often been outmaneuvered and silenced in their confrontations with Jesus. There was something of Him that had rubbed off onto the disciples. In spite of having the normal rabbinical education, these men were punching way above their weight (see Acts 4:13). They could not deny the noteworthy miracle and had to contend with the popularity of the apostles, plus the rapid growth of the numbers of followers (see Acts 4:4, 14-16, 21-22). Peter appealed to their conscience, when they commanded the disciples to remain silent about Jesus – *"...Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge* (Acts 4:19). He then declared their intention to continue – *for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:20).

Q.4. How did the church evaluate the opposition of the Jewish leaders? What was their prayer request? How did God answer their petitions? – (Acts 4:23-31)

The immediate response of the church was to see the opposition of the religious leaders in the light of the Scriptures. They reminded themselves of God's sovereign power as Creator and Sustainer of all things – *to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur* (Acts 4:28 c.f. 4:24). They saw their trials as fore-ordained opposition against God ... and by inference to themselves – *25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, Why did the Gentiles rage, and the*

peoples devise futile things? 26The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ' (Acts 4:25-26). They viewed the Jewish leaders as being no different from Gentile unbelievers. Far from requesting for the persecution to stop, they asked for boldness to keep sharing the Gospel (see Acts 4:29-30). God gave a dynamic response from Heaven, when – ... the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31). The filling did not come with or produce tongue speaking. It resulted with boldness in speaking the Word of God intelligently.

Q.5. What was the initial role of the apostles? How did the early believers show their oneness? What did Barnabas do? How did he get his name? – (Acts 4:32-37)

God was extending the impact of the apostles, with accompanying signs and wonders (see Acts 4:30). However, most people were being transformed forever through the preaching of the gospel, as – *with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all* (Acts 4:33). Though almsgiving was part of the Jewish religion, there was still much poverty and hardship in the cities (see Jn.9:8; Acts 3:2-3). Without a functioning welfare system in place, the early church expressed its love for others by sharing what they had to ensure that none were left in need (see Acts 4:32 & 34-35 c.f. Jn 13:34-35)). In fact, some even sold surplus property and brought the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. They did not sell the homes they lived in, but literally – *'as many as were owners of lands or houses were selling them'* (Acts 4:34-35). A prominent leader in the church did the same. He sold a tract of land – *Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles ... which translated means Son of Encouragement* (Acts 4:36). His nickname said it all. He was greatly used by God in the growth of the early church.

DAY 7

Read: Acts 5:1-16

DIVINE JUDGMENT PRONOUNCED BY PETER TO
KEEP THE CHURCH PURE.

Q.1. What was wrong with the gift that Ananias and Sapphira brought to the apostles? Whom had they deceived? What happened to Ananias after his exposure? – (Acts 5:1-6 c.f. 4:34-35)

Many in the early church had expressed their oneness in Christ, by generously giving surplus property to the apostles for the support of those less fortunate (see Acts 4:34-35). Giving for the cause of Christ is always highly commendable. However, Ananias and Sapphira had agreed to give the impression that they had given all the proceeds of the sale of their property. As Peter told Ananias, it was their prerogative to give part or all. Whatever they gave would have been acceptable. What was not acceptable, was introducing pretense into the equation (see Acts 5:1-2 & 4). On the surface their attempts to be esteemed through deception was lying to others. However, Peter identified it for what it was – 3 ... *“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? 4 ... Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God”* (Acts 5:3-4). In these comments by Peter, it is clear that he ascribed deity to the Holy Spirit. To lie to the Holy Spirit is tantamount to lying to God. Even as Peter exposed the deception of Ananias, God struck Ananias down.

Q.2. Why did Peter question Sapphira about her gift to the church? Were Ananias and Sapphira true believers? What impact did their untimely deaths have on the church? – (Acts 5:7-11)

Peter had directed all his comments to Ananias. Though he may have suspected that Sapphira was in on the deception, he needed to be sure. She had not yet been told about the tragic departure of her husband. Peter asked her to confirm that what they had claimed was indeed all the proceeds. But she also lied to Peter. The sentence of death applied to her also. Some people suggest that Ananias and Sapphira could not have been

true believers. However, If God struck down all in the church for such deception, very few would survive. God sent this powerful lesson to the early church, that lies and deception are unworthy of those who claim to follow Him. Luke records that this incident had a sober impact on the church – *And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things* (Acts 5:11). It is good to remember Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians – *6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant on behalf of one against the other. 7 For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?* (1 Cor.4:6-7).

DAY 8

Read: Acts 5:17-42

PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH IS LIMITED BY THE COUNSEL OF GAMALIEL.

Q.1. What instructions were the apostles given by the angel? Why did the 'jailbreak' cause consternation? Where did the Jewish leaders find the apostles? – (Acts 5:17-26)

The growth of the church produced jealousy in the Jewish leaders, so they arrested the apostles and threw them into jail (see Acts 5:17-18 c.f. 5:14-16). The apostles had been given strict orders not to continue preaching about Jesus. However, that night an angel set them free, and declared – *“Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life”* (Acts 5:20 c.f. 4:21). The Council gathered, expecting to interrogate the apostles ... but were informed – *“We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside”* (Acts 5:23). Next it was reported – ... *“The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people”* (Acts 5:25). Small wonder they were ‘greatly perplexed’ and would have loved to have eliminated these troublemakers. However, they could not because – ... *they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned* (Acts 5:26). God has a great sense of humour as the Psalmist observed – *He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them* (Ps.2:4).

Q.2. How were the apostles treated by the arresting officers? What charge was brought against them by the Council? What arguments did the apostles present to the Council? – (Acts 5:26-32)

The people held the apostles in high regard. That built a barrier around them, protecting them from the worst of their enemies. The Council was furious that their order had been disregarded. They blamed the apostles for their impact on the people. They went as far as to accuse them – ... *you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this*

man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:28 c.f. 2:41 & 47; 4:4; 5:14). However, Peter and the apostles responded to the Council as previously of their commission – ... *"We must obey God rather than men* (Acts 5:29 c.f. Acts 4:19-20). They also needed to obey the angel's command (Acts 5:20). Once more they boldly presented the gospel to the Jewish leaders, holding them responsible for Christ's death, and proclaiming the resurrection as the basis for granting repentance and forgiveness of sins to people of Israel (see Acts 5:30-31). Peter also explained that they were witnesses of the resurrection and stated that there was a direct relationship between obedience, and the power of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 5:32).

Q.3. What kind of man was Gamaliel? How did he use history to avoid bloodshed? What warning did he bring to the Council? How did the apostles respond to the flogging? – (Acts 5:33-42)

During the time of Jesus, in spite of the opposition of the majority of the leaders, there were some notable exceptions such as Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Gamaliel, who was – ... *a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people ...* (Acts 5:34). He addressed the Council, after asking that the apostles be removed. He argued powerfully from recent history, of the futility of trying to squash movements planned by men as with Theudas and Judas of Galilee who operated at the time of the census (see Acts 5:36-38 c.f. Lk.2:2). He warned that – *if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God"* (Acts 5:39). The apostles were released after a flogging. However, far from being discouraged – *they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name* (Acts 5:41). The infant church continued to worship at the temple and from house to house – *And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ* (Acts 5:42). Far from rebelling against their Jewish heritage, they considered that they were the true expression of the faith of their forefathers. They kept the fires of their faith alive from house to house (Acts 2:42). It is hard to stamp out house churches and home fellowships.

DAY 9

Read: Acts 6:1-15

THE IMPACT OF SEVEN GODLY MEN CHOSEN TO OVERSEE PRACTICAL NEEDS OF THE CHURCH.

Q.1. Why did the apostles delegate the practical ministry to others? What were their qualifications? How were they appointed? How did the apostles understand their roles? (Acts 6:1-6)

Satan is always trying to stir up strife in the church. So, not surprisingly, there was disunity in the church between the Greek-speaking Jewish widows, and the Hebrew-speaking widows. Disagreement arose – ... *because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food* (Acts 6:1). The apostles refused to be distracted, since they had a commission from Christ. They explained – 2 ... *“it is not desirable for us to neglect the Word of God in order to serve tables ... 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word”* (Acts 6:2 & 4). Interestingly the congregation was directed by the apostles to – ... *select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task* (Acts 6:3). The people chose seven men who were then set apart by the apostles (see Acts 6:5-6). These men represented all the culture groups that made up the congregation. There was nothing to suggest that the apostles thought it was beneath their dignity to serve at tables.

Q.2. How did God bless this division of roles? Where did they minister? Does it surprise you that many priests were coming to Christ? – (Acts 6:7)

After the trouble between the widows was resolved, God again gave success to the church – The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7). We learn that unity is one of the greatest factors in church growth. The apostles were still operating primarily in Jerusalem. It has been suggested

that the church grew to one hundred thousand or more. On the surface, it may be surprising that many priests embraced the Christian faith. However, Jesus had opened the minds of His disciples to understand the Old Testament Scriptures. These insights were simple and transferable. The priests came in great numbers, in spite of the opposition from Judaism. To this point the church was totally Jewish, apart from a few proselytes.

Q.3. Did Stephen restrict himself to practical ministry? With whom did He share? How well was he received? What impact did Stephen have? – (Acts 6:8-15)

Churches tend to focus on the practical abilities of people, when appointing deacons. However, the apostles appointed – *men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom* (Acts 6:3). These men were not confined to practical ministry alone, as we learn from the stories of two of them – *Stephen, the first martyr, and Philip, the evangelist. We read that – Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people* (Acts 6:8). His compassion spilled over to the liberal Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia. He began to share the gospel powerfully – *But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking* (Acts 6:10). They dragged him before the Sanhedrin and falsely accused him (see Acts 6:11-14). However, Stephen was irrepressible – *... all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel* (Acts 6:15).

DAY 10

Read: Acts 7:1-38

STEPHEN BRINGS LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S HISTORY TO THE COUNCIL.

Q.1. How did Stephen interact with the Council? What did his quotations reveal about God? What is the nature of God's relationship with Abraham and his descendants? – (Acts 7:1-8)

The High Priest asked if the accusation that Jesus would alter the customs of Moses, was true (see Acts 7:1 c.f. 6:13-14). In response, Stephen gave the Council a history lesson supported by copious quotes from their Scriptures. This would make it hard to dismiss him summarily. He presented God as sovereign over the father of their faith, Abraham, as well as the patriarchs and his descendants. He reminded them of how the Lord so gripped the life of Abraham that he fully trusted God, even though this was based on future promises (see Acts 7:2-5). God gave Abraham and his descendants the Covenant of Circumcision and predicted a difficult journey that would bring them into slavery in Egypt (see Acts 7:6-8). Stephen's audience would find no disagreement thus far.

Q.2. What did Joseph's life teach us about God's plan for His children? Why did Jacob and his children have to go to Egypt? – (Acts 7:9-16 c.f. 7:6-7)

Even after Abraham was long gone, God never forgot His promises about the land and their captivity, that would forge them into a nation – *And whatever nation to which they will be in bondage I Myself will judge,' said God, and after that they will come out and serve Me in this place.'* ... *Then Joseph sent word and invited his father Jacob, and all his relatives to come to him. There were seventy-five persons in all.* (Acts 7:7 &14). This God accomplished, by making him Governor over Egypt, and proving that God plans and directs the lives of His servants (see Acts 7:9-15).

Q.3. What made the release of Israel from Egypt improbable? How did God prepare Moses for his role as deliverer? Why did Moses have to flee? – (Acts 7:17-29)

Stephen wanted the leaders to understand the improbability of the freeing of the Hebrews, and to make it clear that God was always in total control – 17 *“But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, 18 until there arose another king over Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph (Acts 7:17-18 c.f. Gen.15:13-16). God was preparing His instrument – Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds (see Acts 7:22). However, in an aborted attempt to lead his people, Moses became a murderer and needed to flee for his life (see Acts 7:23-29).*

Q.4. How did God regain his attention? How did God describe Himself? What task did God give Moses? How did Stephen apply the rejection of Moses by the people? – (Acts 7:30-38)

Stephen then reminded the Council that Moses was called to bring salvation to his people, when God spoke to him – 32 *I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look ... 34 I have certainly seen the oppression of My people in Egypt and have heard their groans, and I have come down to rescue them; come now, and I will send you to Egypt’ (Acts 7:32 & 34).* The point Stephen made from this well-known story, was that Moses was neither believed nor esteemed as their leader – *“This Moses whom they disowned, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush (Acts 7:35). This Moses whom they now respected had furthermore foreshadowed the coming of another prophet (see Acts 7:37 c.f. Dt.18:15 & 18). History was simply repeating itself in their treatment of Jesus.*

DAY 11

Read: Acts 7:37-60

STEPHEN'S MESSAGE OFFENDS THE JEWS AND SO THEY MURDER HIM.

Q.1. How did Israel respond to the message of Moses? Why did God reject Israel's sacrifices? – (Acts 7:37-43)

Though Moses received – 38 ... living oracles to pass on to you. 39 Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt (Acts 7:38-39). Stephen reminded these leaders about Israel's terrible idolatry in the wilderness. He quoted the Scriptures, of which they would have been aware. God had given their disobedient fathers up. Stephen implied that these leaders were the same, and that God would treat them the same way (see Acts 7:41-43 c.f. Ps.95:7-11; Amos 5:25-27).

Q.2. Where did Moses get his design for the Tabernacle? Can God be confined to a human building? Why? (Acts 7:44-50 c.f. Is.66:1-2)

Stephen then told them that the Tabernacle was given to Moses as a pattern of the Heavenly one. Their attachment to the temple overlooked a fact that they knew only too well from Isaiah – *48 the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: 49 Heaven is My throne, and earth is the footstool of My feet; What kind of house will you build for Me?' says the Lord, or what place is there for My repose? 50 'Was it not My hand which made all these things?'* (Acts 7:48-50 c.f. Is.66:1-2). Stephen dismantled their reliance on rules and systems. This needed to be replaced by dependence on the living God.

Q.3. Why were the Jewish leaders so offended by Stephen? How do we know that Paul supported the killers? How did Stephen react to his murderers? Why? – (Acts 7:51-60)

Stephen accused the religious leaders of resisting the Holy Spirit and persecuting the prophets, exactly the same as the previous generations

had done. He then declared that the Righteous One, foretold by the prophets, had been betrayed and murdered by them. He even exposed their failure to keep the Law ordained by angels (see Acts 7:51-53). Their rage against Stephen boiled over. They covered their ears when Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit testified – ... *“Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God”* (Acts 7:56). The narrative gives us the first mention of Saul. It indicates that he was part of the group who killed Stephen (see Acts 7:58). Just as his Master did, Stephen prayed for his murderers (see Acts 7:60). Luke also shared some beautiful insights into the violent death of God’s servant: (i) Before he died, Stephen saw a vision of the glory of God (see Acts 7:55). (ii) He saw Jesus standing in readiness to receive him (see Acts 7:55-56). (iii) The stoning must have been agony, but Stephen simply fell asleep (see Acts 7:60). The death of believers lifts them to a new level of relationship, on earth and in Heaven (see Ps.116:15 c.f. Eph.1:20; 2:6).

DAY 12

Read: Acts 8:1-25

PERSECUTION SPREADS THE GOSPEL BEYOND TO SAMARIA THROUGH PHILIP.

Q.1. How did the church respond to the death of Stephen? What was the result of the persecution that broke out against the church? What part did Saul play? – (Acts 8:1-4)

It is ironic that religion can be so hostile toward other believers. This was all the more difficult for believers to accept, since the gospel flowed out of Judaism built on the Old Testament revelation. The apostles had been beaten. However, Stephen was the first to be martyred. The stoning of Stephen devastated the church. It also heralded a turning point in the escalation of persecution. Saul's part was irrational, as he ravaged the church and dragged off believers from the privacy of their homes (see Acts 8:1-3 c.f. 1 Tim.1:12-13). However, like trying to stamp out a fire, the persecution actually spread the flame – ... *and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles ... Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word* (Acts 8:1c & 4). According to Jesus, the gospel was to have been proclaimed – ... *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth* (1:8). Persecution brought about obedience to Christ's wider plan. Luke records that the apostles stayed home at Jerusalem. This was a lay movement.

Q.2. Who was Philip? What was odd about his response to the persecution? What difference did his ministry make to the city of Samaria? – (Acts 8:5-8 c.f. 6:5; Jn.4:9; 8:48)

Philip was one of the seven, chosen to be a server at Jerusalem. After the persecution, he was the first missionary. He eventually settled at Caesarea, where Paul stayed with his four prophetess daughters – ... *entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him* (Acts 6:5; 21:8-9). Jews and Samaritans did not normally relate, so when the Jewish leaders called Jesus a Samaritan, it was meant

as a gross insult (see Jn.4:9; 8:48). However, Christ had gripped Phillip's heart, so he crossed the cultural barriers erected by men. His preaching of Christ, accompanied by signs and wonders brought – ... *much rejoicing in that city* (Acts 8:8 c.f. 8:5).

Q.3. What reputation did Simon, the Magician have? What drew him to the preaching of Philip? How did Simon reveal his true colours? – (Acts 8:9-19)

Simon practiced magic and was highly influential – claiming to be someone great (Acts 8:9). In fact – 10 ... from smallest to greatest, they were giving attention to him, saying, “This man is what is called the Great Power of God.” 11 And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts (Acts 8:10-11). Simon attached himself to Philip, because he was impressed with his undeniable signs and wonders ... and the response of the masses. It is reported that – Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed (Acts 8:13). However, the evidence shows that Simon was touched by the sensational signs, rather than the gospel of salvation. When Peter and John ministered at Samaria, Simon offered money, in order to gain the power that marked Philip and Peter's ministries (see Acts 8:18-19).

Q.4. Why did the apostles send Peter and John to Samaria? How did God confirm the inclusion of the Samaritans into the church? Why did Peter withstand Simon? – Acts 8:14-25 c.f. Mt.16:19; Jn.20:23)

The gospel was always intended for all nations (see Mt.28:19; Mk.16:15; Acts 1:8; Gen.12:3; 22:18). During His time on earth, Jesus had made Peter and the apostles the custodians of the gospel (see Mt.16:19; Jn.20:23). In order for the church to be one, the apostles had to embrace, give their stamp of approval, and extend the hand of fellowship beyond Jerusalem. God withheld the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit from the Samaritans, until the apostles' representatives, Peter and John had laid their hands on them (see Acts 8:14-17). God gave them special discernment. In the process, Peter exposed the unbroken heart of Simon the magician saying – 20 ... “*May your silver perish with you, because you*

thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you (Acts 8:20-22). We don't know what happened to Simon. Philip continued to do the work of an evangelist in the villages of the Samaritans (see Acts 8:25)

DAY 13

Read: Acts 8:26-40

GOD CONTINUES TO USE PHILIP, THE EVANGELIST BEYOND JERUSALEM.

Q.1. What made Philip leave Samaria and go to south of Jerusalem? Who was the man whom he met along the desert road? What did the Holy Spirit tell him to do? – (Acts 8:26-29)

It is interesting that the Holy Spirit would call Philip away from a revival that he had been instrumental in starting, to a solitary man on a desert track (see Acts 8:26-27). This underscores the truth that God considers individual people to be precious in His sight (see Jn.4:7, 27-30; 5:5-6). Just as the Samaritan woman had a great impact amongst the Samaritans, this Ethiopian eunuch had great influence, as – *... a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship* (Acts 8:27). The Holy Spirit prompted Philip to join this chariot (see Acts 8:29).

Q.2. What was the man doing and what was he reading? How did Philip share the gospel? From where did he get his information? – (Acts 8:30-35)

As it happened, the eunuch was pondering over the section in the scroll of Isaiah chapter 53 that spoke of the Suffering Servant. Though this passage was traditionally interpreted by rabbis as referring to Israel's suffering (and still is today – 2 Cor.4:3-4), the Holy Spirit was calling this view into question. – *Then Philip opened his mouth and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him* (Acts 8:35). The New Testament Scriptures had not yet been written. Philip used the Old Testament to reveal Christ to the eunuch. This is a powerful reminder that we should familiarize ourselves with the whole Bible in order to present the gospel. Just as a tree and its roots are nourished by the same sap, so the same crimson thread runs through the Old and New Testaments. It has been observed that (i) The New is in the Old concealed – The Old is in the

New revealed. (ii) The New is in the Old contained – the Old is in the New explained.

Q.3. What made Philip baptize the eunuch? How did he baptize him? What impact did the baptism have on the eunuch? Where did Philip go and what did he do? – (Acts 8:36-40)

Doubtless, the eunuch, as a Jewish proselyte, would have been familiar with baptism. He responded to the gospel and had now embraced faith in Christ. When they came upon a stream, he asked Philip to baptize him into Jesus Christ. This would demonstrate to his entourage that he was now a follower of Jesus. Philip, who was part of the first church, did not just symbolically baptize the eunuch but Dr Luke records that – *38 ... they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him but went on his way rejoicing* (Acts 8:38-39). This act of surrender brought rejoicing. Philip was snatched away as mysteriously as he appeared – *But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through, he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea* (Acts 8:40 c.f. Acts 21:8-9). He did not return to the persecuted church in Jerusalem but settled in Caesarea. NOTE: Acts 8:37 was in the Greek manuscripts of the Textus Receptus, from which The Luther Bible, William Tyndale's Bible, and the King James Bible (1611) were produced. Though many preachers in the past gave great sermons based on Acts 8:37, the verse did not appear in earlier manuscripts, so is not included in the Majority Text that is used in modern translations of the Bible. However, the verse is totally supported by the rest of the N.T. which endorses the later manuscript in which – *Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may'. And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God'.*

DAY 14

Read: Acts 9:1-19

GOD SAVES SAUL AND COMMISSIONS HIM TO PREACH TO THE GENTILE NATIONS.

Q.1. What was Saul's mission? Who was he persecuting? How did God turn his life around? Were his companions aware of Saul's encounter? – (Acts 9:1-9 c.f. Acts 22:6-11)

Saul's hatred for Christians and their persecution had become his passion in life. He gained authority from the high priest – ... *so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem* (Acts 9:2). However, the story of Saul's conversion revealed that the real battle was an inner one against Jesus, Whom he dramatically met on his way to Damascus – *and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"* (Acts 9:4). That day the One Who is the Light of the World blinded him, in order to remove all other distractions, as he faced the ultimate reality of the risen Christ (see Acts 9:3-9 c.f. Jn.8:12). Paul's companions – *saw the light to be sure but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me* (Acts 22:9 c.f. Acts 9:7). As did the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul grappled with a different explanation of the Scriptures (see Acts 9:8-9 c.f. Acts 8:32-35).

Q.2. Why did Ananias protest when he was commanded to minister to Saul? What new mission was Saul given? What would it involve? – (Acts 9:10-16)

Damascus was located north of Israel in Syria, on the trade route between Egypt and Asia Minor. A large group of Jews resided there, including many who had converted to Christ. God spoke in a vision to a disciple named Ananias and commanded him to minister to Saul of Tarsus – *for he is praying* (Acts 9:11). Saul was well known to Ananias and the other disciples at Damascus. His rampage against the Jerusalem church, that had now spread to Damascus were well known. However, the Lord unfolded to His servant, Ananias the plans He had for Saul – ... *"Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and*

kings and the sons of Israel (Acts 9:15). The Lord told Ananias that it would not be an easy mission for Saul – *for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake* (Acts 9:16). Just as Saul had inflicted pain on the church, he would experience the same.

Q.3. How did Ananias greet Saul? What ministry did he render to Saul? What follow-up did Saul receive? Where did Saul fellowship? – (Acts 9:17-20)

Ananias heeded the heavenly vision, put aside his personal misgivings, and greeted Saul as a brother in Christ. He laid his hands on him and accepted that God had indeed spoken to him (see Acts 9:17 c.f. 1 Jn.5:1-2). The risen Christ had given Ananias two important tasks – ... *the Lord Jesus ... has sent me so that you may regain your sight and ... be filled with the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 9:17). After Saul miraculously regained his sight, he was baptized and given food to sustain him (see Acts 9:18-19). He fellowshiped with the believers in the Damascus church for several days. As well, he immediately went to the synagogues around Damascus, declaring that Jesus – *is the Son of God* (Acts 9:19-20). It is clear that the process leading to his conversion had been long, as he pondered the witness and explanation of the Christian believers. The Damascus church encouraged Saul in his faith. No one could stop him from preaching in the synagogues and any Jews he met (Acts 9:20-22).

DAY 15

Read: Acts 9:19-43

PETER BRINGS HEALING AND SPREADS THE GOSPEL BEYOND JERUSALEM.

Q.1. What change was there in Saul after he met Christ? Where did he share the Gospel? How did he escape his assassins? – (Acts 9:19-25 c.f. 2 Cor.11:32-33)

Saul had a dramatic conversion. He had obviously been mulling over the substance of the gospel that Stephen and his other captives had tried to share. Now converted, he was a man on a mission. He headed straight to the synagogues, intending to open their eyes to the truth about Jesus – *He is the Son of God ... and ... proving that this Jesus is the Christ* (Acts 9:20 & 22). However, there were Jews out there as vehemently opposed to the gospel as he had been – *32 In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, 33 and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands* (2 Cor.11:32-33 c.f. Acts 9:23-25). This was a humiliating experience for the proud Pharisee. It was also a prelude for what was to come.

Q.2. Why were the Jerusalem believers cautious about Saul? How were their fears calmed? Why was he sent to Tarsus? How did Saul's conversion impact the church? – (Acts 9:26-31)

After the persecution, the believers scattered beyond Jerusalem. There was soon a heightened awareness of the threats against Christians by Saul (see Acts 8:1-4). It took a highly regarded man to turn the tide of opinion – *But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus* (Acts 9:27). With Saul soundly converted, his arguments were unstoppable. Once again, his opponents – *were attempting to put him to death* (Acts 9:29). However, the leaders helped him to escape, firstly to Caesarea, and then to his hometown of Tarsus (see Acts 9:30 c.f. Acts

9:11; 11:25). Like many new converts, Saul had been too confrontational. This had stirred up more opposition against the Christian disciples. However, after Saul left, it was actually recorded – *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase* (Acts 9:31). God has uniquely gifted every individual, and blesses His work, regardless of the personalities involved (see Acts 8:26, 40).

Q.3. How was Peter used to extend the infant church? What kind of a woman was Tabitha? What impact had she made? How was Peter used to comfort the saints at Joppa? – (Acts 9:32-43 c.f. Acts 5:12-16; Heb.2:3-4)

God enabled Peter to perform extra-ordinary miracles, in order to confirm his message – 3 ... After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will (Heb.2:3-4 c.f. Acts 9:32-35, 40-42). Many people in Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa were impacted by the gospel, and turned to the Lord (see Acts 9:35, 42). Tabitha (Greek: Dorcas) was a great contributor to the church in Joppa – ... this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died (Acts 9:36-37). The widows were devastated by her passing and called for Peter – ... all the widows stood beside him, weeping, and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them (Acts 9:39). God, through Peter, then raised this dead lady to life, and gave her back to the church (see Acts 9:37 c.f. 9:41).

DAY 16

Read: Acts 10:1-48

GOD USES PETER TO INGRAFT THE GENTILES INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD.

Q.1. What kind of a man was Cornelius? Why was he visited by an angelic messenger? What message was he given? How did this relate to God's gospel plan? – (Acts 10:1-8 c.f. 1:8)

Cornelius was a Roman centurion – a devout man and one who feared God with all his household and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually (Acts 10:2). He was generous and godly, and as a Jewish proselyte, would have had a knowledge of the Scriptures. God sent an angel to him, because – ...Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God (Acts 10:4 c.f. Rev.8:3-4). He was given specific instructions to send for the apostle Peter. Connected to Judaism, Cornelius was still in darkness. God was going to miraculously open up the gospel to the Gentiles through him and his family. All this was in keeping with Christ's commission to the apostles (Mt.28:19-20; Acts 1:8).

Q.2. How did God prepare Peter for his mission? What was Peter's response to God's command? What explanation did God give? – (Acts 10:9-16)

At this time, Peter had no intention of sharing the gospel with the Gentiles. He had been praying at midday and was hungry. As he was dozing off, God spoke to Peter in a vision, challenging his prejudice against the Gentiles. This came via a dream in which Peter was urged to kill and eat unclean animals. He responded that he had never eaten anything unholy and unclean (see Acts 10:9-14). However, God told him – ... *"What God has cleansed, you must no longer consider unholy"* (Acts 10:15). Since the message God wanted Peter to accept was so significant, the dream was repeated three times.

Q.3. Did Peter understand the vision? How did God further direct him? What was unusual about Peter's response to these Gentiles? – (Acts 10:17-23)

At first the vision confused Peter. Then – 19 While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. 20 But get up, go downstairs, and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself” (Acts 10:19-20). The three men sent by Cornelius explained about their master, and the mission given them by the angel. Peter now grasped the message and gave hospitality to the Gentiles (see Acts 10:22-23). Later, those of the circumcision would disagree with Peter over this issue (see Acts 11:2-3).

Q.4. What made Peter accept the Gentile delegation? How did he explain his break with Jewish prejudice? Why did Cornelius invite Peter? – (Acts 10:22-33)

The delegation convinced Peter that Cornelius had received a divine visitation, in much the same way as he had (see Acts 10:22 c.f. 10:17). Peter accepted these men and gave them lodging. He would later be severely criticized for this (see Acts 11:2-3). Upon arriving at the home of Cornelius, Peter restated why he was willing to break with Jewish tradition regarding interaction with Gentiles – ... *“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean* (Acts 10:28). Cornelius then explained that an angelic messenger had told him that God was rewarding his faith, and he was to send for a man called Simon Peter. Hence, he had gathered his family, household, and friends to hear Peter's message (see Acts 10:30-33).

Q.5. What had Peter learned about God's dealing with the Gentile nations? What was the substance of Peter's message to the family gathering? – (Acts 10:34-43)

Peter had been given a dream which expanded his vision – 34 ... “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him (Acts 10:34-35). Cornelius was chosen, because he was – a devout man and one who feared God with all his household and gave many alms

to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually (Acts 10:2). Peter was able to build on Cornelius's understanding of the Jewish Scriptures, in order to present the gospel (see Acts 10:36). He added the well-known recent events concerning the life of Jesus Christ, culminating in His death on a cross (see Acts 10:38-39). To this Peter added the facts of the resurrection and its implication, namely – 42 ...that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. 43 Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:42-43). Now this Jesus is both Saviour and Judge.

Q.6. How did God ratify the inclusion of the Gentiles into His family? What was the nature of the tongues? How did Peter follow up the converts? – (Acts 10:44-48) =

God showed Peter and his brethren that the Gentiles were part of His plan and family, by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He had done before (see Acts 10:44-45 c.f. 2:1). What evidence did Peter and his Jewish companions have? The Holy Spirit came on them, just as He had done on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 10:45-47 c.f. 11:15-17). Luke recorded that the tongues were not unintelligible, but clearly understood to be exalting God in just the same way as on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 10:46 c.f. 2:6-11). Peter responded by calling on these converts to be baptized. He then encouraged them in their faith by staying on for several days more (see Acts 10:47-48).

DAY 17

Read: Acts 11:1-30

THE CHURCH REACHES OUT TO THE GENTILES
AFTER THE PERSECUTION.

Q.1. Did the Jerusalem Church endorse Peter's sharing with Gentiles? How did Peter convince them that God included Gentiles into His church? – (Acts 11:1-18)

When the other apostles and brethren heard that the Gentiles had received the Word of God through Peter, they took issue with him. Surely Peter would know that Jews did not associate with Gentiles! (see Acts 11:1-3 c.f. Jn.4:9). However, Peter was able to share in sequence the way God had intervened supernaturally repeating a vision, in order to open the door to the Gentiles. He connected this the words of Jesus that He would baptize with the Holy Spirit, and related – *And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning ... Therefore, if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?* (Acts 11:15 & 17). His testimony quietened them down. They glorified God, for His grace even extended to these 'outsiders' (see Acts 11:18 c.f. Acts 15:7-9).

Q.2. When did revival attend the scattered believers? What did the Jerusalem Church do about it? How did Barnabas bring about success? – (Acts 11:19-26) ... [NOTE: This passage connects to Acts 8:4]

Like the other Jewish believers, those scattered by the persecution continued their focus on Jews alone (see Acts 11:19). However, some Greek (from Cypress) and north African (from Cyrene) Jews of the dispersion – *20 began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord* (Acts 11:20-21). Revival broke out when these people followed Christ's original blueprint (see Mt.28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Once more, we observe the role of the Jerusalem Church (where the

apostles were located) in maintaining unity and the purity of the gospel (see Acts 11:22 c.f. 8:1; 15:2, 6, 22-23). They dispatched Barnabas to oversee the church at Antioch. He was successful, because he was a genuinely godly leader – *for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord* (Acts 11:24). When the church grew, Barnabas realized that he needed a competent co-worker. He sought out Saul from his hometown in Tarsus (later known as Paul). So great was their impact that the believers were given a nickname that we bear to this day – *and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch* (Acts 11:26).

Q.3. How did the churches stay connected? Was Agabus a true prophet? How did the Antioch Church respond to his prophecy? – (Acts 11:27-30 c.f. Dt.18:22)

There seemed to have been ongoing connection between the churches. This included the visit of a group of prophets from Jerusalem (see Acts 11:27). One of the prophets, named Agabus, was influential in the church because his predictions came to pass (see Acts 11:28; 21:10 c.f. Dt.18:22). In response to his prophecy about – *a great famine all over the world ... the believers at Antioch decided to take relief to their brethren living in Judea* (Acts 11:29-30). This indicated that they were effectively connected to the ‘mother’ church, and that they had taken to heart the practical implication of embracing the world-wide gospel and the practice of the New Commandment (see Acts 1:8; Jn 13:34-35).

DAY 18

Read: Acts 12:1-25

THE DEATH OF JAMES AND RELEASE OF PETER FROM HEROD'S HATRED.

Q.1. What prompted Herod to have Peter arrested? What did the church do about it? How likely was his escape? – (Acts 12:1-6)

King Herod was an Idumean, whose ancestry traced back to Esau's grandson, Amalek. As did all the Herod's, he had a deep-seated hatred for Christ and the people of God (see Acts 12:1 c.f. Mt.2:13-18). When he saw that it pleased the Jews to kill James, one of the Zebedee brothers, he turned his attention on another key apostle, Peter (see Acts 12:2-3). Peter was arrested and put into prison. Prisons were very secure. Herod assigned four squads of soldiers to guard Peter. Meanwhile, the church fervently prayed for his release (see Acts 12:4-5).

Q.2. What was unusual about Peter's release from prison? Was the response of the praying believers normal? – (Acts 12:7-17)

When he was miraculously released from prison by an angel, it took a while for Peter himself to believe it – ... *and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision* (Acts 12:9). Peter then found his way to – ... *where many were gathered together and were praying* (Acts 12:12). After the untimely murder of James, the praying saints could not get their heads around Peter's release. Rhoda, the maid, was so excited that she raced in to tell the gathered church ... and left Peter standing out in the cold (see Acts 12:13-14 c.f. 12:8). Eventually, they opened the door after Peter continued knocking. They didn't believe Rhoda's testimony and concluded that it may have been Peter's angel. Their response to the circumstances was typical of how people respond to the unexpected.

Q.3. How did Herod respond to the soldiers' explanation? Under what circumstances did King Herod meet his end? – (Acts 12:18-23)

The soldiers were frantic when they discovered that Peter was missing. Their explanations were dismissed by Herod. They paid for their 'irresponsibility', with execution (see Acts 12:18-19). History confirms the bloodthirstiness of Herod. The cities on the far reaches of his empire had fallen out with him, but fortunately they had won over the king's chamberlain to plead their case. They were merchants who relied for their food from the king's country (see Acts 12:20). Herod loved himself, his power, and his own voice. But Herod would soon see his demise. While delivering an address – ... *an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died* (Acts 12:23).

Q.4. How successful was opposition against the church? What was the mission of Barnabas and Saul? Who was John Mark? (Acts 12:24-25 c.f. 11:30; 12:12)

It was recorded that the effect of the initial persecution, was to spread the gospel (see Acts 8:1-4; 11:19-21). The same happened again after James was martyred. It is recorded – *but the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied* (Acts 12:24). Barnabas and Saul returned from their food distribution mission to Jerusalem. They brought John Mark with them (see Acts 12:25 c.f. 11:26, 30). Barnabas was John Mark's uncle. The prayer meeting for Peter's release in Jerusalem was at the home of Mary, John Mark's mother (see Acts 12:12 c.f. 15:37-39).

DAY 19

Read: Acts 13:1-31

THE FIRST EVANGELISTIC MISSION OF BARNABAS AND SAUL.

Q.1. What was significant about the call of Barnabas and Saul to missionary service? Why was the church's endorsement crucial? Who was in charge of the mission? Who made up the team? Where did they start their mission? (Acts 13:1-5).

The call of Barnabas and Saul to spread the Gospel was a combination of the Holy Spirit's direction, and the church's desire to do whatever God wanted (see Acts 13:1-2). The church's leaders at Antioch were from far-ranging places, such as Jerusalem and Cyrene in North Africa. They were also from different socio-economic circumstances. Interestingly, they were called to commission and send out the best of their prophets and teachers. This was immediately following a special time of prayer and fasting. This gave the church planters assurance that the sending church would support them with fervent prayers (see Acts 13:3). Barnabas led the team. It included Saul and John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (see Col.4:10). They likely began in Cyprus, because their converts were among the first to take the gospel to the Gentiles after the persecution in Jerusalem (see Acts 11:19-21). It would be their practice – *to proclaim the Word of God in the synagogue of the Jews first* (see Acts 13:5). These Jews in the synagogues were well grounded in the Scriptures. Therefore, it was easier for the apostles to explain how Christ had fulfilled the prophecies of their Scriptures written from ancient times (see Lk.24:26-27, 44-46).

Q.2. Does it surprise you that there was opposition? How was it dealt with? How do we account for this? How did this promote the Gospel? – (Acts 13:6-12 c.f. 2 Cor.12:11-13) =

One thing we can count on, is opposition to the Gospel. Not surprisingly, at Paphos, a Jewish false prophet tried to undermine their ministry to the proconsul, Sergius Paulus – But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from

the faith (Acts 13:8). Saul withstood him and – 9 ... filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, 10 and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? (Acts 13:9-10). Elymas was then struck blind for a season – Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord (Acts 13:12). When God broke through supernaturally, as He did here, Luke made it clear that this extraordinary event was caused by God Himself, and not by any man described as being ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’. It was recorded that Saul was also known as Paul. From this time, he was called by that name (c.f. Acts 13:9). From this time onwards, Paul was also recognized as the key leader of the team (c.f. Acts 13:13, 42 etc).

Q.3. What is the lesson of John Mark’s leaving? How well were the men received by the synagogue? Who took the lead in preaching the Gospel? – (Acts 13:13-16 c.f. 15:36-41) =

We don’t know exactly why Mark left, but Paul felt strongly about his desertion. This later caused a serious rift between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:13 c.f. 15:38). The synagogue officials at Pisidian Antioch gave them open access to bring an exhortation. Paul took up the offer with relish (Acts 13:14-16).

Q.4. How did Paul review the history of Israel? What insights did he give about David? Would they have known about the ministry of John the Baptist? What happened to the One heralded by John? What amazing claim did Paul make about Jesus? – (Acts 13:17-31) =

Paul summarized the birth of the nation, their wilderness journeys, and eventual settlement into the Promised Land. He passed quickly over Samuel the prophet and King Saul and focused on King David. He highlighted David’s credentials from his divine calling – ... concerning whom He also testified and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.’ (Acts 13:22). He added the identity of the Promised One through David – from the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus (Acts 13:23). It is clear that they were well informed about John the Baptist. Paul reminded them that John pointed the people to Jesus Christ

(Acts 13:24-25). He charged the Jews and their leaders with ignorance of the prophecies regarding Jesus. Because of this, they had Jesus put to death – when they carried out all that was written concerning Him (Acts 13:29 c.f. 13:26-29). Paul then made the staggering claim that – 30 But God raised Him from the dead; 31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people (Acts 13:30-31). This was news indeed.

DAY 20

Read: Acts 13:32-52

PAUL PREACHES TO THE JEWS AND THEN TURNS TO THE GENTILES.

Q.1. How did Paul support the claim that the gospel relates to Israel? How did he argue for the resurrection? What are the benefits of the gospel? – (Acts 13:32-41)

Throughout his message, Paul related the gospel to the Jewish Scriptures. Christ was the One promised, and He fulfilled the promises – *32 we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus* (Acts 13:32-33). Paul argued from Ps.2:7; Is.55:3 & Ps.16:10 that the promises to David actually related to God's Son, Jesus. The prophecies could not apply to David since he died and has undergone decay (see Acts 13:33-36). Paul contended about Jesus, that – *37 He whom God raised did not undergo decay. 38 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you* (Acts 13:37-38). The law was powerless to liberate, but – *through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses* (Acts 13:39).

Q.2. What did the people at Pisidian Antioch think of the Gospel? How did Paul deal with the opposing Jews? How did he support his actions? – (Acts 13:40-47)

After Paul used Habakkuk 1:5 to warn the people against scoffing at the Gospel, many desired to hear more. However, soon many of the devout Jews undermined the message of Paul. Therefore, he and Barnabas made a clear choice – *46 ... and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, that You may bring salvation to the end of the earth'* (Acts 13:46-47). This was a

quotation that they knew very well, which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet (see Isa.42:6; 49:6).

Q.3. How did the Gentiles react? What enabled many to come to Christ? Why did the team go to Iconium? What impact did the gospel make? – (Acts 13:48-52)

The Jews had scoffed at and repudiated the gospel. Not so the Gentiles present – ... *they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord. And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region* (Acts 13:48-49). Small wonder. These Gentiles had already humbly sought deliverance through believing the gospel – *and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed* (Acts 13:48). How does anyone come to Christ? We must be chosen in Christ from the foundation of the world and appointed to everlasting life (see Eph.1:4-5). We must respond to Him in repentance and faith. This is a great mystery, but all glory belongs to our God. The Jews stirred up strife and drove Paul and Barnabas on to the city of Iconium. However, the gospel thrilled and transformed all who embraced the message – *And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit* (Acts 13:52).

DAY 21

Read: Acts 14:1-28

THE GOSPEL PREVAILS IN SPITE OF AND IN THE MIDST OF PERSECUTION.

Q.1. How did God assist Paul and Barnabas to preach the gospel? What was the response like? Why did the evangelists leave for other cities? – (Acts 14:1-7)

Paul and Barnabas spoke convincingly in the synagogue, and large numbers of both Jews and Greeks came to Christ. So – they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands (Acts 14:3). However, some Jews undermined their ministry. The city was divided, and threats were made against them. Paul and Barnabas had to flee to the surrounding cities where – ... they continued to preach the gospel (Acts 14:7). Not even signs and wonders convinced the people of Iconium.

Q.2. How did God demonstrate His power at Lystra? Did the healing help Paul and Barnabas in bringing the gospel? Why? – (Acts 14:8-18)

The people of Lystra worshipped the pagan gods Zeus and Hermes (see Acts 14:12-13). There was a lame man who had never walked, whom Paul healed (see Acts 14:8-10). The sensationalized crowds cried out – ... *The gods have become like men and have come down to us* (Acts 14:11). They even wanted to make sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, who found it hard to restrain the people. Sadly, the healing took the focus from the gospel (see Acts 14:13-18).

Q.3. What was the response to the gospel? What miracle happened at Lystra? Why did they return to the cities that rejected them? – (Acts 14:19-22)

The adulation of the people of Lystra was short lived. Persuaded by their enemies from Antioch and Iconium – ... *they stoned Paul and dragged him*

out of the city, supposing him to be dead (Acts 14:19). However, an amazing miracle took place – while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe (Acts 14:20). Some understand that Paul referred to this incident when writing to the Corinthians – I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven (2 Cor.12:2 c.f. 2 Cor.12:1-6). From Derbe, Paul and Barnabas returned to preach the gospel to the very cities that had mistreated them (see Acts 14:21-22).

Q.4. What follow-up did Paul and Barnabas give? How did they strengthen the churches? What did they do upon their return to Antioch? – (Acts 14:22-28)

The gospel was based on the Old Testament Scripture, and needed clear explanation, lest they return to their former religion of works (see Acts 15:1 c.f. Heb.2:1-4; 6:1-8). The converts needed encouragement to keep them faithful, amid opposition. The follow-up they were given was enlightening. They were –*strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”*(Acts 14:22). People who are not prepared to suffer ridicule and persecution for Christ, will not last long. In their haste to escape the murderous opposition, the church planters had been unable to form churches. Upon their return – *When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed* (Acts 14:23). For the church to survive, there needed to be recognized leaders. Later, the missionaries returned to the church at Antioch that had commissioned and prayed for them. They reported – *... all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles* (Acts 14:27). Antioch was able to enjoy the fruits of their combined labours (see 1 Sam.30:23-25).

DAY 22

Read: Acts 15:1-35

THE JERUSALEM CHRISTIANS CLARIFY THE GOSPEL FOR THE GENTILES.

Q.1. What objection was raised by the Jewish believers from Judea? How did the Antioch Church propose to break the deadlock? How was their report received? – (Acts 15:1-5)

There were Jewish believers from the tradition of the Pharisees, who added to the gospel proclaimed to the Gentiles. They taught – *1 ... Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved ... 5 It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses* (Acts 15:1 & 5). This brought much contention and debate. To break the deadlock, the church decided to seek for a ruling from the ‘mother’ church and sent representatives – *... to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue* (Acts 15:2). On the way, Paul and Barnabas were – *... describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles and were bringing great joy to all the brethren* (Acts 15:3). They then arrived at the church in Jerusalem and laid their concerns before the apostles and prophets (see Acts 15:4-5).

Q.2. Who was responsible to preserve the apostles’ doctrine? What testimony did Peter add to the discussion? How did he understand the gospel? – (Acts 15:6-11)

Some of the apostles were still alive. God kept them in Jerusalem, in spite of persecution, to establish the truth of the gospel (see Acts 8:1). They were joined by the elders of the Jerusalem church who were the new generation of leaders committed to holding fast to the truth (see Acts 15:6 c.f. Acts 20:28-32). The nature of the gospel was hotly debated. Then Peter once more shared the testimony of his vision from God (see Acts 10:9-16), and the resultant transformation of the Gentiles (see Acts 10:34-48), which had been accompanied by the same signs they experienced at Pentecost (see Acts 15:7-9). He opposed placing rules on the new believers, that the Israelites themselves had failed to keep. –

Since we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are (see Acts 15:11).

Q.3. What was the impact of the testimony of Barnabas and Paul? How did James support the other speakers? How was the issue resolved? – (Acts 15:12-22)

The testimony of the respected Barnabas, as well as Paul's report of God's endorsement of their ministry to the Gentiles, made its mark. James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, then summed up. He stated that the new direction of including the Gentiles had been given to Peter and was supported by the Old Testament Scriptures in Amos 9:11-12, and the other prophets. In deference to Jewish believers, and so as not to cause division, he proposed – *that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood* (Acts 15:20). This ruling was ratified by the whole church. A letter was sent to Antioch, along with some leading men of their number to report on the outcome of this historic Jerusalem Council (see Acts 15:22).

Q.4. How were Paul and Barnabas perceived by the leaders? What was their new commission? What restrictions were placed on the Gentiles? – (Acts 15:22-29)

The Jerusalem church distanced themselves from the Judaizers. They commended Barnabas and Paul as – *men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Acts 15:26). The Jerusalem church was represented by Judas and Silas, who were to share the ruling to the Gentile converts, with the proviso – *that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication ...* (Acts 15:29).

Q.5. How was the letter received by the believers at Antioch? What was the role of Judas and Silas? How was the church in Antioch strengthened? – (Acts 15:30-35)

The decision brought tremendous joy (see Acts 15:31). Judas and Silas – ... *being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message* (Acts 15:32). Silas stayed and joined Paul and Barnabas in establishing the church at Antioch (see Acts 15:34-35). Unity

between believers, and clarity of understanding the truth, always result in much joy and growth.

DAY 23

Read: Acts 15:36-41; Acts 16:1-15

CONFLICT AND CONFUSION BEFORE GOD GAVE THE MACEDONIAN VISION AND CALL.

Q.1. What complicated the return visits to the newly established churches? In what way was the parting bad? Was there anything good about the outcome? – (Acts 15:36-41)

Barnabas agreed to join Paul on a return visit to the churches that they had established previously. However, Paul sharply disagreed with the determination of Barnabas to take John Mark along, since he had previously deserted them (see Acts 15:36-38). They had a bad fall-out. Barnabas parted, taking with him John Mark – *But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord* (Acts 15:40). God doubtless used the disagreement to bring about change in John Mark. Later, he wrote the Gospel of Mark. It is believed that Peter teamed up with him in this project. In time, John Mark also became useful to Paul (see Col.4:10; 2 Tim.4:11). Sad though the disagreement was, it resulted in two excellent teams committed to taking the gospel to the churches in Asia Minor.

Q.2. What message did Paul and Silas bring to the churches? How did it impact on God's work? Who was Timothy? Did Timothy need to be circumcised? – (Acts 16:1-5)

One of the key purposes for their return was – ... delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe (Acts 16:4). The impact was significant – So the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number daily (Acts 16:5). At Lystra they found – 1 ... a disciple there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, 2 and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:1-2). To head off

potential trouble from Judaizers, Paul had Timothy circumcised, since it was known that his father was Greek (see Acts 16:3).

Q.3. What unusual measures did God take to lead the team to Macedonia? Who was their first convert there? How did she meet their needs? – (Acts 16:6-15)

Paul and Silas had their plans interrupted by God – 6 ... having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; 7 and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them (Acts 16:6-7). This was an important lesson in the need to be sensitivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. As they obeyed – 9 A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10 When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:9-10). Therefore, they went to Philippi and met – A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul (Acts 16:14). Her household came to Christ, and all were baptized. Paul and Silas lodged with her (see Acts 16:15).

DAY 24

Read: Acts 16:16-40

FIRST A SLAVE-GIRL AND THEN A JAILER'S HOUSEHOLD IS SAVED.

Q.1. Why did Paul resist the testimony of the slave-girl? How did her masters deceive the magistrates? Why were Paul and Silas beaten with rods? – (Acts 16:16-23)

On the surface, any support for the gospel seems acceptable (see Phil.1:15-18). However, someone under Satan's power like this, would inevitably spoil the testimony of Christ. Paul commanded the demons to come out of her (see Acts 16:16-18). This enraged those who had profited from her divination, so they dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates, falsely claiming that they were – *proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans* (Acts 16:21). Paul had set a slave-girl free. As a reward, the evangelists were beaten with rods and – *When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely* (Acts 16:23 c.f. 2 Cor.11:25).

Q.2. What were Paul and Silas doing in jail? What made a jail-break possible? How did the jailer respond? Why? – (Acts 16:23-27)

After their severe beating, they were thrown into the inner prison, and their feet fastened in stocks – all for rescuing a slave-girl (Acts 16:24). They responded by – *praying and singing hymns of praise to God* (Acts 16:25). At midnight, with their captive audience – *suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened* (Acts 16:26). Earthquakes usually bring carnage and destruction – this one liberated every prisoner and snapped the stocks. The jailer was under command. It was an offense punishable by death to let prisoners escape, so, assuming the prisoners had escaped – ... *he drew*

his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped (Acts 16:27).

Q.3. What made the jailer change his mind? How did Paul answer the jailer's question? What change took place in the jail? Who shared the blessing? – (Acts 16:25-34)

When Paul saw what the jailer was doing, he called out – ...”Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!”(Acts 16:28). The jailer, upon seeing the miracle – ... trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas ... and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:29-30). He doubtless had heard the singing. Now, observing the divine intervention, he recognized the God moment. Amid the rubble, both Paul and Silas gave him and his household the gospel, and – 31 They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house (Acts 16:31-32). The jailer's first act was to wash their wounds – something this hardened man had been unwilling to do after the severe beating of Paul and Silas. He also led his whole household to be baptized and then set food before them all. There was great rejoicing (see Acts 16:33-34). What a change the gospel makes.

Q.4. Why did Paul refuse to go quietly? How did the town leaders and police respond to the news? Where did Paul and Silas go? – (Acts 16:35-17:1)

The magistrates felt that they had made their point, and ordered for Paul and Silas to be released – But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! ... (Acts 16:37). Realizing their oversight, the city leaders were afraid and begged them to leave the city. However, Paul and Silas returned to stay and encourage the believers at Philippi. Then they went on to Thessalonica (see Acts 16:40-17:1).

DAY 25

Read: Acts 17:1-15

PAUL AND SILAS MINISTER IN THESSALONICA AND BEREIA.

Q.1. What was Paul's normal starting point in a new city? Was this the best place to start? What do we learn from the response to the gospel? – (Acts 17:1-5)

Paul invariably started at the Jewish synagogue, according to his custom. He knew that they met each Sabbath day, and that they knew the Scriptures. He also knew that they often attracted proselytes from other nationalities. This was undoubtedly the best place to begin (see Acts 17:1-2). He – *2 reasoned with them from the scriptures 3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ"* (Acts 17:2-3). As normal, there were two kinds of responses. Some of them were persuaded, including a – *... a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women* (Acts 17:4). However, jealousy on the part of some staunch Jews soon stirred up trouble (see Acts 17:5). This was to be expected.

Q.2. Why did they focus on Jason? What was their charge against the evangelists? What was the outcome? Why were Paul and Silas sent away? – (Acts 17:5-10)

Jason was criticised because he had welcomed the evangelists into his house (see Acts 17:5 & 7). Jews were monotheists, so were hostile to Caesar and Roman rule. The resistance of the Jews to the gospel was hypocritical, when they accused the evangelists of acting – *... contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus* (Acts 17:7). Their impact had been enormous – *... These men who have upset the world ...* (Acts 17:6). Their opponents managed to stir up the crowds. The city authorities took a pledge to ensure that they kept the peace. The believers sent Paul and Silas away for their own safety (see Acts 17:10).

Q.3. Where did Paul and Silas go? How did the Bereans respond? From where did opposition come? Where was the team forced to flee? – (Acts 17:10-15)

Paul and Silas moved up the coast to Berea. They were well received, because – these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11). The response was significant, when – many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men (Acts 17:12). However, Paul was soon forced to flee the hostile Jews who had come from Thessalonica (see Acts 17:13). Silas and Timothy stayed out of sight, but Paul was escorted on to Athens (see Acts 17:14-15).

DAY 26

Read: Acts 17:16-34

PAUL EXPLAINS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

Q.1. How was Paul affected by idols at Athens? How did he pass his time there? What was he proclaiming? Why was there an interest in Paul's message? – (Acts 17:16-21)

Paul was provoked by the idolatry of Athens. He probably felt very alone. It was not that he considered the idols to have any relevance, but the worship of these revealed the utter darkness of these people, who thought they were sophisticated (see Acts 17:16, 21 c.f. 1 Cor.8:4-6). He was therefore – ... *reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present* (Acts 17:17). This particularly attracted the Greek philosophers: Epicureanism attacked superstition and denied divine intervention and Stoicism urged its followers to shun pleasure and fatalistically accept pain. These groups were eager to engage Paul – ... *this idle babbler – and proclaimer of strange deities,*”–because he was *preaching Jesus and the resurrection* (Acts 17:18). Were they truly interested? Probably not, because they just loved discussing any new philosophy with anyone.

Q.2. How did Paul connect with his audience? Why did he consider idolatry futile? What claim does God place on all mankind? Are we all His children? – (Acts 17:22-29)

Paul connected with the people by focusing on one of the altars – *TO AN UNKNOWN GOD*. He provoked their interest by declaring – ... *Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you* (Acts 17:23). He pointed out the uselessness of idols, by asserting – *The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands* (Acts 17:24 c.f. Acts 17:29). God needs no material offerings from mankind since – *He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having*

determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation (Acts 17:26). We are all connected through that One Man and are potentially His children (see Acts 17:27-29). Paul will explain.

Q.3. Why is ignorance no longer acceptable? What does the resurrection of Christ prove? How should we respond? How did they respond? – (Acts 17:30-34)

Since we are made by God, He makes a claim on our lives – Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent (Acts 17:30). The urgent reason is that – He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). These Greek philosophers offered no hope beyond the grave. However, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead proves that there is life after death for all who place their trust in Him. Most brushed the gospel aside – But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris and others with them (Acts 17:34).

DAY 27

Read: Acts 18:1-28

PAUL ENJOYS A SUSTAINED MINISTRY AT CORINTH.

THE MINISTRIES OF PAUL, PRISCILLA, AQUILA,
AND APOLLOS.

Q.1. Why were Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth? What drew Paul to them? What was Paul's focus while at Corinth? – (Acts 18:1-4)

God first used Jewish zealots to scatter the early believers through persecution (see Acts 8:1; 11:19). Aquila and Priscilla had lived in Italy. The Emperor Claudius had expelled all Jews from Rome. Aquila and Priscilla were not just Jews but were devout Christians and tentmakers like Paul. They worked together with Paul – *and he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks* (Acts 18:4).

Q.2. What changed when Silas and Timothy joined them at Corinth? What kind of response did Paul have? How did he follow up the converts? – (Acts 18:5-8)

After Silas and Timothy arrived, Paul began to devote himself completely to evangelism (see Acts 18:5). This soon created heated opposition, so Paul adjusted his focus – ... *and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles"* (Acts 18:6 c.f. Acts 28:28). He retreated all the way to next door to follow up on the converts (see Acts 18:7). God blessed Paul's initiative and – *Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized* (Acts 18:8).

Q.3. What gracious promise did God give Paul? How did the proconsul protect Paul? Why did the Jews beat up Sosthenes? – (Acts 18:9-17)

Paul must have wondered when next he would be forced out of town. A vision from God, promised him protection from opposition. A guarantee from the Lord of success must have been most welcome – *for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city* (Acts 18:10). When the Jews dragged Paul before the Judgment Seat, asking the proconsul to stop him from preaching the gospel. Surprisingly, – 14 ... *Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; 15 but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters."* 16 *And he drove them away from the judgment seat* (Acts 18:14-16). Then they turned their attention to Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue. However, Gallio refused to take action against the Christians (see Acts 18:17).

Q.4. When did Paul leave Corinth? Who accompanied him? What are we to make of Paul's vow? Why did he go where he went? – (Acts 18:18-23)

In line with God's promise that he would not be harmed at Corinth, Paul did not leave there until he had laid the foundation of the church (see Acts 18:9-11). He took Priscilla and Aquila with him but left them at Ephesus to minister there while he returned to Antioch, via Caesarea (see Acts 18:18-22). Paul had cut his hair and had made a Nazarite vow – *to dedicate himself to the Lord* (see Num.6:2 c.f. Acts 18:18). We are not told why Paul took this special pledge of devotion. The context suggests that it related to his ministry in Jerusalem, where his presence created animosity from the Jews. This is supported by (i) His leaving Priscilla and Aquila in safety at Ephesus (see Acts 18:19). (ii) His doubts about whether he may be able to return – *"I will return to you again if God wills"* (Acts 18:21). (iii) From Caesarea – *he went up (i.e. to Jerusalem) and greeted the church and went down to (stay at) Antioch* (Acts 18:22). (iv) After his third missionary journey Paul reported to the leadership of the Jerusalem church (see Acts 21:17-19). His third mission trip started once more from his 'home church' at Antioch, after he had reported to the church leaders at Jerusalem – *And having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples* (Acts 18:23 c.f. Acts 13:1-3).

Q.5. What special gospel clarification did Priscilla and Aquila give to Apollos? What impact did their contributions have on the church? – Acts 18:24-28)

It appears that Priscilla was more dominant in presenting the truth of the gospel, since she was usually mentioned first (see Acts 18:18, 26). They ministered to the eloquent Apollos, who – ... *had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John ... they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately* (Acts 18:25-26). Apollos was then mightily used by God to spread the Gospel – 27 *And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, 28 for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ* (Acts 18:27-28). However, it was the behind-the-scenes ministry of Priscilla and Aquila, that ensured that the doctrine proclaimed by Apollos was true to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

DAY 28

Read: Acts 19:1-22

PAUL LAYS THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS.

Q.1. Why did Paul quiz the disciples at Ephesus? To Whom did these followers belong? How did Paul minister to them? How was the gospel confirmed? – (Acts 19:1-7)

John the Baptist was the forerunner and herald of the coming Messiah. It would not have taken long for Paul to realise that there was something missing from the lives of these disciples of John. He asked them – ... *“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They said to him, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit”* (Acts 19:2). Paul explained to them that the role of John was to prepare for and point to Jesus (see Acts 19:4). The moment these people confessed Christ through baptism – *when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying* (Acts 19:6). This was the same phenomenon that accompanied the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost – ... *we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God* (Acts 2:11 c.f. Acts 10:46; 11:15).

Q.2. How well was Paul received at the synagogue? Why did he set up the school of Tyrannus? What impact did Paul’s ministry have? – (Acts 19:8-10)

The synagogue at Ephesus received Paul eagerly for some three months. However, eventually some of the Jews spoke evil of “The Way”, another description of Christian believers (see Acts 19:9 c.f. Jn. 14:6; Acts 11:26). Consequently, Paul & Barnabas established the school of Tyrannus, where they followed up converts over a period of – ... *two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks* (Acts 19:10). In the ancient world, Ephesus was a centre of travel and commerce. Situated on the Aegean Sea at the mouth of the Cayster River, the city was one of the greatest seaports of the ancient world. This

explains why the school of Tyrannus made such a significant contribution to the whole region.

Q.3. How did God confirm Paul's message? Did Satan's attempts to undermine Paul succeed? How did the converts reveal they really believed? – (Acts 19:11-20 c.f. Acts 5:14-16; Heb.2:3-4)

The Lord used the location but also confirmed the truth of Paul's message as – 11 God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out (Acts 19:11-12). Invariably, where there is truth, there will be counterfeits. Satan tried to take attention away from Paul's message, using seven Jewish exorcists, the sons of a chief priest named Sceva (see Acts 19:13-14) But – 15 the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16 And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded (Acts 19:15-16). This brought a holy fear upon the church and gave greater attention to the power of the gospel. The transformation of the Ephesian converts was dramatic – 18 Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing, and disclosing their practices. 19 And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver (Acts 19:18-19). God's work went from strength to strength (see Acts 19:20 c.f. Eph.1:1; Rev.2:1-7).

Q.4. What was Paul final destination? Where was he led to go first? How did Paul establish the churches of Macedonia? – (Acts 19:21-22 c.f. Acts 21:1-14)

Paul was convinced he should go to Rome (see Acts 19:21 c.f. 21:13; 23:11). However, first he was intending to return to Jerusalem (see Acts 19:21 c.f. Acts 18:18; 21:17-26). It becomes obvious when reading about his journeys, that Paul rarely travelled alone. He had left Priscilla and Aquila to minister at Ephesus. He then sent Timothy and Erastus to minister in Macedonia (see Acts 19:22 c.f. Acts 18:18-19). He was constantly looking after the welfare of the church (see 2 Cor.11:28).

DAY 29

Read: Acts 19:23-41

THE SILVERSMITHS OF ARTEMIS STIR UP A RIOT.

Q.1. Who were these followers of the Way? Who was Demetrius? What was his complaint against Paul? – (Acts 19:23-27)

A common name given to believers was 'Followers of the Way' (see Acts 19:23), since Jesus had identified Himself as being – *the Way, the Truth, and the Life* (Jn.14:6). Their basic beliefs clashed with the those of the idol worship of Artemis, which – ... *was bringing no little business to the craftsmen* (Acts 19:24). Demetrius was one of the leading silversmiths. The ministry of Paul brought a dramatic turning from idol worship amongst the Ephesians (see Acts 19:18-19). This impacted Demetrius's trade – ... *this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all* (Acts 19:26 c.f. Acts 19:18-19).

Q.2. Why did Paul's friends stop him from addressing the crowds? How did the town clerk quieten the riot? – (Acts 19:28-41)

Demetrius soon stirred up a riot. The mob dragged Paul's companions, Gaius, and Aristarchus into the city. Paul wanted to address the mob but was stopped by his political friends. As often happens, most of the people involved had no idea what the riot was all about. However, that didn't stop them shouting for some two hours (see Acts 19:32-34). Eventually, the town clerk convinced them to disperse, since those apprehended had committed no capital offence, and a continuation might bring stronger measures against the unlawful gathering from the Romans (Acts 19:35-41).

DAY 30

Read: Acts 20:1-12

PAUL AND HIS TEAM BUILD UP THE CHURCH IN ASIA MINOR.

Q.1. How was Paul involved with the believers at Ephesus and Macedonia? Why did he leave Greece? What was the strength of Paul's ministry? – (Acts 20:1-6)

In each newly established church, Paul encouraged the believers to stay true to the gospel (see Acts 20:1-2). Though he was able to minister for three months in Greece, he was forced to send on his companions on to Troas, while he returned to Macedonia (see Acts 20:3-5). Paul did not appear to minister alone. Frequently we are told about his travelling companions and fellow workers in the Gospel – ... *Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus, and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia* (Acts 20:4).

Q.2. What do we learn about church gatherings? How keen were the believers to grow? What significant thing happened to Eutychus? – (Acts 20:7-12)

There seemed to be a transition from the Sabbath to a Sunday, or first day of the week when Luke records – *On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them ...* (Acts 20:7 c.f. Acts 2:42 c.f. Rev.1:10). [The Christian church's case for Sunday worship is that it is the day of Resurrection. There is no command in the New Testament to keep the Sabbath, and it was not a condition placed on the Gentiles by the Jerusalem Council (see Acts 15:23-25,28-29; Rom.14:5; 1 Cor.16:2; Gal.4:10-11; Col.2:16-17)]. These early believers were fervent in their commitment, and happily sat under Paul's teaching, when – *he prolonged his message until midnight ... and – talked with them a long time until daybreak, and then left* (Acts 20:7 & 11). Poor young Eutychus will never be forgotten. He had probably worked hard all day and was sitting in a room where lamps and people were using all the

oxygen (see Acts 20:8-9). After he fell down from the third-floor dead, the other people would be much less likely to fall asleep themselves – *But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, “Do not be troubled, for his life is in him.” ... They took away the boy alive and were greatly comforted* (Acts 20:10 & 12).

DAY 31

Read: Acts 20:13-38

PAUL INSTRUCTS AND WARNS THE ELDERS OF THE EPHESIAN CHURCH.

Q.1. Why was Ephesus bypassed on the trip from Troas to Miletus? How had Paul ministered in Ephesus? What did he expect to happen at Jerusalem? – (Acts 20:13-25)

Just why Paul didn't join his team by ship, we are not told. He probably went by land to catch up with some believers on the way (see Acts 20:13-14). They then sailed together beyond Ephesus to Miletus – ... *for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost* (Acts 20:16). While at Miletus – ... *he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church* (Acts 20:17). Paul's message to these leaders was fully reported because it was foundational. Luke's record contained some of the most crucial guidelines for the function of elders in a local church (see Acts 20:18-35). He had modelled passionate and faithful shepherding at Ephesus for some three years, both publicly and privately, from home to home (see Acts 20:19-20 & 31). He taught both Jews and Gentiles to maintain – *repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ* (Acts 20:21). He had determined to go to Jerusalem, although he knew that – *bonds and afflictions await me* (Acts 20:23). He happily pursued this path – ... *so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God* (Acts 20:24). He seemed to know that he would never see them again (see Acts 20:25).

Q.2. What was his instruction and warning to the Ephesian elders? How had Paul modelled ministry and giving? What made the parting so emotional? – (Acts 20:25-38)

Paul stated that he had been faithful and guiltless, because he had – *declared to you the whole purpose of God* (Acts 20:27). These elders were an extension of his endeavours. Therefore, they should – *be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has*

made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Having been 'blood-bought', God had placed them over the local church. They were then chosen for that role by the Holy Spirit. They were to exercise their oversight diligently. Paul gave his reason, based on his experience that savage wolves would not spare the flock. Sadly – *from among your own selves, men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them* (Acts 20:30). Paul himself had served tirelessly and sacrificially, in order to build up God's flock. In doing this, he followed Christ's own words, that – ... *'it is more blessed to give than to receive'* (Acts 20:35). Paul's love was reciprocated – *they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul and repeatedly kissed him* (Acts 20:37). The parting was doubly sad because they would never see him again (see Acts 20:38).

DAY 32

Read: Acts 21:1-36

PAUL HEADS FOR STRIFE IN JERUSALEM AND AGREES WITH THE ADVICE OF THE CHURCH.

Q.1. How much did the churches love Paul? Should he have heeded the warnings about trouble in Jerusalem? What more do we learn about Philip? – (Acts 21:1-14 c.f. Acts 8:5-40; 20:22-24)

Luke gave a resume of the sea journey from Ephesus to Tyre, where they interacted with believers for seven days – ... *and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem* (see Acts 21:4). This was not fresh news to Paul, who had already indicated to the Ephesian elders that he would face bonds and afflictions (see Acts 20:22-23). The believers at Tyre responded like the Ephesian leaders – ... they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another (see Acts 21:5 c.f. Acts 20:37-38). Life for Paul was not about avoiding rejection and suffering, but about seeing the hand of God, even in adversity. Philip was one of the seven servers who were appointed to oversee the feeding of the widows in Jerusalem (see Acts 6:1-6). When persecution scattered the church, he fled to Samaria and took revival to them. He was then taken away, to explain the gospel to the Ethiopian Eunuch. He ended up on the coast at Caesarea as an evangelist (see Acts 8:5-40). Paul and his companions – *8 ... came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. 9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses* (Acts 21:8-9). A well-known prophet graphically declared that Paul would be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. He illustrated this, by tying Paul's hands and feet with his belt (see Acts 21:10-11 c.f. Acts 11:27-28). All responded by pleading with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem (see Acts 21:12). Paul accepted the prophecy, yet not the advice to avoid the pain, declaring – ... *I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus* (Acts 21:13).

Q.2. How was Paul received by the church leadership at Jerusalem? Did they support his ministry to the Gentiles? Why was Paul being maligned amongst the Jews? What advice did the Jerusalem leaders give him to deflect these criticisms? – (Acts 21:15-26)

Paul and his companions went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea, and – *the brethren received us gladly* (Acts 21:17). Though the leaders rejoiced at the spread of the gospel through Paul, they soon addressed some issues over which there were different opinions. – *18 And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. 19 After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20 And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law* (Acts 21:18-20). They confirmed once more the decision of the Jerusalem Council (see Acts chapter 15) – *concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication* (Acts 21:25). However, they faced a problem because there were – *20 ... many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; 21 and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs* (Acts 21:20-21). They advised Paul to purify himself and pay for the rites of four Jewish men under a vow, in order to prove to his critics that he was not undermining Jewish practices (see Acts 21:22-24). Paul submitted to the counsel of the Jerusalem leadership (see Acts 21:26).

Q.3. What were the Jews from Asia doing in Jerusalem? What false report did they spread about Paul? How was Paul saved from death? = (Acts 21:27-36 c.f. Acts 20:16)

It had been Paul’s determination to get to Jerusalem to celebrate the day of Pentecost, the birthday of the church (see Acts chapter 2). Here he was with many other Jews of the Dispersion (see Acts 20:16). Among these were Jews from Asia Minor, who stirred up the crowds against Paul, by claiming – ... *This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against*

our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place ... Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut (Acts 21:28 & 30 c.f. Acts 21:29). Confusion reigned. Many in the crowd had no idea what the riot was all about (see Acts 21:30-31,34 c.f. Acts 19:32) News quickly spread to the Commander of the Roman cohort, who cut short Paul's beating. The soldiers lifted Paul up, to avoid the violence of the mob. He was safe for a short while.

DAY 33

Read: Acts 21:37-40; 22:1-30

PAUL GIVES THE JEWS OF JERUSALEM THE STORY OF HIS CONVERSION.

Q.1. Who did the commander think Paul was? Why did he allow Paul to address the Jews? What made them quieten down? – (Acts 21:37-40; 22:1-2)

As soon as Paul spoke in the common language of the Roman Empire, the commander realized – Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness? (Acts 21:38). Paul then explained – ...”I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people” (Acts 21:39). Later he informed the commander that he was also a Roman citizen (see Acts 22:25-29). Paul was confident in his abilities as a preacher ... and standing before a holy God. He was able to quieten the confused crowd with a wave of his hand. He then addressed them in their own Hebrew dialect, and – they became even more quiet (Acts 21:40 c.f. Acts 22:2).

Q.2. How did Paul build rapport with the Jews? What unexpected confrontation turned him around? What mission was he given from God through Ananias? – (Acts 22:3-15)

Paul connected with the audience by outlining his Jewish credentials – I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today (Acts 22:3). He built on this by testifying of his persecution of those of the Way, complete with the authority granted him by the High Priest and Council of the elders (see Acts 22:4-5). This all changed in a moment, when – ... about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me (Acts 22:6). The very One Whom he had been persecuting was alive and declared – ... I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting’ (Acts 22:8). The men with Paul led this proud Pharisee to Damascus, where the Lord told him – ...

you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do (Acts 22:10). A devout and respected Jew named Ananias healed his blindness, and relayed Christ's message – 14 ...The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. 15 For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard (Acts 22:14-15). In obedience, Paul was there in Jerusalem, to bear witness to the risen Lord.

Q.3. How was Paul followed up? Why did he leave Jerusalem previously? What made him reluctant to leave? – (Acts 22:16-20)

The first follow-up Paul received, was to submit to baptism – *washing away your sins, calling on His name* (Acts 22:16). Acts 9 records how he was accepted at Jerusalem by the church, through the appeal of Barnabas (see Acts 9:26-27). However, soon his testimony and preaching attracted dangerous negative attention, and he was sent back home to Tarsus (see Acts 9:28-29). Here Paul reported on how this move was confirmed by a vision in the temple – *and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me'* (Acts 22:18). Paul protested to the Lord that his opposition to Christian converts was well known, but – *He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles'* (Acts 22:21). This was highly inflammatory to the Jews.

Q.4. Why did the commander rescue Paul again? What information stopped Paul from being flogged? How did the commander react? – (Acts 22:21-30)

When the crowd realized Paul's real purpose for sharing the gospel, they were enraged. The commander was forced to rescue him once again. He ordered a centurion – *that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way* (Acts 22:24). Paul then questioned the legality of scourging a Roman citizen without trial (Acts 22:25). This brought a sudden end to the flogging, as the commander asked – ... 27 *"Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes."* 28 *The commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money." And Paul said, "But I was actually born a citizen"* (Acts 22:27-28). The commander was horrified. He then

tried to discover the reason for the conflict by quizzing the Chief Priest and the Council in Jerusalem (see Acts 22:30).

DAY 34

Read: Acts 23:1-35

PAUL CONFOUNDS THE JEWISH COUNCIL AND
ESCAPES A CONSPIRACY TO KILL HIM.

Q.1. Did the Jewish Council accept that Paul had a clear conscience? How did he confound the Council? Why did the commander confine Paul to the barracks? – (Acts 23:1-10)

The Roman commander ordered a meeting between Paul and the Jewish Sanhedrin (see Acts 23:1). When Paul claimed to have fulfilled his duty to God with a clear conscience, the high priest, the brutal Ananias, ordered an officer to strike him on the mouth. Paul reacted to this illegal treatment that he had received before he had been tried. However, he retracted his rebuke when he learned that it came at the command of the High Priest (see Acts 23:1-5). Paul then cleverly played off the Pharisee and Sadducee factions in the Council against each other – 6 ... *“Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!”* The resurrection is central to the Gospel – 8 ... *For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all* (Acts 23:6 & 8). In his testimony, Paul had shared his heavenly vision, a notion rejected by the Sadducees but a reality the Pharisees defended (see Acts 23:9 c.f. Acts 22:6-11). Once again, the commander had to save Paul from this vehement dispute between these factions. He was placed under protection in the Roman barracks (see Acts 23:10).

Q.2. How serious was the plot to kill Paul? How was he kept from being ambushed? What gracious assurance did God give him? – (Acts 23:11-22)

Nothing but murder would satisfy these devout custodians of the Law ... what irony. More than forty – ... Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12). They approached the Jewish Council, in order to entice the commander to take Paul for further

questioning, so that they could ambush and slay him on the way (see Acts 23:14-15). However, the plot became known to the son of Paul's sister. He warned the commander privately. This enabled the commander to take evasive action on behalf of Paul (see Acts 23:16-22). However, Paul was being protected by Almighty God. He was reassured that he would fulfill God's purposes, for – ... the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also" (Acts 23:11). Many believers had tried to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem, so this word from the Lord would have done much to encourage him.

Q.3. Where was Paul taken for his safety, and how? What explanation did the commander give to the governor? What follow-up did Felix plan for Paul? – (Acts 23:23-35)

Elisha reminded his fearful servant when they seemed to be surrounded by the enemy and was told – *Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them* (2 Kgs.6:16). The enemies who pledged to kill Paul numbered more than forty, but under God, the commander – 23 ... *called to him two of the centurions and said, "Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen."* 24 *They were also to provide mounts for Paul to ride on, and to bring him safely to Felix the governor* (Acts 23:23-24). People can only do what God allows. The commander also provided a letter of explanation to Felix, the governor of Caesarea. He informed Felix that Paul was a Roman, and – *and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment* (Acts 23:29). Felix, after meeting Paul, told him – ... *"I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also," giving orders for him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium* (Acts 23:35). Though Paul was a prisoner, he was being treated well.

DAY 35

Read: Acts 24:1-27

PAUL MAKES HIS DEFENCE BEFORE FELIX THE GOVERNOR.

Q.1. How long was it before the Jewish leaders brought their case before Felix? Why was Tertullus there? What were their charges against Paul? – (Acts 24:1-9)

The High Priest and some elders came within five days, to bring their charges against Paul. They mounted a serious prosecution and brought an attorney (literally – orator), to sway Governor Felix (see Acts 24:1). Though the Jews did not respect Roman rule, Tertullus tried to flatter Felix. He claimed that Paul was – ... *a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes* (Acts 24:5). Without supporting evidence, he said that they arrested Paul, because he – *tried to desecrate the temple* (Acts 24:6). He also reported the violent intervention of Lysias, the commander (see Acts 24:7). The whole delegation agreed.

Q.2. How did Paul address Felix? Did following The Way contradict the Law and the Prophets? What was the real reason Paul was being persecuted? – (Acts 24:10-21)

Paul was familiar with Caesarea and may have known that Felix's wife was Jewish (see Acts 24:24 c.f. Acts 21:8). He happily brought his defense before him (see Acts 24:10). He asserted that his accusers could not support their charges – *14 But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; 15 having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked* (Acts 24:14-15). He claimed that his faith was in total agreement with the Old Testament Scriptures. The Council was controlled by Sadducees who refused to accept the validity of miracles or the supernatural. The other faction was Pharisees, who supported the

resurrection of the dead (see Acts 24:21). They all persecuted Paul, because their eyes were blinded to the death and resurrection of Jesus as the Messiah.

Q.3. How well was Felix informed about Judaism and The WAY? What freedoms did Paul enjoy? Why did Felix dismiss Paul? What was his real interest in Paul? – (Acts 24:22-27)

It is clear from Luke's record that both Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla were more than interested in the gospel, and – ... *sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus* (Acts 24:24). Paul was free to share the Gospel. Felix – ... gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him (see Acts 24:23). However, Paul's message was too convicting, and while – ... *discussing righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you"* (Acts 24:25). Felix – ... *used to send for him quite often and converse with him* (Acts 24:26). Sadly, Felix would not humble himself and was always – ... hoping that money would be given him by Paul (see Acts 24:26). Furthermore, to ingratiate himself to the Jews, Felix kept Paul in prison for 2 years (see Acts 24:27).

DAY 36

Read: Acts 25:1-27

PAUL ASKS GOVERNOR PORTIUS FESTUS THAT HE BE TRIED AS A ROMAN.

Q.1. Did the hatred of the Jewish leaders abate over the years? How did Festus respond to the Jewish request? Was Paul willing to stand trial in Jerusalem? – (Acts 25:1-12)

Two years had elapsed, when Festus took up office as governor in the place of Felix. He soon paid a visit to Jerusalem, where the Jewish leaders renewed their charges against Paul (see Acts 24:27-25:2). They asked that Paul be brought to Jerusalem with the plan of – *setting an ambush to kill him on the way* (Acts 25:3). Festus refused their request but invited them to bring their case before him in Caesarea (see Acts 25:4-5). Once more they brought many and serious charges which they could not prove, against Paul (see Acts 25:6-7). In his defence, Paul stated that he had committed no offence, either against the Law, the Temple, or Caesar (see Acts 25:8). Festus wanted to make a good impression and gain favour with the Jews. He asked if Paul was willing to be tried before them in Jerusalem (see Acts 25:9-10). Paul responded that he was prepared to die if he had committed a capital offence but refused to submit to the injustice that would eventuate. Therefore, when Paul appealed to Caesar, Festus accepted his request (see Acts 25:11-12).

Q.2. How did Paul end up making his defence before King Agrippa? What did Festus think about the conflict between Paul and the Jews? Why did he want Agrippa to look into the case? – (Acts 25:13-27)

In the providence of God, King Agrippa and Queen Bernice paid a visit to Festus, who brought the Jewish complaint against Paul to the king's attention, as – ... *some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive* (Acts 25:19). Paul was thus given another opportunity to testify the gospel – ... *Agrippa came together with Bernice amid great pomp, and*

entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus ... (Acts 25:23). In his introduction, Festus explained the reason for the gathering – 26 Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore, I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write. 27 For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him” (Acts 25:26-27). Once more, Paul was able to share his faith before a large and eminent audience as the Lord had prophesied at his conversion (see Acts 9:15).

DAY 37

Read: Acts 26:1-32

PAUL TESTIFIES AND MAKES HIS APPEAL BEFORE KING AGRIPPA.

Q.1. Why was Paul glad to testify before Agrippa? How well did the Jews know Paul? Why was he on trial? How had he treated Christ's followers previously? – (Acts 26:1-11)

Paul expressed his delight at setting forth his appeal to Agrippa, because – *you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews* (Acts 26:3). Festus had summed up the disagreement between Paul and the Jews as – *... some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive* (Acts 25:19). Paul agreed that – *... all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem* (Acts 26:4). Paul further stated – *... I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers* (Acts 26:6). He added the question on every thinking person's mind – *Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?* (Acts 26:8). He previously had been on the side of these Jews, and had vehemently persecuted Christ's followers, even to death (see Acts 26:9-11).

Q.2. How was Paul's life turned around? Why did he include information about his call to the Gentiles? How did he conduct himself after his conversion? – (Acts 26:12-20)

Paul then explained how he had changed sides because of a surprising confrontation with the risen Christ, whilst on a killing mission on route to Damascus (see Acts 26:12-15). Previously while addressing the Jews, he had avoided mention of his solemn call to the Gentiles. However, here he was testifying before Gentiles. He included his call from Christ, revealing – *16 ... for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; 17 rescuing you from the Jewish*

people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me' (Acts 26:16-18). Consequently – 19 ... King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance (Acts 26:19-20).

Q.3. Was his message new? How did the Jews respond? What impact did Paul's message have on Festus and Agrippa? What was the king's conclusion? – (Acts 26:21-32)

Paul claimed that his message agreed with what – 22 ... the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; 23 that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:22-23). Rejecting his interpretation of the Scriptures, the Jews did all in their power to kill Paul (see Acts 26:21). Festus, ever seeking an opportunity to advance himself, interjected – ... Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad (Acts 26:24). Paul respectfully deflected the remark, and questioned the thoughtful king – ... Do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do (Acts 26:27). However, Agrippa refused to be persuaded after only such a brief presentation (see Acts 26:28-29). Later the king told Festus – ... This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar (Acts 26:32).

DAY 38

Read: Acts 27:1-44

PAUL IS SHIPWRECKED ON THE JOURNEY TO ROME.

Q.1. What travel arrangements were made for Paul? What special blessings were extended to Paul along the way? What was the journey like? Why was Paul's warning not heeded? – (Acts 27:1-12)

Paul, along with the other prisoners was placed under the charge of a centurion named Julius. Paul was given special treatment. He was even able to have a travel companion – *Aristarchus of Macedonia* (Acts 27:1-2). Not only that, but before leaving Sidon – ... *Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care* (Acts 27:3). They started out from Sidon but took measures to shield the boat from the strong winds. They eventually landed at Myra in Lycia (see Acts 27:4-5). They then boarded an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy. However, the weather was so unfavourable that they stopped at Fair Havens near Lasea (see Acts 27:6-8). Paul warned them not to proceed because the voyage was becoming dangerous – ... *Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives* (Acts 27:10). However, the centurion preferred the advice of both the pilot and captain, to proceed to a better harbour for 'wintering' at Phoenix in Crete (see Acts 27:11-12).

Q.2. What made sailing so difficult? What measures were taken to save the ship? What encouragement did Paul give the stricken sailors and passengers? On what basis did he raise their hopes? – (Acts 27:13-26)

The journey started with promise, until a violent northeaster (called *Euraquilo*) took hold of the helpless vessel. They tried to hold the ship together with – ... *supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and, in this way, let themselves be driven along* (Acts

27:17). The situation was so grave that they lightened the ship by throwing the cargo overboard, and – *since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on, all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned* (Acts 27:20). However, God brought a message of hope. Paul was able to assure them that they would all be spared – *23 For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, 24 saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.’ 25 Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told* (Acts 27:23-25). The crisis gave Paul an opportunity of testifying to his God.

Q.3. How significant was Paul’s influence over the ship’s company? Did they accept his advice and prayers? How was a threat to the prisoners averted? Were all saved? – (Acts 27:27-44)

After two weeks in the blackness of the storm, the sailors could tell that they were approaching the coast ... and certain shipwreck. Some of the sailors deceitfully tried to abandon ship, but Paul warned – ... *Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved* (Acts 27:31). Paul further advised the crew to take food to sustain them, and – ... *he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat* (Acts 27:35). Paul was in control, so was able to lead the hapless crew into the presence of God. Soon they were at the mercy of the sea and ended up shipwrecked in an unknown bay. However, there was a more imminent threat as – *42 the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape; 43 but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, 44 ... And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land* (Acts 27:42-44).

DAY 39

Read: Acts 28:1-16

PAUL IS HONOURED BY GOD, THE MALTESE, AND HIS CAPTORS.

Q.1. How were the travellers received in Malta? What did the people conclude after Paul's encounter with a viper? How did God draw attention to Paul's faith while on the island? – (Acts 28:1-10)

The shipwreck took place at Malta. The weary and cold survivors all got safely to shore (see Acts 28:1 c.f. Acts 27:22-24). They were well received and – *the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all* (Acts 28:2). When a viper fastened itself around Paul's hand, the Maltese concluded that God was punishing him for some crime. However, when he showed no ill effects, they – *began to say that he was a god* (Acts 28:6 c.f. Acts 28:4-5). The father of the landowner, Publius, was very sick with recurrent fever and dysentery. Paul laid hands on him and healed him (see Acts 28:7-8). Soon others on the island were healed by Paul of various diseases. Not surprisingly – *they also honoured us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied us with all we needed* (Acts 28:10). Much blessing flowed to others because Paul had been faithful to His Master and had unashamedly commended the Saviour.

Q.2. How did Paul get to Rome? Was he restricted in his movements as a prisoner? Why? What privileges were extended to Paul? – (Acts 28:11-16)

The centurion decided to take another Alexandrian ship for the last leg of the journey to Rome (see Acts 28:11 c.f. Acts 27:6). Paul had predicted the shipwreck and had given a message of hope in the midst of the storm. He had also led in a communion meal, been saved from being bitten by a viper, and had brought healing to many on the island of Malta. Not only were the Maltese impressed, but so were Julius and the Roman cohort. Their respect for Paul gave him many privileges, including freedom to stay

and fellowship with some brethren. – *when we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him* (Acts 28:16). God further encouraged His faithful servant, with a show of support from Roman believers – ... *when they heard about us, they came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage* (Acts 28:15).

DAY 40

Read: Acts 28:17-31

PAUL DECLARES THAT THE GOSPEL HAS BEEN SENT FROM THE JEWS TO THE GENTILES.

Q.1. Why did Paul meet with the Jewish leaders? How could he claim that he had been true to the faith of his forefathers? Was he forthcoming about his disagreement with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem? What had the Roman Jews heard about the gospel? Were they open to discuss it? – (Acts 28:17-22)

Although God had called Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles, his strategy was to always start at the synagogue, where there were Jews as well as some Gentile proselytes (see Acts 9:15; 13:44-48). Some Jews responded, but most reacted vehemently against what they saw as an attack on the Law. Paul's message eventually took him into conflict with the Jewish leaders at Jerusalem. This resulted in an extended period in Roman custody for him. Therefore, Paul naturally wanted to know if the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had warned the Jewish leaders at Rome. From Paul's perspective, the gospel was a fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures. Therefore, he could claim – ... *Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans* (Acts 28:17). There was obviously much conversation about his interchange with the Jews in Rome. But Paul did not hide from the Jewish leaders that he was committed to the 'Christian sect'. They responded – *we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere* (Acts 28:22).

Q.2. Where did the leaders meet Paul? On what basis did he make his defence of the gospel? How did the men respond? Why did they leave Paul? How did Paul show them that history was repeating itself? – (Acts 28:23-27)

Paul was under house arrest in his own rented home (see Acts 28:16,23,30). The Jewish leaders visited him where he lived. Whenever

they came – ... *he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening* (Acts 28:23). Some did accept his preaching, but the majority refused to believe and stopped coming (see Acts 28:24-25). There came a turning point, when Paul identified with Isaiah the prophet's condemnation of a previous generation, whom God accused as being people who refused to believe the truth (see Is.6:9-10).

Q.3. What prophecy about the Jews and Gentiles did Paul make upon their departure? How great was the impact Paul had on the Jewish leaders? What did Paul do after this further rejection by the Jews? – (Acts 28:28-31 c.f. Lk.21:20-24; Rom.11:25)

It was more than a coincidence that Luke completed his account of all Jesus continued to do through His apostles in establishing the church, as is recorded in the closing verses of Acts 28 (see also Acts 1:1-3). His blueprint in what he recorded was in line with the command of Jesus to be – ... *My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth* (Acts 1:8). Luke concluded with all the peoples beyond Israel, as Paul declared – *let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen* (Acts 28:28). This is consistent with the prophecies of Jesus that – *Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled* (Lk.21:24 c.f. Rom.11:25; Hos.5:15). The impact of Paul's ministry was underscored by the heated dispute amongst the Jews. If a Jew converted to Christianity, this would result in much opposition, and even rejection by his people and family (see Acts 28:29). Paul continued his witness to all who came to see him in his own rented quarters – *preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered* (Acts 28:31 c.f. Acts 28:30). Tradition has it that Paul was martyred for his commitment to Christ.

About This Resource

The Book of Acts – A 40 Day Bible Study is a custom adaptation made for the Charis Fellowship Conference 2026 (by Tim Hodge) from Paul's BRP (Bible Reading Plan) material. God used Paul Hoogenraad to be a godly mentor to Tim Hodge (Charis Fellowship Coordinator) during his years living in Australia.

Paul Hoogenraad was born at Tilburg in the Netherlands towards the end of the 2nd World War. For some years he lived in Indonesia before his family eventually migrated to Australia. It was a glorious event when Jesus revealed Himself to Paul one night. Not long after, God called him to be an under-shepherd of His church, and he served as Senior Pastor of Baptist churches for decades since. As of 2026, Paul is still involved in the church he was called to in April 1974.



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