

# BIRTH *of the* CHRISTIAN CHURCH

*The Book of Acts*



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## Lesson 1

# The Birth of the Christian Church

### *Acts 1 and 2*

The book of Acts begins with the phrase, “In my former book, Theophilus.” Acts is the second volume of Luke’s history of the Christian church. The gospel bearing his name is the “former book” mentioned in Acts 1:1. Luke was a physician, a traveling companion of Paul, a historian and a theologian. His two volumes, combined, make him the most prolific author in the New Testament. The gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were probably written during the two years that Paul was imprisoned in Rome.

Luke’s purpose in writing could simply have been to record the history of the Christian church, but many theologians believe he wrote in order to provide Paul and other Christians with a legal defense for their faith. Luke wrote consistently to prove three things: 1) Christians were not a political threat to Rome; 2) the Christian church is the continued ministry of God in the world and 3) the Christian church was a diverse, but united group of people who received salvation in Christ.

### *Read Acts 1 and 2*

1. The introduction to the gospel of Luke is believed to be the introduction for the book of Acts as well. Read Luke 1:1-4. “Theophilus” literally means “loved by God.” The books might have been written to every Christian believer. The phrase can also stand for a phrase like “your Excellency.” Luke may have been writing to a specific Roman position of power. From Luke 1:1-4, what are Luke’s credentials and his purpose in authoring these books?
2. What did Luke ask the reader to remember from his “former book” as they began to read his second volume? (Acts 1:1-5; Luke 24:34, 36, 49)
3. What did the disciples want to talk about on the Mount of Ascension? What did Jesus want them to know? (1:6-9)
4. What message did the angels bring? What does that message mean to believers today? (1:10-11)
5. How did the disciples “wait” for the Holy Spirit to come? (1:12-14)
6. How did Peter begin to emerge as a leader in the early church? What were the necessary qualifications to fill the apostolic position? (1:15-26)
7. Read Exodus 23:14-17. What was the historical purpose of the Pentecost, the Festival of Harvest celebration? Why is that celebration a perfectly significant time for the Pentecost celebration passage in Acts 2: 1-14?
8. From your knowledge of the Old Testament, what is the symbolism of wind and fire? (See also: Lev. 10:2; Is. 66:15; Ps. 106:18)
9. How did Peter explain the coming of the Holy Spirit to the crowd gathered in Jerusalem? (2:14-21)

10. What was the Pentecost connection to King David that Peter wanted the Israelites to understand? (2:22-28)
11. What did Peter clearly explain to his fellow Israelites who were witnessing the joy and miraculous power of the disciples? (Acts 2:29-36)
12. What was the evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence at Pentecost? What is the application for the church today? (2:37-41)
13. Describe the impact of the Holy Spirit on the early believers. How does this passage convict and guide us today? (2:42-47)

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*

-2 Corinthians 3:17

## Lesson 2

### **The Power in the Name of Jesus**

*Acts 3- 4:31*

Acts Chapters One and Two describe the early church, filled and led by the Holy Spirit of God. It is not long, however, before Satan came against the Christian church. Acts, chapters 3-6, describe the challenges the early church faced. The attacks on the Church came from among the followers as well as from the Jewish leadership. The book of Revelation describes the battles as a conflict between the Holy Lamb of God and the fierce red dragon.

In Revelation and in Acts the attacks are similar. In Acts, persecution arose from those who were antagonistic to the message of Christ. Lower, immoral standards emerged from some who joined the fellowship of the believers. Finally, there were those who sought to gain positions of power and authority among the believers who compromised the truth and taught false messages about the faith. The apostles were called to address and handle the attacks and, in the process, the power of the Holy Spirit was revealed in new and miraculous ways.

#### ***Read Acts 3-4:31***

1. List the important details from the story of the lame beggar that Luke was careful to include? (Acts 3:1-5)
2. Describe the miracle that Peter was enabled to perform. What was the impact on the people who were visiting the temple during the afternoon prayer time? (3:6-10)
3. What was Peter careful to explain to those who came running to hear about the miracle? What is the lesson for us today about our own witness? (3:11-16)
4. Describe the grace and the command that Peter offered to his fellow Israelites and consider the alternative? How does that message translate to people today? (3:17-23)
5. How did the writings from the prophets confirm the message that Peter gave his Jewish brothers and sisters? (3:24-26)
6. Describe the reactions of the Jewish leadership and the reactions of many who were in the crowd. What does this passage teach us about our own expectations when we share biblical truth? When we hear biblical truth? (4:1-4)
7. What does the questioning of the Jewish leadership prove about the events of the day before? (4:5-7)
8. How does Peter's response to the Jewish leaders reveal the power and purpose of the Holy Spirit at work in his life? (4:8-12)
9. Describe the reactions of the Jewish leaders. How do their reactions indicate their priorities? How do those reactions reveal their relationship with God? (4:13-17)

10. How did Peter respond to the Jewish authorities? Why were the authorities unable to assert their influence? (4:18-22)

11. Describe the impact of this miraculous story on the early Christians. (4:23-30)

12. How did God respond to the praise of his people? How did the people respond to God? (4:31)

*More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

—Romans 5:3-5

## Lesson 3

# The Purity and Power of the Early Church

Acts 4:32-5

The early church was powerful in the Holy Spirit and grew quickly. Almost every aspect of life was changed for those early believers. The purity of their faith was quickly attacked from physical as well as spiritual forces. God's protection of the Christian faith was marked by swift judgment as well as by his miraculous grace. God's people and their fellowship together were a witness to the power and guidance of his Holy Spirit.

### *Read Acts 4:32-5*

1. Describe the attitudes and priorities of a people when God's grace is powerfully at work. (4:32-35)
2. How did Luke introduce Barnabus, the future missionary leader? (4:36-37)
3. Contrast the gift of Ananias and Sapphira with that of Barnabus . (5:1-2)
4. According to Peter, what was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? (5:3-4)
5. Describe the consequences to Ananias and Sapphira. What was the impact on the early believers? (5:5-11)
6. Reread verse 9. What was the sin that carried such immediate judgment? Why do you think God's judgment was so quick and so stern?
7. The gate called Beautiful was located along the Eastern wall of the temple and it was the place the people ran to in order to hear Peter's first sermon after the lame beggar was healed. Jesus had walked and taught in that same area of the temple. That area was known as Solomon's Colonnade. Describe the public worship of the early Christian church and the various reactions of the people. (5:12-16)
8. What was the purpose of the early church? Has that purpose changed?
9. How did the Jewish leaders react to the public, temple worship of the Christians? (5:17-18)
10. How does God make his calling in the apostles' lives clear? (5:19-24)
11. Why were the Jewish leaders opposed to and concerned about the apostles' ministry? (5:25-28) What was the evidence that the apostles' teaching had been effective?
12. What did the apostles insist that the Jewish leaders understand? (5:29-32) How should Peter's words convince or convict God's people today?
13. Gamaliel was a Pharisee and a teacher of the Law. Gamaliel was later identified by Paul as his teacher. (Acts 22:3) What wisdom did he give to the Jewish leadership that might have saved the apostles' lives?
14. What impact did the early persecution from the Jewish leaders have on the lives and ministries of the apostles? (5:40-42)

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

## Lesson 4

### The Ministry and Mission of the Early Church

*Acts 6-8:4*

The early Church had been attacked from the outside by the jealous, Jewish leaders. The church had been attacked from within by members who had chosen to sin. God had provided, protected and strengthened the apostles to establish the new Christian faith and the church had grown quickly. Now, the apostles would be faced with a new attack on their ministry. The needs of the people were distracting the apostles from their calling to preach the gospel. God's answer would lead the Church to a new level of influence in the world.

#### *Read Acts 6 – 8:4*

1. The Hellenistic Jews were those who came from a Greek culture, spoke the Greek language and tended to live with Greek customs. The Hebraic Jews were probably born and raised in a traditional Hebrew home and culture, speaking Aramaic. The tension between the two groups existed before and was now infecting the Christian church. What was the conflict the early church faced with the two groups and how was it resolved? (6:1-7)
2. What were the qualifications for a church leader? How did effective leadership impact the early church? (6:1-7)
3. How did Luke describe Stephen? Why was Stephen seen as a threat? (6:5, 8-15)
4. What were the charges against Stephen? (6:8-7:1)
5. Stephen responded to the Jewish council with an oral history of the Jewish nation. What was Stephen careful to point out about each of these leaders and why might he have selected them to discuss:

Abraham:

Jacob:

The twelve patriarchs:

Joseph:

Moses:

Aaron:

David and Solomon:

The prophets:

6. What did Stephen make abundantly clear to the Jewish leadership? (7:51-53)

7. Compare and contrast the character and demeanor of Stephen with that of the Jewish leadership. (7:54-60)
8. How might Stephen's example be applied to the cultural struggles Christians face today?
9. Reread 7:57-58. Why was Stephen's faithful witness crucial to the early church?
10. How did God enable and strengthen Stephen? How does this passage encourage us when we suffer or grieve?
11. How did the young man, Saul of Tarsus, react to the stoning of Stephen? (8:1-3)
12. How does Acts 8:1 fulfill Acts 1:8?
13. Read Romans 8:28 and then Acts 8:4. How did God bring blessing from Stephen's tragic death?

*The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will happen.*

–Isaiah 14:24

## Lesson 5

### Evangelism Amid Persecution

*Acts 8:5-40*

Philip was among the group of seven who were chosen to serve and support the ministry of the early church. (Acts 6:5) Philip, like Stephen, was also an evangelist and had a preaching ministry as well. Stephen's martyrdom generated enormous change in the early church and with the Jewish population in Jerusalem. The Christians fled the city taking the message of the gospel to the surrounding areas. The apostles and many of the Hebraic Christians remained in Jerusalem, but those that did lived in fear of persecution.

#### *Read Acts 8*

1. Read Acts 21:7-9. How did Luke probably come to know the details found in Chapter 8?
2. Look carefully at 8:2-3. The "godly men" in verse 2 were likely pious Jews who disagreed with the treatment that Stephen had received. Compare that description with Saul's. What did Luke, who wrote this book at the end of Paul's life, want to make certain the readers understood?
3. Read 1 Kings 16:29-33. Why did devout Jews despise the land of Samaria? Why would Philip and other Jewish Christians have chosen to go to Samaria? (Acts 1:8, 8:1-3)
4. How did Luke describe Philip's ministry in Samaria and what does that reveal about the culture? (8:6-8)
5. Describe Simon's life before and after his conversion. (8:9-13) Read John 3:7. Why is evangelism essential?
6. How did the apostles respond to Philip's ministry? Consider the Jewish thought concerning the Samaritans. What might their response indicate? (8:14)
7. What happened when the apostles arrived in Samaria? Why was this a significant moment in the life of the early church? (8:15-17)
8. What does Simon the Sorcerer request of Peter? What does his request reveal about his possible attraction to Christianity? (8:18-25)
9. List some wrong motives that might attract people to Christianity or to the church. How should we respond to wrong motives?
10. How did the Lord lead Philip? (v. 26) Why might God have worked in that way?
11. Ethiopia was considered the "edge" of the known world in this day. The region would be known today as the "upper Nile." A man would need to be a eunuch in order to serve in a high position with a queen. What other details does Luke reveal about the man to whom Philip spoke? (8:26-31)
12. The Ethiopian man had obtained a scroll of Isaiah 53 and was reading the prophecy. Why was it the perfect

passage for Philip to use to speak to him of Christ? (8:32-34) What is the lesson for evangelism today?

13. What followed the Ethiopian man's conversion? What is "biblical baptism?" (8:36-40)

14. How will you apply the lessons of Acts, chapter 8, to your personal ministry?

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

—Romans 1:16

## Lesson 6

# The Conversion of Saul

*Acts 9:1-31*

Damascus is located in Syria and is one of the oldest, continually inhabited cities in the world. Apparently many of the early Christians fled to Damascus after Stephen was stoned to death by the Jewish leadership. Saul was intent on finding those that had fled Jerusalem, intending to do them harm. Saul's miraculous conversion is one of the key events in Christian history.

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

1. How did Luke describe Saul's wrath towards the Christian movement? (9:1-2)
2. What did the Lord want Saul to understand about his attacks on the Christians? (9:3-6) What can the Church today learn from those words?
3. How was Saul afflicted by his encounter with the Lord and how did that encounter affect those he traveled with? (9:7-9)
4. How did the Lord speak to Ananias? Why do you think Ananias recognized God's voice and understood what he was saying? (9:10-12)
5. How did Ananias respond to God's direction? (9:13-14) Describe the spiritual battle that often is part of God's calling?
6. What was God's plan for Saul of Tarsus? (9:15-16)
7. Describe Saul's conversion experience. Why do you think Saul's conversion was extraordinary and involved Ananias? (9:17-19)
8. How do Saul's conversion and Ananias' involvement speak to Christians today who may be facing opposition and persecution?
9. What was the evidence that Saul's conversion was real and that he was filled with God's Holy Spirit? (9:19-22)
10. What happened when Saul returned to Jerusalem? (9:26)
11. Look back at Acts 4:36-37. Why was Barnabus able to help Saul? (9:27)
12. Barnabus and Saul were both leaders in the early church. What qualities should we look for in our spiritual leaders?
13. Saul's preaching in Jerusalem would have had an enormous impact on the city. What did Luke choose to point out? (9:28-31)
14. Who might be a Saul of Tarsus today? How should we pray for the leaders in our world and in our culture?

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

## Lesson 7

### The Conversion of Cornelius

*Acts 9:32-11:18*

After Saul's conversion he began to preach the gospel in Jerusalem until he was forced to flee. Paul disappeared from the book of Acts for a time and Luke changed his focus back to the Apostle Peter. The Jewish nation had been taught to remain set apart from Gentiles because of their unbelief. The greatest issue facing the Christian movement would be the inclusion of the Gentiles. God chose Peter to pave the way so that the Gospel message would be opened to the entire world, Jew and Gentile alike.

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

1. Why might Peter have felt free to leave Jerusalem and travel? (9:31-32) Now read Galatians 1:11-17. Where was Paul during this time in church history?
2. Who was Aeneas and how did Peter minister to him? (9:33-35) What was the impact on the surrounding area?
3. What did Luke want his readers to know about Tabitha? When Peter told Tabitha to "get up" he was using a phrase similar to "be resurrected." The phrase indicates that he knew he was asking for something only God could do. What effect did this miracle have on the city of Joppa? (9:36-42)
4. Look carefully at verse 43, then read Leviticus 11:1-8. What do these two passages say about the changes taking place in the apostle Peter, a minister of the Gospel?
5. How did Luke describe Cornelius? Three o'clock in the afternoon was a time of prayer. Describe the vision that God gave to Cornelius. (10:1-6)
6. Who did Cornelius send to Joppa and what happened to Peter while they are on their journey? What does this passage teach about the importance of God's timing in our lives? (10:7-20)
7. How did Peter react to the "Gentile" messengers? Why is that significant? (10:21-23a)
8. How was Peter welcomed into Cornelius' home and why was that important for Luke to write about? (10:23b-26)
9. What had Peter come to understand about the vision that God gave him? (10:27-29)
10. The following verses are a complete presentation of the Gospel message. What details must people understand to truly place their faith in Christ? (10:30-43)
11. How did Peter know that these Gentiles had experienced true salvation? (10:44-48)
12. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, how was he greeted and why? (11:1-3)
13. Why were the Jerusalem Christians able to accept the conversion of the Gentiles? (11:4-18)
14. Practically speaking, who feels "excluded" from the church today? What would Peter encourage Christians to consider today?

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

## Lesson 8

# The Expansion of the Church

*Acts 11:19-12*

The city of Antioch was the third largest city of the Roman Empire and many from the early church fled there to escape persecution. The city was located fifteen miles from a major seaport and was known for having an international, cosmopolitan population. The Christians arrived and news of the gospel spread. The church in Antioch would become a key center for the expansion of the Church.

***Read Acts 11:19-12***

1. What significant change took place in the early church as a result of Stephen's death and the persecution that ensued? (11:19-21)
2. How did the church in Jerusalem react to the news of the Gentile converts in Antioch? Why was Barnabus chosen for the job? (11:22-24)
3. The church in Antioch grew rapidly and became a key church in Christian history? What is the "church growth" model from Antioch? (11:25-30)
4. What was the "state of the church" in Jerusalem? (12:1-5)
5. Describe Peter's escape from prison. (12:6-10)
6. Why was Luke able to record the details of Peter's escape, with certainty, as a miracle? (12:11-17)
7. What instructions did Peter give those gathered before he left the city? (12:17)
8. Why do Herod's actions further substantiate the miracle? (12:18-19)
9. Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, is the Herod of Acts, chapter 12. Reread 12:1-3. A Herod's job was to maintain peace and Roman control over a certain geographical region. Why would Herod have chosen to kill James and imprison Peter?
10. What do verses 19—20 indicate about the reign of Herod Agrippa I? About his personality?
11. Josephus, a Roman historian, recorded the events seen in Acts 12:21-23. Josephus described Herod's robe as made completely out of silver. When the sun flashed on it the crowd shouted and "hailed him as a god." Josephus recorded that Herod Agrippa died five days later of "severe belly pain." According to Luke, why was Herod was struck down?
12. How did God bless the events found in chapter 12? (12:24)
13. Reread Acts 11:27-30. What was the mission that brought Barnabus and Paul to Jerusalem? (12:25) Who returned with them to Antioch?

*Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.*

—Proverbs 19:21

## Lesson 9

### Paul's First Missionary Journey

*Acts 13-14*

Acts, Chapter 13, marks a shift in the story of the early church. Saul, Barnabus, and John Mark have just returned to Antioch after taking the help offering to the Church in Jerusalem. The church in Antioch was a diverse, cosmopolitan church and Chapter 13 begins by introducing five leaders who represent that diversity. Barnabus was a Levite from Cyprus. Simeon is a Hebrew name and the word "Niger" means black. Simeon was likely a black man from North Africa and is believed by many in theology to be the man chosen from the crowd to carry the cross of Jesus. Lucius of Cyrene was also from North Africa. Manaen is a Greek name and he was associated in some way with Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, having been brought up together. The fifth leader was Saul of Tarsus. These five men, all very different in background, met together to fast and pray. The result of that time was the unified idea that the church should encourage and support Saul and Barnabus to take the gospel to other regions of the world. John Mark accompanied the two missionaries on that first journey.

#### *Read Acts 13 and 14*

1. How did Saul and Barnabus decide where they should travel? (13:4-5) Read Romans 1:16-17. Who did they preach to first and why?
2. A proconsul was appointed by the Roman Senate to oversee an area and monitor the civil functions. Bar-Jesus, meaning "son of salvation," was an attendant to the proconsul in Paphos. How is Bar-Jesus described? Recap Saul's ministry to these men. (13:6-12)
3. What happened at this point in the missionary journey? (13:13) What was the setting for the next event that Luke recorded? (13:14-15)
4. Paul preached an evangelistic sermon to the crowd gathered. Read the following verses and summarize the major point Paul made in each section:  
  
The introduction: (13:16-25)
5. The heart of the message: (13:26-37)
6. The conclusion: (13:38-41)
7. Describe the different reactions people had to Paul's message. What was Paul's important declaration in verse 46? (13:42-52)
8. How does Paul's message to the synagogue define our message to the Jewish people of today?
9. Iconium is located in a beautiful area of what is now modern-day Turkey. The area is surrounded by rivers and has historically been a center for agriculture and commerce. How did the people of the synagogue in this important city react to Paul and Barnabus? (14:1-7)

10. Lystra and Derbe were much smaller than Pisidian Antioch and Saul and Barnabas may have chosen to travel there hoping to avoid an uproar, like the one they experienced in Psidian Antioch. What miracle occurred in Lystra and what was the perception of the people? (14:8-15a)

11. What was Paul careful to explain to the crowd? (14:15b-18)

12. What happened to Paul in Lystra? What impact did it have on his ministry? (14:19-20)

13. Describe the rest of Paul's first missionary journey. (14:21-25)

14. Look carefully at the final verses of Chapter 14. How did God use the church in Antioch to fulfill Acts 1:8? (14:26-28)

15. What is the role of the individual and what is the role of the church in God's plan to share the gospel with the world?

*And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

—Matthew 24:14

## Lesson 10

# The Jerusalem Council

*Acts 15:1-35*

Several years passed from the time of Peter's visit with Cornelius, the centurion in Caesarea. Cornelius was the first Gentile to receive the Holy Spirit. The apostles ministry, especially that of Barnabus and Paul, had led to the salvation of many Gentiles and their inclusion in the local congregations. Cornelius had accepted Jewish practices and beliefs before becoming a Christian. Most of the later Gentile believers in Paul's ministry came from pagan beliefs or no belief. As a result, they were uncircumcised believers. To those who came from a Jewish faith that meant the converts had not chosen to be "set apart" as believers in God alone. They saw lack of circumcision as a lack of commitment.

The new Gentile believers did not believe they needed to make a commitment to the Jewish Law concerning circumcision. Acts 15 records one of the most significant moments in the early church as leaders in the faith met together to find a unified answer to a problem that was splitting the congregations and ruining the fellowship they had shared.

### *Read Acts 15:1-35*

1. Read Luke's words in Acts 15:1, then read Paul's words in Galatians 5:1-12. What were the men from Judea teaching and how did Paul feel about their message?
2. How did the leaders of the church in Antioch handle the dispute? (15:2-4)
3. Look carefully at Acts 15:5. Who were the people in Jerusalem who believed and taught that each Christian needed to be circumcised?
4. Read Genesis 17:10-14. Why were the Jewish Christians right to value circumcision? Read Colossians 2:9-15. Why were the Gentile believers right to believe circumcision was unnecessary for a Christian?
5. What are the issues today that can divide a church and break the fellowship?
6. What did Peter say was necessary for a Gentile to be considered a believer? (15:6-9)
7. What did Peter say was happening because of the Jewish insistence that the Gentile men be circumcised? (15:10-11)
8. Who addressed the assembly after Peter and what was their message? (15:12)
9. James, the half-brother of Jesus, and the current leader of the church in Jerusalem was the next to speak. What message did he give to the assembly? (15:13-21)
10. The issue facing the church was doctrinal. The question before them was the role of the Old Covenant versus the New Covenant and how the two would function together. How did each spokesperson address that issue?

11. Read Matthew 5:17-20. How did Jesus address the issue?
12. What answer did the council deliver to the church in Antioch? (15:22-29)
13. What impact did this doctrinal decision have on the church in Antioch, and the Christian faith? (15:30-35)
14. Why is doctrine necessary? When is doctrine divisive? What example is set by the Jerusalem council about how to come to an agreement?

*Through insolence comes nothing but strife, but wisdom is with those who receive counsel.*

—Proverbs 13:10

## Lesson 11

# The Second Journey Begins: The Church on Mission

*Acts 15:36-16*

Paul and Barnabus left the Council in Jerusalem and returned to the church in Antioch with an important letter. The letter assured the Gentile believers that they were saved by grace because of their faith in Christ. The letter also encouraged the Gentiles to avoid immorality and live as faithful witnesses to the gospel. The church in Antioch was greatly encouraged by the message they received from the Council in Jerusalem and Paul and Barnabus made sure the other Gentile churches were informed as well.

### *Read Acts 15:36 – 16*

1. Read Acts 13:46. What had Paul and Barnabus decided on the first missionary journey?
2. What changed their plan to travel together? The result? (Acts 15:36-41)
3. Who was Timothy? What did Paul decide must happen before Timothy could join them in their work? Why would Paul make that decision after the Jerusalem Council? (Acts 16:1-5)
4. How did God direct Paul's second missionary journey? What does this passage teach about the necessity of the Holy Spirit in our own lives? (Acts 16:6-10)
5. Describe Lydia's conversion. What aspect of her story do you find most meaningful? (Acts 16:11-15)
6. A slave girl followed Paul around for many days. Who was she and why did her screams bother Paul? What did he finally do? (Acts 16:16-18)
7. Why were the girl's owners upset and what happened to Paul and Silas as a result? (Acts 16:19-24)
8. Read Romans 8:28-29. How is that verse illustrated by Paul and Silas' time in prison? (Acts 16:25-30) How might you use this passage to help a fellow Christian through a difficult time?
9. Describe the changes in the life of the jailer after his salvation. (Acts 16:31-34)
10. What had the Romans discovered about Paul and Silas that concerned them? How did Paul use this to the benefit of his ministry? (Acts 16:35-40)
11. Chapter 16 details both the miracles of God and the work of his followers. Compare Micah 3:5-12 with Acts 16. Why was Israel punished? Why were Paul and Silas protected and blessed?

*For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.*

## Lesson 12

### Paul's Second Journey Ends: Expansion of the Church

Acts 17-18:22

Paul's missionary work to the Jews and the Gentiles was having a dramatic affect on the cities he visited. His preaching was, at the very least, a message about which people were curious. People, from all walks of life were coming to faith in Christ as their Messiah, Lord and Savior. The growth of the church escalated the attacks from the Jewish leaders and Paul was the target of their anger and jealousy. Paul changed his tactics somewhat because of the persecution, and the Church continued to grow.

#### Read Acts 17 – 18:22

1. What was Paul's objective when he preached in the synagogue? (Acts 17:1-3)
2. Who accepted his message as truth? (17:4)
3. It is quite possible that the book of Acts was written as a legal defense for Paul. What was Luke careful to point out about the controversy that took place between the Jews and the Christians in Thessalonica? (17:5-9)
4. How did Paul and Silas protect the early church and themselves from the Jewish persecution? (17:10)
5. How did Luke compare the Berean Jews to those in Thessalonica? What can we learn from their example? (17:11-12)
6. How did the missionaries handle the second attack from the Jews from Thessalonica? (17:13-15)
7. Describe the culture of Athens. How did Paul try to minister to the various groups? (17:16-21)
8. List the major points of Paul's sermon at the meeting of the Areopagus. (17:22-31)
9. What was the point of contention with those at the meeting? How did Paul handle the "argument?" (17:32-33)
10. Read 1 Corinthians 15. Why is belief in the resurrection essential to the Christian faith? Who believed Paul that day? (17:34)
11. What did Paul do in Corinth while waiting for Silas and Timothy? (18:1-4)
12. How did Paul's ministry change after Silas and Timothy arrived? (18:5-8)
13. How was Paul's ministry attacked in Corinth? Why did he choose to remain in the city this time? (18:9-17)
14. Who traveled to Ephesus with Paul and how were they important to the mission? (18:18-26)

*All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

## Lesson 13

### Paul's Third Missionary Journey

*Acts 18:23-20:6*

The message of the gospel had grown influential, especially in the areas where Paul's ministry has planted churches. The effect of the gospel had been changed lives and the culture is changing as a result. Paul is able to revisit some of those first congregations established on earlier missionary trips. Paul was able to remain for extended periods of time, preaching and teaching. The third missionary journey shows the evidence of people whose lives were changed by their faith in Christ.

***Read Acts 18:23 – 20:6***

1. When Paul left Antioch for his third missionary journey, where did he go and for what purpose? (Acts 18:23)
2. Who was Apollos? How does his story illustrate the success of Paul's missionary work? (18:24-28)
3. The beginning of Acts 19 appears to indicate a "second baptism" of the Holy Spirit. Paul encountered twelve men in Ephesus that he referred to as "disciples." His questions of them indicate that he did not think they were yet disciples of Christ. What did Paul ask the men and what did he realize when he heard their answers? (19:1-7)
4. Paul spent a long time in Ephesus. Where did Paul begin his preaching ministry and why did he change venues? How did his time in Ephesus reflect the growth and rising influence of the Christian church? (19:8-10)
5. How did God choose to bless Paul's ministry in Ephesus? Why might God have chosen to use these extraordinary acts? (19:11-20)
6. Where did Paul feel called to visit after Ephesus? (19:21-22)
7. How was the spread of Christianity, through Paul's preaching, impacting the region? (19:23-27)
8. Describe the uproar that ensued? (19:28-34)
9. Paul had wanted to speak to the crowd but the believers would not allow him to go. Who calmed the crowd and why would Luke choose to include this story in his narrative? (19:35-41)
10. How does Paul's work, combined with God's extraordinary blessing speak to the mission of bringing the Gospel to our own culture?
11. What did Paul decide to do after the uproar that had occurred in Ephesus? (20:1)
12. How was God guiding and protecting Paul's ministry during this third missionary journey? What did Luke want the readers to know about this time? (20:2-6)

*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

## Lesson 14

### Paul's Love for Ephesus and the Church

*Acts 20:7-21:16*

The church in Antioch was like a parent church to Paul. The members there offered their help, their encouragement and their support. The church in Ephesus was much like Paul's child. Paul was concerned for the wellbeing of that church and invested a great deal of time teaching and training that congregation in the truth of "The Way." The church in Ephesus had influenced the surrounding areas as well as their own city because of its strategic position on the trade route. Paul devoted his life to sharing the gospel, and the evidence of God's blessing and favor on his ministry was clear.

#### ***Read Acts 20:7 – 21:16***

1. How did Paul end his week in Troas? (20:7)
2. What happened while Paul was teaching, and how did God choose to redeem? (20:8-12)
3. What was Paul's priority at this point in his ministry? (20:13-16). What could be a lesson for your personal ministry from this passage?
4. Paul sent for the leaders of the church in Ephesus. How did Paul describe his years of ministry in that city? (20:17-21)
5. Look again at verse 21. What lessons can you draw for your own life and ministry?
6. Why was Paul focused on Jerusalem? What did he expect to happen in that city? (20:22-24)
7. What did Paul expect to happen to the church in Ephesus? What did he ask the leaders of that church to do? (20:25-31)
8. Why did Paul have confidence for the church even though he would be absent? (20:32)
9. What did Paul want the leaders of the church to remember about his time and ministry with them? Why would Paul want them to remember those things? (20:33-35)
10. Describe Paul's farewell to those church leaders? (20:36-38)
11. What did the leaders in Tyre want Paul to know? Reread Acts 20:22. Why was Paul unable to heed their words? What was the Holy Spirit preparing God's people to know? (21:1-6)
12. Who did Paul visit in Caesarea and what do we learn about that disciple's ministry? (21: 7-9)
13. Who was Agabus and why did he come to Caesarea? What impact did his words have on Paul and the Church in that city? (21:10-16)

*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

—Philippians 3:14

## Lesson 15

### Paul's Arrest at Jerusalem

*Acts 21:17-23:35*

Agabus had prophesied that Paul would be bound and taken captive if he went to Jerusalem. Paul knew God had called him to return to the Holy City. Paul's ultimate calling was to visit Rome and that calling was fulfilled by all that happened in Jerusalem. Luke accompanied Paul to Jerusalem and was a witness to all that takes place in the final chapters of Acts. Paul would stand trial five different times during his two year imprisonment. Each time Paul had to defend himself against the accusations made by the Jewish people. Luke made it clear that while the Jewish hostility increased, so did Paul's favor with the Gentile population.

#### *Read Acts 21:17 – 23:35*

1. What was the first place Paul visited upon his arrival in Jerusalem and what message did he bring them? (21:17-19)
2. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) had stated that it was unnecessary for a Gentile to be circumcised but the controversy persisted in the early church. Read Galatians 6:12-16. Why did Paul make his message to the church in Jerusalem a high priority? (21:20-21)
3. What did the church ask of Paul and four others so they could pacify the Jewish Christians who were "zealous for the law?" (21:22-26)
4. Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Why was Paul willing to compromise with the Jewish Christians? When is compromise appropriate and when is it hypocritical?
5. Why were the Jews in the temple upset? What was the charge they made against Paul and what was Luke careful to point out? (21:27-29)
6. Why was Paul's life saved? (21:30-32)
7. What was the Roman commander interested in knowing? What did Luke want the reader to know? (21:33-36)
8. What was Paul's request of the commander and why was he surprised by Paul's words? (21:37-40)
9. How did God redeem Paul's capture and persecution by the Jews? (22:1-21)
10. Why was the crowd of angry Jews enraged? Why was that a brilliant thing for Paul to speak of at that moment? (22:22)
11. What did the Roman commander order and why did it not take place? (22:23-29)
12. What was the next order from the Roman commander? (22:30)
13. How did Paul's words before the Sanhedrin reveal his theological and political brilliance? (23:1-8)

14. How was Paul spared harm from the Sanhedrin? (23:9-10)

15. What did the Lord make certain Paul knew while he endured prison? (23:11)

16. What did the Jewish people plan and how was Paul spared? (23:12-35)

17. What did Paul's time in Jerusalem reveal about the way God's will is accomplished in our lives?

*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

—Isaiah 55:9

## Letter 16

### Paul's Imprisonment in Caesarea

#### Acts 24

The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision saying that he would go to Rome, but did not say how that journey would be accomplished. Paul was taken by the Roman commander in Jerusalem to Caesarea, and could not have known all that would happen. Some events in life happen as the result of God's overt and intended will. Other times, God must redeem the choices of men in order to accomplish his will. God was sending Paul to Rome, but his journey would take many unusual turns.

#### Read Acts 24

1. Reread Acts 23:23-35. Who was Felix and why was Paul brought to stand trial before him?
2. Who came from Jerusalem as Paul's prosecutors? What impression would their presence have given to a Roman governor? (Acts 24:1)
3. The power struggle between the Jewish leaders and the Roman government historically intense and long-lived. Study the words of Tertullus, the Jewish prosecution lawyer. What did he hope to accomplish with Felix? (Acts 24:2-4)
4. What were the charges against Paul and how did these charges differ from the charges made before the Roman commander in Jerusalem? What do the differences indicate? (24:5-9)
5. How did Paul respond to the charges against him? (24:10-13)
6. How did Paul compare himself to his accusers? (24:14-16)
7. Why should Paul have been absolved of his crimes and set free? (24:17-22) What happened instead?
8. What were the conditions of Paul's captivity? (24:23)
9. Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12) and, the sister of Herod Agrippa II and Bernice, who Luke will talk about in later chapters. She is known historically as a beautiful woman who was seduced by a magician, away from her first marriage into a marriage with Felix. Drusilla, according to records, was the governor's third wife. How might his past explain his reaction in verse 25? What does this story say about Paul's commitment to the truth of God's word? (24:24-25)
10. How long was Paul held in prison by Felix and why? (24:26-27)
11. Why did Felix leave Paul in the hands of Festus, his successor? (24:27)
12. Caesarea is located about seventy miles from Jerusalem. It is commonly believed that Luke used the time during Paul's two-year imprisonment in Caesarea to write the gospel that carries his name. How has God redeemed a difficult time in your life for a greater purpose?
13. Luke hinted to the fact that Paul was probably given a chance to free himself or to be freed by others during his time in Caesarea. How does his example speak to Christians and to the church in today's culture?

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

## Letter 17

### **Paul on Trial**

#### *Acts 25-26*

Historians record that Felix was removed from his position in Caesarea because he used brutal force to calm a civil dispute between a group of Jews and a group of Syrians. The reports of his savage treatment reached Rome and he was called to face charges in that city. Reportedly his brother appealed to Nero on his behalf and that is why Felix was not executed for his crimes. Festus, his replacement, was sent to Caesarea and he would be the next Roman leader to place Paul on trial.

#### ***Read Acts 25-26***

1. Festus traveled through Jerusalem on his way to Caesarea. Describe his encounter with the Jews while in that city. (Acts 25:1-5)
2. How did Luke make certain the reader understood the gravity of Paul's situation at this time? (25:6-7)
3. The position that Festus held in this part of the Roman Empire had one main priority. The Roman leader was required to exercise the civil authority of the Roman government and maintain peace with the powerful Jewish population. The Zealots were a radical group of Jews who were intent on overpowering the Roman government and purging them from the land. What did Paul need to prove as he stood before Festus? (25:8)
4. Paul was essentially in the same legal position Jesus was forced into. What was the difference between Paul's defense and the position that Jesus chose to take? How does this speak to their different callings from God?
5. Look again at the amount of time that Festus spent in Jerusalem with the Jewish leadership. How did Festus want to handle this situation with Paul? (25:9)
6. How did Paul's response to Festus insure that he would not be returned to the Jewish court in Jerusalem? (25:10-12)
7. Herod Agrippa II and Bernice, his sister, were the next leaders to arrive. History records that this Herod had an incestuous relationship with his sister. Study the following verses about his family lineage:  
  
Herod the Great, his great-grandfather (Matthew 2):  
  
Herod Antipas, his grandfather (Matthew 14:1-12):  
  
Herod Agrippa I, his father (Acts 12):
8. What did Herod Agrippa II want from Festus? Given the familial history, what might Paul have expected to encounter from his next trial? (25:13-22)
9. Describe the room that Paul was ushered into. What does that say about the importance of and interest in this trial? (25:23)

10. What was the position that Festus had chosen to take with Paul's trial and how did he shift responsibility for Paul's life to Herod Agrippa II? Why was this a clever political choice for Festus to make? (25:24-27)
11. Read through Paul's carefully prepared speech. Look again at the charges (25:8) that he must answer to. How did Paul succeed in proving his innocence of all charges? (26:1-23)
12. Why did Festus interrupt Paul's defense? How did Paul respond to his accusation? (26:24-27)
13. What did Herod say was Paul's purpose in speaking? How did Paul respond? (26:28-29)
14. Picture, again, the room where Paul was questioned. Imagine the way Festus, Herod and Bernice would have been robed and seated on thrones. Picture Paul, in prison clothes and chains. What did Paul accomplish with his words, his demeanor and through the power of the Holy Spirit? (26:30-31)
15. Why was Paul not set free? (26:32)

*But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*

—Matthew 10:19-20

## Lesson 18

### Paul's Trip to Rome

*Acts 27-28:16*

For every Roman citizen, Paul included, the city of Rome was the center of the world. Rome was the greatest world power that had ever existed, and their rule had changed the world. The armies, the roads, the architecture and the arts had changed the world culture. The “Pax Romana” or Roman peace was designed to enable all peoples to live together under one authority. Paul, from the time he was a young boy, would have dreamt of seeing the city of Rome. In addition to the cultural draws there would have been his spiritual calling. Acts 2 records that there were men from Rome in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. It is possible that when they returned home, they took work of the gospel with them. Twenty-five years after Pentecost, Paul wrote his “Christian manifesto” and sent it to them. The book of Romans was probably written at the end of Paul’s third missionary journey, before he returned to Jerusalem and was captured. Paul had longed to see Rome, was called to see Rome and now, if on his way to that city.

#### ***Read Acts 27-28:15***

1. Read Romans 15:23-33. What had been Paul’s plan for the coming years of his life?
2. Describe Paul’s traveling companions when he set sail for Rome? (27:1-2)
3. Luke gave a detailed account of the initial journey. What circumstances does Luke want the readers to understand? (27:3-12)
4. Why did the captain choose to set sail? What happened shortly after? (27:13-20)
5. What was the good news and the bad news Paul delivered to the people on the ship? How had he received that news? (27:21-26)
6. How did Paul save the people on the ship? (27:27-32)
7. What does Paul instruct the people to do? How does this section of Luke’s narrative illustrate the favor that Paul had with the Roman soldiers on the ship? (27:33-38)
8. Why did the prisoners on the ship escape death when the ship ran aground? (27:39-44)
9. Where did they land and how were they treated upon arrival? (28:1-2)
10. What did the islanders assume about Paul after he was bitten by the snake? Why and how did their assumption change? (28:3-6)
11. Describe Paul’s ministry while on the island of Malta. (28:7-10)
12. Describe the remainder of Paul’s journey to Rome. What can be concluded about Paul’s reputation from Luke’s description? (28:11-16)
13. If, in fact, the book of Acts was written as a legal defense for Paul, why did Paul have sufficient evidence to prove his innocence to the Roman government? What do these facts prove about Paul’s ministry?

*They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.*

## Lesson 19

### Paul Brings the Gospel to Rome

*Acts 28:17-31*

Paul arrived in Rome and was allowed to live in a home by himself, with a soldier guarding him. It has been years since he was arrested in Jerusalem, held captive in Caesarea and then sailed on his journey to Rome. Paul knew that God had made his presence in Rome possible and chose to honor God's will and God's calling on his life, regardless of the consequences. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, took the gospel message to the most important city in the world.

***Read Acts 28:17-31***

1. Paul met with the Jewish leaders first. How did Paul explain his house arrest to the Jewish leaders? (28:17-20)
2. How was this group of Jewish leaders different from the leaders in Jerusalem? What could Paul have done with that information, what did he choose to do instead? (28:21-22)
3. How did Paul explain the gospel to the Jewish leaders, and others of the Jewish faith? (28:23)
4. How did the Jewish leaders receive Paul's message? How does Paul explain their response? (28:24-27)
5. What did Paul state would happen next? (28:28)
6. What did Paul do while under house arrest in Rome for two years? (28:29-31)
7. Paul spent two years in imprisoned in Caesarea, spent at least six months sailing to Rome and then lived two years, under house arrest, in Rome. Look again at Acts 9:15-16. What did God tell Ananias about his purpose for Paul's life?
8. During Paul's two years of house arrest he wrote four letters to churches that were founded on his earlier missionary journeys. Paul could not have known his letters would survive and be considered Scripture by future Christians. Read the following verses from his prison epistles, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, and record the messages that Paul, through the Holy Spirit, provided the Christian church.

Ephesians 2:8:

Philippians 2:12-13:

Philippians 4:6-8:

3 Philippians 4:11-13:

Colossians 1:15-16:

Colossians 3:12:

Colossians 3:16:

Colossians 4:5-6:

9. Eusebius was a bishop in Caesarea in the 4th-century. He is credited with being the first Christian to write a chronological account of Early Christianity from the first century through the fourth century. Eusebius provided the following information about Paul's death that many in the church adopted as tradition. He wrote: "Concerning the time, place, and manner of his (Paul's) death, we have little certainty. It is commonly believed that, when a general persecution was raised against the Christians by Nero, about A.D. 64, under pretence that they had set Rome on fire, both St. Paul and St. Peter then sealed the truth with their blood; the latter being crucified with his head downward; the former being beheaded, either in A.D. 64 or 65, and buried in the Via Ostiensis." Having studied Paul's life, what event or lesson do you find most memorable and why?

*If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.*

—Philippians 1:22-23

## Lesson 20

# The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Early Church

### *A Review of Acts*

Luke began the gospel bearing his name saying that he would record “all that Jesus began to do and teach.” Luke wrote that the book of Acts is the story of what Jesus continued “to do and teach” after his ascension. The book of Acts continues to reveal the miracles and teaching caused by the Holy Spirit. John Stott defines the Holy Spirit as the continued earthly ministry of Jesus through the believers of Christ. In closing the study of Acts it is beneficial to look back at the ministry of Jesus through the lives of his disciples.

For each passage, record the work of the Holy Spirit and write down the lesson to be learned by God’s people today.

Acts 2:1-8

Acts 2:17-18, 38

Acts 2:42-47

Acts 3:1-16

Acts 4:8-10

Acts 4:31

Acts 5: 1-11

Acts 5:12

Acts 5:17-20

Acts 7:55-56

Acts 8:4-8

Acts 8:38-39

Acts 9:17-19

Acts 10:44-46

Acts 12:8-10

Acts 13:6-12

Acts 16:6-10

Acts 16:25-28

Acts 20:7-12

Acts 27 – The voyage and the shipwreck

Acts 28:4-5

Acts 28:30-31

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

–Acts 1:8