

Contents

The Book of Acts

1. “‘The Holy Spirit Will Come to You’ ”— <i>June 30–July 6</i>	4
2. God Pours His Holy Spirit on His People — <i>July 7–13</i>	11
3. Church Life During New Testament Times — <i>July 14–20</i>	18
4. The Church’s First Leaders — <i>July 21–27</i>	25
5. Paul Becomes a Christian — <i>July 28–August 3</i>	32
6. Peter’s Work for God — <i>August 4–10</i>	39
7. Paul’s First Trip to Share the Good News — <i>August 11–17</i>	46
8. The Jerusalem Group — <i>August 18–24</i>	53
9. Paul’s Second Trip to Share the Good News — <i>August 25–31</i>	60
10. Paul’s Third Trip to Share the Good News — <i>September 1–7</i>	67
11. Paul’s Arrest in Jerusalem — <i>September 8–14</i>	74
12. Paul in Prison — <i>September 15–21</i>	81
13. Paul’s Trip to Rome — <i>September 22–28</i>	88

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Introduction



The Power and the Success of the Good News About Jesus

Many history experts believe that the most important time in history happened when a small group of men told people everywhere about Jesus and the Good News. This small group of men was mostly Jews. The Holy Spirit gave them power to do their work.

The book of Acts is the story about that important time in history. That time lasts a little over 30 years. It starts with Jesus' waking up from the dead and coming back to life in A.D. 31. It ends when Paul is put in prison in Rome for the first time in A.D. 62 (Acts 28:30). We believe Luke wrote the book of Acts soon after Paul went to prison. Why do we think that Luke wrote the book soon after that happened? Because the story in the book of Acts ends just after Paul becomes a prisoner. The Bible shows us that the Romans let Paul go free from prison later. Then Paul continues to tell people the Good News about Jesus. Paul preaches and travels until he is arrested a second time, a few years later. This time, Paul is killed in Rome in A.D. 67.

The book of Acts does not tell us anything about who wrote it. But church leaders told stories many years later that say Luke wrote the book of Acts. Luke is also the same "dear doctor" that Paul writes about in Colossians 4:14 (NLV). Luke is Paul's friend, and he travels with Paul (2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Many people believe that Luke also wrote the third Gospel story about Jesus. The Gospel stories about Jesus are the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Bible experts believe that Luke's Gospel is the book that Acts 1:1 talks about when it says, "the first book" (ERV). Both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts teach us about how the Christian religion started. The Gospel of Luke tells us about Jesus' life and His work. The book of Acts also talks about the work that Jesus' first followers did to take the Good News about Jesus everywhere on the earth during New Testament times.

Together, both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts make about 27%, or almost 1/3, of the New Testament. That means Luke wrote more words in the New Testament than any other writer. Paul seems to say in his letter to the Colossians that Luke is not

Jewish (Colossians 4:7–14). Luke is the only non-Jewish writer who writes part of the New Testament. All other New Testament writers are Jews.

When we keep in mind that Luke is not Jewish, we will understand an important topic he writes about: God wants to save everyone. God has no favorites. God commands the church to witness to everyone everywhere (Acts 1:8; Acts 2:21, 39, 40; Acts 3:25; Acts 10:28, 34, 35). If we fail to do this work, then we go against the Good News itself and a very important Bible truth: we are all the same before God. We are sinners who need Jesus to save us.

Other important topics in Acts are: (1) God's power over everything and His plan to save us (Acts 17:24, 25; Acts 20:27; Acts 23:11); (2) the truth that Jesus is both Lord and Savior (Acts 2:32, 36; Acts 3:13, 15; Acts 4:10–12; Acts 5:30, 31); and (3) the Holy Spirit's work to lead the church and make it grow strong to do God's work (Acts 2:1–4; Acts 4:24–31; Acts 8:14–17, 29, 39; Acts 10:19, 20). The New Testament church's success does not come from human wisdom or skill. The New Testament church's success comes from God. The same thing is true for us today. No other church leader in Paul's time is able to do what Paul did (1 Corinthians 15:10). God uses Paul to change the world in a powerful way, and God will use us too.

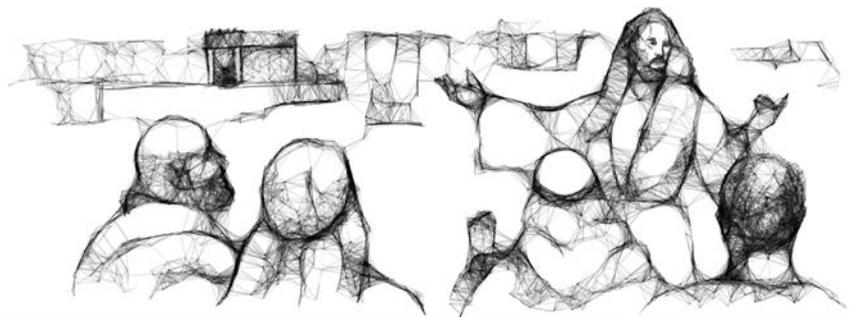
We are all the same before God. We are sinners who need Jesus to save us.

Acts tells the story about how fast the New Testament church grew. We can see one example of how fast the church grew when we read about how the church answers hard questions. The church answers hard questions about (1) faith and how our faith helps us become saved, (2) the things non-Jewish members must do, and (3) the time when Jesus will come back to earth. The New Testament church does a lot of work in a short time. The church's success shows us what God can do when we give our lives to Him and pray. But we must not be proud. We must not let our problems or disagreements with other believers stop our work for God. Then the Spirit can use us to bring honor and glory to God.

The book of Acts tells us the story about the people in the New Testament church who did God's work. God asked them to start this work. Today, God asks us to finish the work they started. What can we learn from their story to help us do God's work?

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“ ‘The Holy Spirit Will Come to You’ ”



SABBATH—JUNE 30

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Acts 1:6–8; Luke 24:25; Luke 24:44–48; Deuteronomy 19:15; Acts 1:9–26.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘But the Holy Spirit will come to you. Then you will receive power. You will be my witnesses—in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria, and in every part of the world’ ” (Acts 1:8, ICB).



The Holy Spirit will help Jesus’ followers do a special work to reach people all over the earth.

IN ACTS 1, Jesus promises His followers that soon God will send to them His Holy Spirit to give them power. The Holy Spirit will help Jesus’ followers do a special work to reach people all over the earth. The Holy Spirit will do many miracles. Then people everywhere will know that this special work comes from God. Jesus cannot stay on this earth in a human body with His followers forever. His human body puts limits on the things Jesus can do for His followers. Also, Jesus needs to go to heaven so that the Holy Spirit can come to this earth and be with God’s people.

But God’s people do not clearly understand these things until after Jesus wakes up from the dead and comes back to life. Jesus’ followers give up everything to follow Him. Jesus’ followers believe He will get rid of the Romans and make Israel a powerful kingdom again. It is not easy for Jesus’ followers to think in a different way.

In Acts 1, we read about Jesus’ last lesson to His followers. Jesus promises to give them the Holy Spirit. Acts 1 also tells us Jesus goes to heaven and how the New Testament church gets ready for the Holy Spirit’s coming.

A NEW ISRAEL (Acts 1:6)

The Old Testament promises Israel that God will send them the Messiah. The Messiah is God's Chosen One. God chose the Messiah to save His people. But save them from what? Some verses in the Old Testament promise that the Messiah also is a king. This king will rule forever (Psalm 89:3, 4, 35–37). Other verses about the Messiah promise a Savior who will die for the sins of His people (Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Daniel 9:26). These different promises about the Messiah do not disagree with each other. Instead, they tell us about the different parts of the Messiah's work. First, the Messiah will suffer. Then the Messiah will become king (Luke 17:24, 25; Luke 24:25, 26).

But the problem with the Jews in Jesus' time is that they hope for a Messiah who will save them from the Romans. This false hope causes the Jews to not understand that the Messiah will come to suffer and die for our sins.

At first, Jesus' followers tell the Jews about their hope for a Messiah who will be a powerful king on the earth. They believe Jesus is this king (Matthew 16:16, 20). Sometimes Jesus' followers fight with each other about who will sit next to Jesus' throne when He becomes king (Mark 10:35–37; Luke 9:46). Jesus warns His followers about His suffering and death. But His followers do not understand what He means. So, when Jesus dies, His followers become confused. They have no hope (read Luke 24:21).

What does Acts 1:6 tell us that Jesus' followers do not understand? In Acts 1:7, how does Jesus answer?

Jesus' death destroys His followers' hope that He is the Messiah. But then they see Him alive again, and they start to hope. They now believe strongly that Jesus will become king of Israel on this earth and end Roman power.

Jesus' answer is very interesting. He says nothing about giving the kingdom back to Israel. He also says nothing about becoming Israel's king. Instead, Jesus tells His followers to remember that only God knows the time when He will do the things He promises. No human can know when.

As Luke 24:25 shows us, what is the real problem with Jesus' followers? Why is it easy to believe what we want to believe instead of looking for the truth the Bible teaches? How can we escape this trap?



Only God knows the time when He will do the things He promises.

THE SPECIAL WORK JESUS GIVES HIS FOLLOWERS TO DO (Acts 1:8)

Read Acts 1:8. As these verses show us, what does Jesus ask His followers to do?

Acts 1:8 tells us about the work Jesus gave His followers. There are four important parts to this work:

1. The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit always worked for God's people. But God's messengers in the Old Testament tell us about a time in the future when God will give the Holy Spirit to His people in a special way (Isaiah 44:3; Joel 2:28, 29). The Spirit already filled Jesus during His work on earth (Luke 4:18–21). But God the Father pours His Spirit on Jesus' followers after God honors Jesus in heaven (John 7:39; Acts 2:33).

2. Witness. A witness is someone who sees something happen with his or her own eyes. Jesus' followers are His witnesses (Acts 1:21, 22; Acts 4:20; also read 1 John 1:1–3). Now Jesus commands His followers to share with everyone on Planet Earth their special experience with Him.

3. The Plan for the Special Work. Jesus orders His followers to witness in Jerusalem first. Then they must witness in Judea and Samaria next. Finally, Jesus tells His followers to take the Good News to everyone. Jerusalem is the center of Jewish religious life. But Jesus dies on the cross outside the city gate. Jesus also works outside the city in Judea and Samaria. So, Jesus' followers must work in other places too. They must go everywhere on the earth.

4. The Audience for the Special Work. In Old Testament times, God planned for the people and countries around Israel to come to Him. God did not plan for Israel to go out to the different nations and preach about Him. (God's special messenger Jonah is an example of someone who takes God's message to other people. That does not happen very often.) But in the New Testament, things change. Yes, Jerusalem is the center of religion for Jesus' believers. But they must not stay there. That is why God sends the believers to share the Good News with everyone on the earth.



Jesus dies on the cross outside Jerusalem's gate. So, Jesus' followers must work outside Jerusalem in other places too.

Read Luke 24:44–48. As these verses show us, what message does Jesus give to His followers to preach?

Jesus spends 40 days with His followers after He comes back to life (Acts 1:3). He explains many Bible truths to them. Now His followers understand the truth more clearly.

HE WILL COME AGAIN (Acts 1:9–11)

Read Acts 1:9–11. How does Luke, in Acts 1:9–11, describe Jesus' going up to heaven? After Jesus goes to heaven, two angels meet with Jesus' followers. What special meaning does this meeting have? (Read Deuteronomy 19:15.)

We must understand that Luke describes in human words what happens here. The only way Luke can describe Jesus' leaving the earth is by saying Jesus goes up in the air.

Jesus' going to heaven is a miracle from God. Luke uses the verb “eperthe” to show us that Jesus' leaving is a miracle. “Eperthe” shows us that Jesus does not lift Himself up into heaven. Instead, Someone is lifting Jesus: “he was lifted up into the sky” (Acts 1:9, ERV). The only time we find “eperthe” in the New Testament is in this verse. But we find “eperthe” several times in the Greek Old Testament. The Greek Old Testament uses “eperthe” to mean the actions of God. So, when we understand the meaning of “eperthe” in the Greek Old Testament, we understand what this word means in the New Testament. “Eperthe” helps us see that God Himself takes Jesus up to heaven. “Eperthe” also shows us that God is the One who wakes Jesus up from the dead (Acts 2:24, 32; Romans 6:4). But in John 10:18, Jesus says He has the power to get back His own life after He dies: “‘My Father has given Me this right [something Jesus can do because the power is already His] and power’ ” (NLV). At the same time, this verse also shows us that Jesus' power to get His life back again comes from God too.

A cloud hides Jesus as He goes up. Then Luke tells us about the two angels standing next to Jesus' followers. Luke is the only Bible writer to tell us about the angels. They wear shining white clothes. In other parts of the Bible, we read about angels wearing bright clothes (Acts 10:30; John 20:12). The angels tell Jesus' followers that Jesus will come back the same way He goes up. He goes up to heaven “while [His followers] were watching” (Acts 1:9, ERV).

The way Jesus' followers see Him go up to heaven in a cloud is a promise that Jesus will come back to the earth in the clouds. Yes, Jesus' Second Coming will happen in the clouds “with power and much greatness” (Luke 21:27, NLV). “‘Everyone will see him’ ” (Revelation 1:7, ERV). Jesus will not be alone (Luke 9:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:7). The power and glory of the Second Coming will be far more than the power and glory that Jesus' followers saw when He went up to heaven after waking up from the dead.



The angels tell Jesus' followers that Jesus will come back the same way He goes up.

JESUS' FOLLOWERS GET READY FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT TO COME (Acts 1:12–14)

In Acts 1:7, 8, Jesus answers His followers' question about when He will come back. Jesus does not say when that will be. But we see in Jesus' words a hint that He will come back after the Spirit comes and His followers finish their work (read Matthew 24:14). The angels' words to Jesus' followers do not answer the question about when Jesus' kingdom will come. But the angels' words hint that Jesus' kingdom will come soon. This idea explains why Jesus' followers go "back to Jerusalem very happy" (Luke 24:52, ERV). They believe the end will happen soon.

Read Acts 1:12–14. As we learn from these verses, who is there in the upstairs room? How do the people in the upstairs room get ready for the Holy Spirit's coming?

Jesus' followers come back from the Mount of Olives. Then they gather together in the guest room upstairs in a house in Jerusalem. Some women followers of Jesus also are there (Luke 8:1–3; Acts 23:49; Acts 24:1–12). Jesus' mother and brothers are there, too, with Jesus' followers.

Who are Jesus' brothers (Mark 6:3)? The Bible gives us good reasons to believe that Jesus' brothers were the older sons of Joseph from his first marriage. We know that Mary could not be their mother because Jesus was Mary's firstborn son (Matthew 1:18–23; Luke 1:34, 35). Ellen G. White agrees. She says that Jesus' brothers were "older than Jesus."—*The Desire of Ages*, page 87, adapted. Anyway, the fact that Jesus' brothers join Jesus' followers there in the upstairs room is a big surprise. Jesus' brothers always doubted Jesus was God's Chosen One (Mark 3:21; John 7:5). But Jesus' coming back to life from the dead seems to change them. Also, Jesus makes a special appearance to his brother James (1 Corinthians 15:7). Later, James takes Peter's place as the leader of the Christian community (Acts 12:17; Acts 15:13; Acts 21:18; Galatians 2:9, 12).

The people in the upstairs room pray a lot (Acts 1:14). They also go to the temple to praise God (Luke 24:53). It is clear that Jesus' followers confess their sins to God and change their behavior. They get ready for God to give His Spirit to them.

What can we do every day to get ready for the Holy Spirit to do His work in our lives?



Jesus' followers gather together in the guest room upstairs in a house in Jerusalem. There they pray and wait for the Holy Spirit.

JESUS' TWELFTH FOLLOWER (Acts 1:21, 22)

The first thing that the new Christian church does is choose someone to take Judas's place. At that time, the Christian church was a group of 120 believers (Acts 1:15).

Read Acts 1:21, 22. As these verses show us, what experience does the person taking Judas's place need to have? Why is this experience so important?

The person taking Judas's place needs to be someone who saw Jesus after He woke up from the dead (read Acts 4:33). This experience is very important because Jesus' coming back to life proves that the Christian faith is true. It also proves that Jesus is the Messiah. The Messiah is the Savior that God chose to free His people from sin.

Jesus' followers decide to choose someone who also was with them during the time that Jesus worked on earth. This person will become the new apostle. The apostles were the twelve followers of Jesus that later became the leaders and teachers of the church after Jesus woke up from the dead and went to heaven. Paul is an interesting example because he is the only apostle who did not follow Jesus during the time that He worked on earth. But Paul says that he is Jesus' apostle in the same way that the twelve apostles are. Why does Paul say that? Because Paul meets Jesus on the road to Damascus. This meeting gives Paul the power to witness to other people about the truth that Jesus woke up from the dead (1 Corinthians 9:1). Paul does not see himself as less experienced or less skilled than Jesus' other apostles (1 Corinthians 9:2; Galatians 2:6–9). Paul and the Twelve men Jesus chose were apostles (Acts 1:25, 26). The most basic meaning of the word "apostle" is messenger. The word sometimes is used in the Bible for a few other workers who tell other people the Good News (2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25).

As we learn in Acts 1:23–26, how do the church leaders choose Matthias?

The believers pray to God to know His plan. "Then they drew names and the name of Matthias was chosen" (Acts 1:26, NLV).

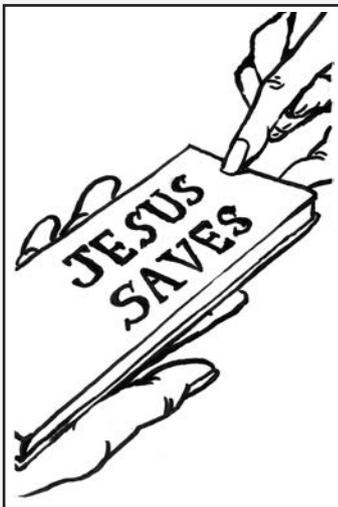
How can you know God's plan for your life?



The believers "drew names and the name of Matthias was chosen" (Acts 1:26, NLV). Matthias took Judas's place.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “God gives His Holy Spirit to the first believers after Jesus goes back to heaven. From that time until the Second Coming, God asks believers to do a worldwide work. This work is sharing the Good News about Jesus. The Holy Spirit will give the church the power to share the Good News. After Jesus goes back to heaven, His followers announce the things that Jesus did at His first coming. Jesus’ followers also invite people to turn away from sin and get ready for Jesus’ Second Coming. Jesus asks His followers to do these things after He goes back to heaven. Jesus’ followers are His witnesses “from one end of the earth to the other” (Acts 1:8, NIV) until the end of time. As Christians today, we must not stop until all the people on the earth have learned the Good News.”—John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & [and] the World [all the people on the earth]* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), page 44, adapted.

“Jesus’ command to His followers includes all the believers. It includes all who believe in Jesus to the end of time. We must not make the mistake of thinking that the work of saving souls belongs only to pastors. God asks every believer to share the Good News with other people. Everyone who gets a new life from Jesus will be led by God’s Spirit to help God save souls. This work is the reason that God started the church on earth. Everyone who joins the church is a partner with Jesus. Together, Jesus and His believers work to save souls.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 822, adapted.



Everyone who joins the church is a partner with Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① In Acts 1:7 Jesus says to His followers, “ ‘The Father is the only One who has the authority [power] to decide dates and times. These things are not for you to know’ ” (ICB). Ellen G. White says: “God’s people are not allowed to know the exact time when the Holy Spirit will be poured out or when Jesus will come back again.”—*Selected Messages*, volume 1, page 188, adapted. She also says: “Any person who begins to announce the hour, day, or year that Jesus will come back is announcing a message that does not come from God.”—*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 12, 1893, adapted. What do these words from Ellen G. White and the Bible tell us today?

② How important is prayer in the early church?

God Pours His Holy Spirit on His People



SABBATH—JULY 7

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 2:1–3; Acts 2:5–12; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:22–39; Psalm 110:1–3.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Jesus is the one God raised [woke up] from death. We are all witnesses of this. We saw him. Jesus was lifted up to heaven. Now he is with God, at God’s right side. The Father has given the Holy Spirit to him, as he promised. So Jesus has now poured out that Spirit. This is what you see and hear’ ” (Acts 2:32, 33, ERV).

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN by the word “Pentecost”? Pentecost comes from the Greek word “pentekoste.” It is the name for the Jewish religious festival known as the Jewish Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22), or the Feast of the First Fruits (Numbers 28:26). First fruits are the first crops from the harvest. People gave the first fruits to God as gifts, fifty days after the Passover. The Passover is a special Jewish feast. Passover celebrates the time that God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt. So, the Feast of the First Fruits is a day of joy and thanksgiving. On that day, Israel brought God the “first gathering of grain” (Exodus 34:22, NLV).

So, the Feast of the First Fruits became a word picture for the first spiritual “harvest” of the Christian church. At that time, God poured the Holy Spirit on His people more fully than ever before. Then 3,000 people were baptized on one day (Acts 2:41). Many Bible thinkers say that Pentecost is the birthday of the church. Pentecost was the time in Bible history that Jesus’ followers, both Jews and later non-Jews, became God’s new community of believers on earth.



First fruits are the first crops collected during the harvest.

THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES (Acts 2:1–3)

Jesus commands His followers to wait in Jerusalem for God to give them the Holy Spirit. So, Jesus' followers obey. They wait and pray. They ask God for power over their sins. They praise God. Then the special day comes that Jesus promised. Jesus' followers "were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1, ERV). This place may be the same large room in Acts 1. Soon the believers will move to a place that is more public (Acts 2:6–13).

Read Acts 2:1–3. What miracles and special show of power happen at the same time that God pours His Spirit on His people?

First, there is a noise from heaven. It roars the same as a windstorm. The wind's roar fills the whole place. Then something that looks the same as small flames "came down on each" person (Acts 2:3, NLV). Yes, the Spirit always worked with God's people in the Old Testament. But now God's people see the Spirit's power with their own eyes. "During the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God showed the power of the Holy Spirit to humans in a powerful way. But humans never saw the whole power of the Holy Spirit. Now, Jesus' followers prayed for the gift of the Spirit that Jesus promised them. In heaven, Jesus added His prayers to His followers' prayers. Jesus asked God to pour the gift of the Spirit on His people."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 37, adapted.



Something that looks the same as small flames of fire "came down on each" person (Acts 2:3, NLV).

Before this miracle happens, John the Baptist tells everyone that God's people will be baptized by the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16; read also Acts 11:16). The baptism by the Spirit will happen after the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah is the Savior that God chose to free His people from sin. Jesus also talks about how He will give the Spirit to His followers (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). Jesus asks God to pour the Spirit on His people at Pentecost. Pentecost is the time when God pours His Spirit on His church. Pentecost is the first time that Jesus works in heaven for His people (John 14:16, 26; John 15:26). At Pentecost, God's promise to His people comes true. God sends them the Spirit. Pentecost happened one time. But we need to ask God to fill us with His Spirit every day.

How do you know God's Spirit is working on your life?

JESUS' FOLLOWERS SPEAK IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES (Acts 2:5–12)

In Acts 2:4, the Holy Spirit gives Jesus' followers power to speak languages they did not know before. This gift is one of many gifts from the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:45, 46; Acts 19:6). Other examples of gifts from the Holy Spirit are: (1) knowing the future (Acts 11:28); (2) special dreams from God (Acts 7:55); (3) speaking messages from God (Acts 2:8; Acts 28:25); (4) healing (Acts 3:6, 12; Acts 5:12, 16); and (5) having the wisdom and skill to do special work for God (Acts 6:3, 5).

Why does the Holy Spirit give Jesus' followers the gift of speaking different languages? Remember that in Acts 1:8, Jesus gives His followers special work to do on the earth. So, Jesus' followers need to speak the same languages as the people who need to know the Good News.

We learned that Pentecost was the special time when God poured the gift of the Holy Spirit on His church. Now read Acts 2:5–12. How do these verses prove that church leaders spoke in new languages at Pentecost?

How many Jews lived on the earth in the first century (years 1–100 A.D.)? Some Bible experts say there were less than two million Jews. Other experts say there were as many as eight million. Experts also say that maybe 60% of these Jews did not live in Judea, a part of Israel in the south. Many Jews from different lands traveled to Jerusalem for Pentecost. But these Jews did not speak Aramaic. The Jews who grew up in Judea spoke Aramaic at that time.

The church leaders do not speak in unknown or strange languages that no one understands. How do we know? We know because Acts 2:6, 8 uses the word *dialektos*. It means the language of a country or a group of people (read Acts 21:40; Acts 22:2; Acts 26:14). Clearly, Jesus' followers speak in the different languages of the time. It is a miracle that these men from Galilee now speak in languages they did not know how to speak only a few minutes before! Some Jews who hear Jesus' followers speak in these different languages think that Jesus' followers are drunk "from too much wine" (Acts 2:13, ERV).

Many people thought that too much wine—and not God—caused Jesus' followers to speak in different languages. How can we be careful not to think the same way?



The gifts from the Holy Spirit to the church include: (1) knowing the future, (2) special dreams from God, (3) speaking messages from God, (4) healing, (5) having the wisdom and skill to do special work for God, and (6) speaking in new languages.

PETER'S SERMON (Acts 2:22–32)

As we learned yesterday, some Jews think Peter is drunk (Acts 2). Their misunderstanding gives Peter the chance to explain the truth to the Jews about what is really happening. First, Peter points to the Bible (Acts 2:16–21). Peter uses the Bible to show the Jews that God is pouring the Holy Spirit on His people just as He promised.

Read Acts 2:17 and Joel 2:28. How are these two verses the same? When does Peter believe that Joel's special message from God will happen?

Joel's special message from God is a promise about the future. It talks about a future time when God will save His people (Joel 2:32). Many things will happen in nature at that time to show that God is ready to save His people. God will also pour His Spirit on His people during that time (Joel 2:28–31). Peter wants to help the Jews understand what is happening in Jerusalem. So, Peter reminds the Jews about Joel's message. Peter hopes Joel's message will help the Jews see that Pentecost is very important. When Peter says the verses in Joel, he makes an important change. Let us look at Joel's words first and then at how Peter says them. Joel begins his verse with the words "After this" (Joel 2:28, ERV). "After this" means that something will happen in the future. But Peter changes these words from "After this" to "In the last days" (Acts 2:17). This change shows us that the last part in God's big plan to save us already started. The early church does not know when the end will happen. But they believe it will be soon.



Jesus' coming back to life is the biggest proof that Jesus is the Savior that God promised to send His people (Acts 2:22, 27).

Read Peter's sermon in Acts 2:22–32. What is the most important truth in Peter's sermon about the Good News?

Peter talks about Jesus' life, death, and His coming back to life from death. Peter spends the most time talking about Jesus' coming back to life. Why? Because Jesus' coming back to life is the biggest proof that Jesus is the Savior that God promised to send His people (Acts 2:22, 27). Peter uses Old Testament verses to show the Jews how important Jesus' coming back to life really is.

Death is all around us. So, why is Jesus' coming back to life from death such an important truth?

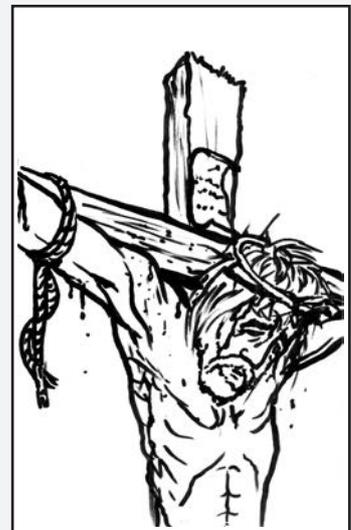
JESUS HAS A PLACE OF HONOR AT GOD'S RIGHT SIDE (Acts 2:33)

In the third part of his sermon, Peter talks again about the Holy Spirit's gift that causes God's people to speak in different languages. This gift is the reason the Jews come to hear Peter talk in the first place. Peter tells them that he and the other followers who speak in different languages are not drunk. That would be strange at nine o'clock in the morning (Acts 2:15)! Then Peter explains that the believers speak in different languages because God poured on them the Holy Spirit from heaven.

Read Acts 2:33–36. In these verses, what is the connection between (1) God giving Jesus a place of honor at His side and (2) God giving the Holy Spirit to Jesus' followers?

"At God's right side" (Acts 2:33, ERV) is a word picture. It shows us that God gives Jesus much power (Psalm 110:1–3). Peter explains that God poured out His Spirit on Jesus' followers because God gave Jesus a place of high honor in heaven. God does not give something new to Jesus. Jesus held this place of honor before (John 1:1–3; John 17:5). But now Jesus' place of honor shows everyone that God the Father sees His Son as both the Lord and Savior of all humans who believe in Him (Acts 2:36).

Jesus' place of honor at God's side is connected to one of the most important topics in the Bible: the big war between good and evil. This big war helps us understand that the Holy Spirit cannot fully come to humans until Jesus stands at God's right side (John 7:39). Jesus stands at God's right side because He wins the victory over sin at the cross (John 17:4, 5). These verses show us that Jesus needs to go to His place of honor at God's right side first. Then the Holy Spirit can come to this earth. The Holy Spirit's coming shows that God accepts Jesus' death for us. Jesus wins, and Satan loses (John 12:31). While Jesus is on the earth, He forgives sins and saves people from demons. The Cross gives Jesus the power to do those things. So, what happens when God accepts Jesus' death on the cross? God crushes Satan's work on the earth. And in our time, God will pour His Spirit on His people to get them ready for Jesus' Second Coming.



The Cross gives Jesus the power to forgive sins and save people from demons.

THE “FIRST FRUITS” (Acts 2:38, 39)

The Jews in Jerusalem listen to Peter talk. Peter’s words cut into their hearts. Some of the Jews listening to Peter may be the same people who asked the Romans to kill Jesus a few weeks earlier (Luke 23:13–25). But now, these same people believe that Jesus of Nazareth is God’s Chosen One. God chose Jesus to save His people from sin. The Jews who listen to Peter are very sad and sorry. They cry out: “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37, ICB).

Read Acts 2:38. As these verses show us, what two things do we need to have for God to forgive us?

Repentance means we feel sorry about sinning against God and others. Repentance means we fully change our lives. Repentance also means we turn away from our sins and stop doing them (Acts 3:19; Acts 26:20). Feeling sorry for our sins is more than feeling sad that we sinned. True repentance and faith are gifts we get from God. But we can choose to turn away from the gift of repentance or any of God’s gifts (Acts 5:31–33; Acts 26:19–21; Romans 2:4).

Starting in John the Baptist’s time, believers connected repentance with baptism (Mark 1:4). Baptism became an example of feeling sorry about sinning. Baptism also became a word picture for two things: (1) God’s washing away sin from the believer’s life and (2) the Holy Spirit’s giving the believer a new heart and mind to obey God (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; read also Titus 3:5–7).



True repentance and faith are gifts we get from God.

In Acts 2:38, 39, God makes a special promise to anyone who turns away from sin and is baptized. What does God promise?

God offers the Holy Spirit to the Jews who listen to Peter. God also offers them the gift of forgiveness for their sins. The Spirit will help His people grow, serve the church, and do God’s work (1 Peter 2:9). What a wonderful gift! God starts the church because He wants its members to share the Good News with other people. From now on, the believers will know that God saves them. The Holy Spirit will help them share the Good News that Jesus gave them before He went to heaven.

What hope in Jesus can we offer people if we do not fully believe that Jesus washes away all our sins?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: God poured the Holy Spirit on His church at Pentecost. Pentecost was the time when Jesus' followers, both Jews and, later, non-Jews, became God's new community of believers on earth. God's gift of the Holy Spirit to the church shows us an important truth. This gift shows us when Jesus' work in heaven started for us. It also shows us that heaven and earth are connected in wonderful and surprising ways we cannot fully understand.

"God lifts up Jesus to heaven. Jesus' going to heaven showed His followers that soon they will get the gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to them. . . . Jesus enters heaven's gates. He sits on a throne with angels all around Him. These angels honor Him. As soon as the angels finish honoring Jesus on the throne, God pours the Holy Spirit on Jesus' followers. God gives Jesus glory and honor at the same time that He pours His Spirit on Jesus' followers. This honor and glory belonged to Jesus before anything was made. This honor and glory are the same honor and glory Jesus shared with God the Father. God pours the Holy Spirit on Jesus' followers at Pentecost to show that He accepts Jesus as man's Savior. God gives Jesus all power in heaven and on earth. Jesus is now our King and High Priest. [A high priest is someone who works to save his people and bring them to God.] God's gift of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' followers proves that Jesus is now their King and High Priest."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 38, 39, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What things happened at Pentecost that our church today will experience in the same way?
- 2 The Jews in Jesus' time wait for the Messiah. The Messiah is the Savior that God chose to save His people from sin. But no one in Jesus' time thinks that the Messiah will die and come back to life. What important lesson can this idea teach us? Why do we need to know what the Bible teaches?
- 3 Acts 2:38 talks about how believers need to be baptized. What if someone believes in Jesus but dies before getting baptized? Will he or she be saved or not? Give reasons for your answer.



"God's gift of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' followers proves that Jesus is now their King and High Priest."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 39, adapted.

Church Life During New Testament Times



SABBATH—JULY 14

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 2:42–46; Acts 4:34, 35; Acts 3:12–26; Acts 4:1–18; Acts 5:1–11; Acts 5:34–39.

MEMORY VERSE: “Day after day they went to the house of God together. In their houses they ate their food together. Their hearts were happy. They gave thanks to God and all the people respected them. The Lord added to the group each day those [people] who were being saved from the punishment of sin” (Acts 2:46, 47, NLV).



What do Jesus' followers do when they think Jesus is about to come back? They sell everything they own and help the poor.

THE FIRST CHRISTIANS believe that Jesus will come back soon. Jesus' followers ask Him when His kingdom will start (Acts 1:6–8). Jesus' answer makes them think that His kingdom will start when the Holy Spirit comes and when the church finishes sharing the Good News about Jesus with all the people on the earth. That is why Jesus' believers think that the time for God's kingdom to come starts at Pentecost. Pentecost is the time when God pours His Holy Spirit on the church. Then the church shares the Good News with everyone on the earth. True, Jesus' followers do not go to everyone on the earth. The people on the earth come to the apostles. The apostles are the men Jesus chose to lead His church.

What do believers do when they think Jesus is about to come back? They sell everything they own. They study about Jesus and help the poor. Then problems start in the church. Also, people outside the church attack it. God works hard to hold His church together. Because of God's help, the faith of God's people during this time stays strong.

TEACHING AND FRIENDSHIP IN THE CHURCH (Acts 2:44, 45)

First, Luke says that God pours His Holy Spirit on His church. Then Luke talks about everyday life in the church in Jerusalem. Luke tells us that the believers do four things: (1) they “spent their time listening to the teaching of the apostles [leaders and teachers].” (2) “They [the believers] shared everything with each other.” (3) “They ate together” and (4) “prayed together” (Acts 2:42, ERV). In Acts 2:45, Luke says the believers teach in the temple in Jerusalem. But they eat and pray together in each other’s homes.

The believers study very carefully the truths about Jesus that they learn from the apostles. The Holy Spirit fills the believers with excitement. They want to learn everything from the apostles. Many miracles help the new believers accept the apostles’ teachings as truth (Acts 2:43).

Deep spiritual friendships between believers also show their deep love for God. The believers are always together in the temple or in each other’s homes. They share meals together. They celebrate the Lord’s Supper together. They pray together (Acts 2:42, 46). By these daily celebrations, the first Christians show that they believe Jesus will come back soon. Then they will be together with Jesus again in His kingdom (Matthew 26:29).

Believers’ homes are a very important part of church life. Yes, the believers continue to go to the temple to worship. On Sabbaths, these Jewish Christians go with other Jews to synagogues (James 2:2). Synagogues are Jewish “churches” or places of worship. But true Christian worship happens in the believers’ homes in New Testament times.

Read Acts 2:44, 45 and Acts 4:34, 35. What is an important part of Christian friendship in New Testament times?

The Jewish believers think the end of time is very near. So, they decide that the things they own are not very important. They share their things with the very poor members in the church. The Jewish believers have faith that Jesus will take care of their needs (Luke 22:29, 30). Sharing helps the believers feel close to each other. They love each other as a family. They are an example of Christian sharing.

In what ways do you share the things God gives you?



Sharing helps the believers feel close to each other.

PETER AND JOHN HEAL A MAN WHO CANNOT WALK (Acts 3:12–26)

In Acts 3:1, Peter and John go to the temple at 3:00 P.M. That is the time for daily prayer. In Acts 3:1, we learn something important about Peter and John. Peter and John do not go to the temple at this time only to teach or to make new believers. Peter and John go to the temple at 3:00 P.M. every day because they never stop following the Jewish ways of life (Acts 20:16; Acts 21:17–26). There, at the temple, Peter and John do a wonderful miracle (Acts 3:1–10). This miracle gives Peter the chance to preach another sermon about Jesus.

Read Acts 3:12–26. As these verses show us, what are some of the most important ideas in Peter’s sermon?

The first Christians preached about five ideas: (1) Jesus suffered for our sins. He is the Messiah. The Messiah is the Savior that God chose to free His people from sin (Acts 3:18). (2) God woke Jesus up from the dead and brought Him back to life (Acts 3:15). (3) Jesus went to heaven, where God honored Him (Acts 3:13). (4) Jesus will come again (Acts 3:20). (5) We must turn away from sin so that He can forgive us (Acts 3:19).

In many ways, we preach this same message today. Of course, the time and place that we live in today is different from the time of the apostles. The apostles were leaders and teachers. Jesus chose the apostles to lead the church after He went to heaven. The apostles continued to live a Jewish way of life after they accepted Jesus. So, the Jews who accepted Jesus only had to change from following the Old Agreement with God to following His New Agreement. As Christians, these Jewish believers needed to accept Jesus as Savior. They also needed to experience the new birth.

We now live in a different time and place from the first Jewish believers in Jesus. But our message is almost the same as theirs: (1) Jesus died for our sins. (2) He woke up from the dead and came back to life. (3) He will come back again. Jesus alone can save us. That is why we must make Jesus the center of our preaching about the Three Angels’ Messages in Revelation 14. We must preach that Jesus died on the cross. We must preach that He woke up from the dead. And we must preach that He will be coming back soon.



We must make Jesus the center of our preaching about the Three Angels’ Messages in Revelation 14.

ATTACKS ON GOD'S CHURCH (Acts 4:1–18)

Jesus' followers preach the Good News about Jesus to the Jews in Jerusalem. Their preaching is a big success. Many Jews accept Jesus and join the new church. The new church grows very fast. The leaders of the Jewish temple get angry when they see the church's success. The top leader of the Jerusalem temple is the high priest. The high priest is the religious leader for all the Jewish people. The high priest and most of his helpers are Sadducees. The Sadducees are a Jewish religious group. They do not believe that God will wake up the dead. So, they get very upset when Peter and John teach that God woke Jesus up from the dead. The temple soldiers arrest Peter and John. The next day, the soldiers bring Peter and John to the high priest and the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1–7). The Sanhedrin is the group of religious leaders for the Jews.

Read the story in Acts 4:1–18. How does Peter answer the religious leaders in this story? What does Peter say that makes the religious leaders so afraid?

Peter says things that make the Jewish leaders afraid they will lose their power. Peter tells the leaders that he healed the crippled man in the Name of Jesus. Peter also tells them that only Jesus can save us. Peter and John stand bravely before the most powerful Jewish rulers. But Peter and John serve a power that is higher than the Sanhedrin. Peter and John are only fishermen from Galilee. They did not study in the Jewish schools. But they speak with courage and power. The leaders do not understand that this power is from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit fills Peter and John just as Jesus promised (Matthew 10:16–20).

The religious leaders cannot say that Peter and John did not heal the crippled man. After all, the crippled man is walking around. Everyone can see him! So, the rulers tell Peter and John to stop preaching. The rulers are afraid of the believers' message and their new religion. Peter's words to the leaders shine the same as jewels: " 'What do you think is right? What [does] God want? Should we obey you or God? We cannot be quiet. We must tell people about what we have seen and heard' " (Acts 4:19, 20, ERV).



The temple soldiers arrest Peter and John.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA (Acts 5:1–11)

The first Christians are very unselfish and giving. They give all they own to the church to give to the poor. But no member is forced by any of the church leaders to give. New believers do not need to give their things to the church before they can join. But there are many examples of people who give because they want to. These examples of unselfish giving make the whole church want to give too. One example is Barnabas (Acts 4:35, 37). We learn more about him later in Acts.

But there are also examples of selfishness in the church that happen at the same time that the Jewish leaders begin to attack the church. These selfish examples have the power to cause terrible harm to the growing church. In fact, these things have the power to split the church apart.

Read the story in Acts 5:1–11. What lessons does this story teach us?



God does not punish our sins right away. That should show us how kind He is (2 Peter 3:9).

Ananias and Sapphira try to keep the money for themselves. But that is not the real problem. The real problem is that they lie to the church. Ananias and Sapphira's sin is planned. Peter says to Sapphira, " 'How could you two have talked together about lying to the Holy Spirit?' " (Acts 5:9, NLV). Ananias and Sapphira do not need to sell their land and give the money to the church. But they chose to sell it. Maybe the real reason they sell it is to look good in the eyes of the church leaders.

This explanation may help us understand why God punishes Ananias and Sapphira in such an awful way. Their actions are a bad example to other believers. Their actions show the church that loyalty to God is not important.

Ananias and Sapphira sin. God may choose not to punish sin right away as He chose to do with Ananias and Sapphira. But sin is always awful in God's eyes (Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 6:23). The fact that God does not punish our sins right away should show us that He is very kind (2 Peter 3:9).

How can we be careful not to "test the Spirit of the Lord" (Acts 5:9, ERV) as Ananias and Sapphira did?

THE SECOND ARREST (Acts 5:34–39)

God uses the first church leaders to do many things. He uses them to judge Ananias and Sapphira, as we learned yesterday. God also uses the church leaders to show His mercy and love to sinners. The church leaders do many healing miracles (Acts 5:12–16). These miracles show that God’s Spirit worked with the church. People even believe that Peter’s shadow can heal people! Luke does not say that Peter’s shadow really heals people. But people think so. Sometimes people believe false ideas about God’s miracles. But God continues to work in these people’s lives. God continues to give them His grace. Grace is God’s gift of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin.

The Holy Spirit fills the church leaders more and more. Another name for these church leaders is apostles. The apostles were the men Jesus chose to lead and teach the church after He went to heaven. The more the Holy Spirit fills the apostles, then the more miracles the apostles can do. The Jewish religious leaders get very jealous of the apostles and their power from God. So, the Jewish leaders arrest the apostles a second time (Acts 5:17, 18). But the apostles escape. Their escape is a miracle too (Acts 5:19–24). Then Peter makes a brave speech. He says that Christians should “ ‘obey God, not men [people]!’ ” (Acts 5:29, ICB). Then many of the Jewish leaders started to think that maybe God gave His power to the apostles.

Read Acts 5:34–39. As these verses show us, how does Gamaliel convince the leaders not to kill the apostles?

Many Jews respect Gamaliel. He reminds the Jewish leaders about two other groups in Jewish history. Those groups gathered many followers and caused trouble. But in the end, the leaders of these groups were killed. Those groups ended when the leaders died. So, Gamaliel says, if the Christian religion was started only by humans, then the new religion will soon end. But if the Christian religion was from God, then nothing can stop it. So, the Jewish rulers listen to Gamaliel and let the apostles go. But they beat the apostles first. Then the Jewish leaders tell them to stop preaching about Jesus.

As this story shows us, how does good advice help us?



People even believe that Peter’s shadow can heal people!

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “We are managers of God’s gifts to us. He gives us His gifts to serve His church. Jesus left us in charge of these gifts after He went back to heaven. Jesus expects us to watch and wait for Him to come back to earth. So, we must be loyal managers of everything that God trusts us with.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [messages] for the Church*, volume 8, page 37, adapted.

“God’s people need to understand that the promises they make to God are very holy. People do not think they need to keep their promises to God the way they keep their promises to other people. But are our promises to God less holy and legal? True, our promises to God are not written down in legal contracts. We do not break our country’s laws if we refuse to keep our promise to God. But will a Christian refuse to do what he has promised? No legal contract we sign is more important than any promise we make to God.”—Ellen G. White Comments [thoughts], *The SDA Bible Commentary [explanation]*, volume 6, page 1056, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Jesus leaves two important gifts for His followers. The first gift is His promise that He will come back soon. The second gift is the work that Jesus gave His followers to tell everyone on the earth the Good News that He saves them. How does Jesus’ promise and the work He gave us help us serve God more fully while we preach the Good News to everyone?
- ② Someone said: “We should be ready for Jesus to come back today. Until then, we should continue working for Him every day with all our might.” Why is this thought wise and important? How should this wisdom lead us as we do God’s work?
- ③ Why must Jesus’ life, death, and His waking up from the dead be at the center of everything we teach about Him?
- ④ Is it easy for us to know what really is in the hearts of people? What does the story of Ananias and Sapphira teach us?



“Jesus expects us to watch and wait for Him to come back to earth.”
—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [messages] for the Church*, volume 8, page 37, adapted.

The Church's First Leaders



SABBATH—JULY 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 6:8–15; Acts 7:1–53; Hebrews 5:11–14; Micah 6:1–16; Acts 7; Acts 8:4–25.

MEMORY VERSE: “The word of God was reaching more and more people. The group of followers in Jerusalem became larger and larger. Even a big group of Jewish priests [religious leaders] believed and obeyed” (Acts 6:7, ERV).

MANY JEWS accepted Jesus at Pentecost. Pentecost was the time when God poured the gift of His Holy Spirit on His church. God poured His Spirit on the church a short time after Jesus went to heaven. Many Jews who became Christians at Pentecost were Greek-speaking Jews who moved to Jerusalem (Acts 2:5, 9–11). These Jews were different from the Jews living in Judea that Luke talks about in Acts 6:1. The Greek-speaking Jews did not know the Aramaic language. But Jews who grew up in Judea spoke Aramaic.

The Greek-speaking Jews were different from the Jews born in Judea in other ways too. The Greek-speaking Jews were born in foreign countries. So, they did not have a deep understanding of Jewish ways of life. They did not understand the many different meetings for worship that happened at the temple in Jerusalem. They also did not follow Moses' law for Jews living in Israel.

But the Greek-speaking Jews were more willing than other Jews to accept God's command to share the Good News with non-Jews. God used many of these Greek-speaking Jews to share the Good News with everyone on the earth.



God used many Greek-speaking Jews to share the Good News with everyone on the earth.

SEVEN MEN ARE CHOSEN TO SERVE (Acts 6:1)

Read Acts 6:1. As these verses show us, what do the Greek-speaking Jewish believers complain about?

“They feel that the church leaders do not pay enough attention to the needs of the Greek widows. Every day the church gives help to members who need it. Any unfair action will not show God’s love. But Satan causes the Greek-speaking Jews to think the worst. So, the church leaders need to act fast to make sure that there is no more reason for anyone to feel unhappy with the way the church does things. If not, Satan will win in his plan to turn believers against each other.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 88, adapted.

The church leaders come up with an answer to the problem. They ask the Greek-speaking Jews to choose Seven men from their own group to be responsible for “ ‘getting food to people’ ” (Acts 6:2, ERV). This plan will let the leaders use all their time “ ‘to pray and to teach the word of God [the Bible]’ ” (Acts 6:4, ERV). The word written as “ ‘getting’ ” in Acts 6:2 (ERV) comes from the Greek word “diakoneo.” The word “ ‘teach’ ” in Acts 6:4 comes from the Greek word “diakonia.” These two words are spelled almost the same. But the words next to “diakoneo [getting]” and “diakonia [teach]” show us that these two Greek words have different meanings. For example, “ ‘food’ ” in Acts 6:2 shows us the meaning of “ ‘getting,’ ” while the wording “ ‘the word of God [the Bible]’ ” in Acts 6:4 shows us the meaning of “ ‘teach.’ ” These differences show us the things that are an important part of everyday life in the church. So, the church leaders share Jesus’ teachings with people. And the Seven men are responsible for everyday church life.



The Seven men are responsible for everyday church life.

Read Acts 6:2–6. How are the Seven men chosen and asked to serve?

The Seven men are also named deacons. They are men filled with God’s Spirit. First, the church leaders pray for the deacons. Then the leaders put their hands on the Seven men and ask God to bless them. This act shows that the church accepts the men to work as deacons.

Why is it important to live in peace and keep our thoughts busy with God’s work? How do we do that?

STEPHEN'S WORK FOR GOD (Acts 6:8–15)

Yesterday, we learned that the church chose Seven new leaders named deacons. The deacons work in the church and also witness to people outside of the church. They share the Good News with everyone who wants to know about it. Many new believers join the church (Acts 6:7). Then people from outside the church attack the church members. The book of Acts tells the story about what happens to a believer named Stephen during this time.

Read Acts 6:8–15. What do these verses teach us about Stephen, his faith, and who he is? Also, what does Stephen preach about that makes his attackers so angry?

Stephen is a Greek-speaking Jew. He shares the Good News in the Greek-speaking synagogues. Synagogues are Jewish “churches” or places of worship. There are many synagogues in the city of Jerusalem. Acts 6:9 talks about two of them. One synagogue has members who are Jews from the south. They come from Cyrene and Alexandria. The other synagogue is made up of Jews from the north. They come from Cilicia and Asia.

For sure, Jesus is the reason why people hurt Stephen. The attacks against Stephen show us that Stephen fully understands the Good News about Jesus. Stephen's understanding goes deeper than the understanding of the Jewish believers from Judea. Stephen's enemies accuse him of telling awful lies against Moses and God. In the enemies' minds, that is the same as attacking the law and the temple. Stephen scolds the Jewish leaders for loving the temple more than they love God (Acts 7:48).

The Jewish believers put too much value on the temple and its worship plan (Acts 3:1; Acts 15:1, 5; Acts 21:17–24). They find it hard to give these things up (Galatians 5:2–4; Hebrews 5:11–14). Stephen and many other Greek-speaking Jews know that Jesus' death means the end of the temple and its whole worship plan.

Should we hold on too tight to some of our beliefs about God? If we do hold too tight to our beliefs, what will happen when new light comes? How can we make sure we do not turn away from new truth in the same way that the Jewish leaders turned away from Jesus?



Jesus' death means the end of the temple and its whole worship plan.

STEPHEN'S TRIAL IN FRONT OF THE JEWS (Acts 7:1–53)

Read Acts 7:1–53. In these verses, what is Stephen saying to his attackers?

Stephen is arrested because he says that the Jews do not need to follow the laws about animals used in worship anymore. Moses gave these laws to the Jews many years ago. The Jews respect these laws. They respect the worship plan Moses gave them and good behavior. What happens when anyone says one of these things is no longer important? Then the Jews believe that person is insulting God.

Stephen's answer is the longest sermon in the book of Acts. Because Stephen's sermon is long, we see that Stephen's words are very important. At first, Stephen's sermon is about Israel's history. Stephen's topic may make us think that this information is old news. But we need to understand that prophets, special messengers, in Old Testament times often speak in this same way to God's people when they stop following God. These prophets often use the Old Testament Agreement between God and His people as an example, or model, for their own sermons. When that happens, these prophets use the Hebrew word "rīb." This word means that God is taking His people to court because they broke God's Special Agreement with them.

Let us look at an example of the word "rīb" in the Old Testament. The word "rīb" is used three times in Micah 6:1, 2. Micah uses the Agreement between God and His people at Mount Sinai as a model for his own speech to God's people. First, Micah asks Israel to remember all the wonderful things God did for His people (Micah 6:3–5). Next, Micah reminds Israel about what God asks them to do in His Agreement with them (Micah 6:6–12). Then, Micah warns Israel about the curses that will happen if they break God's Agreement (Micah 6:13–16).

Micah's sermon helps us understand why Stephen talks about Israel's history in his speech. Angry Jews ask Stephen to explain his behavior. But Stephen does not try to argue with these Jews about his faith or complain that their lies against him are false. Stephen starts to speak with a loud and strong voice. The Old Testament messengers did the same when they warned Israel that God was upset with them for breaking His Agreement. Stephen wants to remind the Jews that they do not obey God or thank Him enough for all He does for them.



The word "rīb" means that God is taking His people to court because they broke God's special agreement with them.

JESUS IN THE COURT IN HEAVEN (Acts 7:55, 56)

A prophet is a name for a special messenger. Stephen becomes a prophet when he announces that God has a problem with Israel. Yesterday, we learned that God's problem with Israel is a "legal action" that must be solved in court. This wording comes from the Hebrew word "rib." Sadly, Stephen works a very short time as a prophet. Why so short? Because he tells Israel about God's "rib," or problem with them. Then the Jews get very angry with Stephen. They do not want to listen to God's legal problem with them.

Read Acts 7:55, 56. In these verses, Stephen has a vision. What does Stephen's vision mean?

"Stephen shows the people that the special messages in the Bible about a Savior are about Jesus. Stephen says some things about the temple in Jerusalem that make the top Jewish religious leader angry. The top Jewish religious leader pretends to be very surprised and shocked by Stephen's words. This leader tears his clothing to show his shock. When the leader tears his clothing, Stephen knows that the Jews will soon kill him. Stephen sees that the Jews turn away from his words. Stephen knows he is giving his last message. That is why he stops his sermon in the middle of what he has to say."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 100, adapted.

Stephen stands in front of the Jewish leaders. At the same time, Jesus stands in heaven's sanctuary. Heaven's sanctuary is the place where God judges His people and works to save them. Jesus stands next to God the Father to show that the trial happening on the earth between Stephen and the Jewish leaders is really a "shadow" of the real trial. The real trial will happen in heaven between God and His enemies. God will judge the false teachers and leaders in Israel.

Do you see that Stephen does not beg Israel to go back to God? That part is missing from Stephen's sermon. But it is part of the other sermons before this time in the book of Acts (Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19; Acts 5:31). Why is this part missing from Stephen's sermon? Because the Jews are no longer God's special people. God asked the Jews to share the gift of being saved with all the people on the earth. But from now on, Jesus' followers, both Jews and non-Jews, will go out of Jerusalem and share the Good News about being saved with everyone on the earth (Acts 1:8).



"The top Jewish religious leader tore his clothing to show his shock."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 100, adapted.

JESUS' FOLLOWERS SHARE THE GOOD NEWS (Acts 8:4–25)

The Jewish leaders win a big victory when they kill Stephen with stones. Stephen's death starts many other attacks against Jesus' followers in Jerusalem. Clearly, these attacks are started by the same group of people who kill Stephen. The leader of this group is named Saul. He does much to hurt the Christian church.

The Christians escape the attacks by moving to other towns in Judea and Samaria. Everywhere they go, they preach the Good News that Jesus saves humans from sin. Then Jesus' promise to His followers in Acts 1:8 comes true. They share the Good News everywhere in Judea and Samaria.

Read Acts 8:4–25. What lessons do we learn from the story in these verses?

The Samaritans were “half-Israelites.” What does that mean? It means that the Samaritans believed in only One God. They accepted the first five books of Moses. They practiced circumcision. Circumcision means the extra skin at the end of the male sex organ is cut off. They waited for the Savior to come. But in the Jews' eyes, the Samaritan religion was “spoiled” by some bad beliefs. So, in the eyes of the Jews, the Samaritans were not worthy of any of the promises that God gave Israel in His Special Agreement.

But when the Samaritans become Christians, the whole church in Jerusalem is shocked and surprised. So, the leaders of the church send Peter and John to find out if the story is true. God waits to pour His Spirit on the Samaritans until Peter and John get there (Acts 8:14–17). Why does God do that? Maybe God wants to show the church leaders that they need to fully accept the Samaritans as members of the church too (read Acts 11:1–18).

The church continues to grow after the Samaritans join. In Acts 8:27, we read about Philip and the Ethiopian. The Ethiopian came to Jerusalem to worship and now is going back home. He studies the Bible with Philip. Then the Ethiopian asks Philip to baptize him (Acts 8:38).

First the Samaritans, then the Ethiopian! The Good News is being taken to everyone on the earth, just as Jesus promised. But these two stories are just the start of what Jesus promised His followers in Acts 1. Soon, Jewish believers will travel everywhere on the earth and preach the Good News that Jesus saves us from our sins.



The Ethiopian asks Philip to baptize him (Acts 8:38).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “The attacks against the church in Jerusalem helped Christians to share the Good News about Jesus everywhere on the earth. Jesus’ followers had much success in the work they did for God in Jerusalem. So, there was danger that they would stay there too long and not obey Jesus’ command to take the Good News to all people everywhere. Jesus’ followers forgot that the best way to fight against evil is to work very hard for God. These believers began to think their most important work was protecting the church in Jerusalem from the attacks of Satan. So, these believers did not teach new believers to take the Good News to people who had not heard it. Jesus’ followers were in danger of leading everyone in the church to be happy with what they already did. So, God allowed His church to be attacked. The attacks caused God’s people to move to many places far away from Jerusalem. Then these believers went everywhere and preached the word.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 105, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Read carefully the Ellen G. White quotation above. How is this quotation a warning for us as God’s people? How can we be sure that we are not protecting what we already have instead of sharing the Good News with everyone on the earth?
- 2 By the time Jesus went up to heaven, there were hundreds of years of hate between the Jews and the Samaritans. Some Bible experts think that Philip was a Greek-speaking Jew who grew up in a foreign country before he came to Jerusalem. What can we learn from the story about how Philip witnessed to the Samaritans? As Seventh-day Adventists, we have feelings of like and dislike for different groups of people too. But what should the Cross teach us about how all people are the same in God’s eyes? What does Jesus’ death for everyone teach us about the true value of every person?
- 3 Read about how Philip witnessed to the Ethiopian in Acts 8:27–30. How can we be open to more chances to share the Good News with other people?



“The attacks caused God’s people to move to many places far away from Jerusalem. Then these believers went everywhere and preached the Good News.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 105, adapted.

Paul Becomes a Christian



SABBATH—JULY 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 26:9–11; Deuteronomy 21:23; Acts 9:20–25; Acts 9:26–30.

MEMORY VERSE: “Go! I have chosen Saul for an important work. I want him to tell other nations, their rulers, and the people of Israel about me” (Acts 9:15, ERV).



Paul's change of heart changed the Christian religion forever.

ONE OF THE MOST AMAZING STORIES in the history of the New Testament church is the story about how Saul of Tarsus became Paul the Christian. Paul is not the only enemy of the church who later became a Christian. But what makes Paul's story so important and amazing are the many places he went to share the Good News about Jesus and the miracles that happened. Paul had been one of the strongest attackers of the church. He had the power to hurt the growing church very much. Paul wanted to destroy the church, and the Jewish leaders supported him. But then, on the road to Damascus, Paul chose to accept God's plan for him and to become God's most important apostle. Apostles were the men Jesus chose to lead the church after He went to heaven. “Paul was one of the worst attackers of the Christian church. But later, Paul became its strongest protector. Paul also had more success than any other apostle in the work of sharing the Good News with other people.”—Ellen G. White, *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, page 9, adapted.

Paul's attacks against the church in the past always made him feel that he was not worthy to work for Jesus. But God's forgiveness filled Paul with thankfulness. Paul's change of heart changed the Christian religion forever.

PAUL ATTACKS THE CHURCH (Acts 26:9–11)

Before Paul accepted Jesus, Paul was known as Saul of Tarsus. Saul was a Greek-speaking Jew. He was born in Tarsus. Tarsus was the capital city of Cilicia (Acts 21:39). Saul went to Jerusalem to study with Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was the most important teacher at the time. Saul was a Pharisee. Pharisees followed the law very carefully. As a Pharisee, Saul sometimes went too far in doing what he believed was right (Galatians 1:14). That is why Saul helped kill Stephen. Then Saul became the leader in the attacks on the church after Stephen's death.

Read Acts 26:9–11. As these verses show, how does Paul describe his actions in the past against the church?

In 1 Corinthians 1:23, Paul says that the Good News about Jesus makes the Jews “stumble.” Why? Because the Good News does not match their idea about who a Savior should be. The Jews in Paul's day want a king who will free them from the Romans. Many Jews at that time cannot accept the picture of a Savior dying on a cross. The Bible says that anyone who hangs on a cross is under God's curse (Deuteronomy 21:23). So, the Jews in Paul's day think that Jesus' death is proof that He is not the Savior.

Acts 9:1, 2 shows us Saul of Tarsus harming believers. Saul wanted to go to Damascus. It was an important city, about 135 miles north of Jerusalem. Many Jews lived in Damascus. Jews living in cities outside Judea continued to communicate with Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish religion. But the center of the Jewish cities were the synagogues. Synagogues were Jewish “churches.” Communication between Jerusalem and these synagogues happened often, mostly in letters. These letters were carried by a “shaliah.” The word “shaliah” means “a person who is sent.” A “shaliah” was someone chosen by the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish ruling group in Jerusalem. The Sanhedrin chose a “shaliah” to do a special job. Saul asked the Sanhedrin's president for letters to take to the synagogue in Damascus. So, Saul was a “shaliah.” These letters gave him the power to arrest any Christians and bring them to Jerusalem (read Acts 26:12). In Greek, the word for “shaliah” is “apostolos.” From this word we get the word “apostles.” Apostles is the same word we use for the the men Jesus chose to lead the church after He went to heaven. So, before Saul became Jesus' apostle, Saul was an apostle for the Sanhedrin.



In 1 Corinthians 1:23, Paul says the Good News about Jesus made the Jews “stumble.”

ON THE DAMASCUS ROAD (Acts 9:5)

Read Acts 9:3–9. What do these verses say happens when Saul is on his way to Damascus? What is the meaning of Jesus' words to Saul in Acts 9:5 (read also Acts 26:14)?

Saul and his friends were near Damascus when something happened that they did not expect. They saw a bright light from heaven and heard a voice speak. Saul and his friends did not dream this experience. They lived it. God meant this experience for Saul, not his friends. Saul's friends saw the light. But the light blinded only Saul. Saul's friends heard the voice. But only Saul understood what the voice said. The light was glory from Jesus. Jesus appeared to Saul on the road (Acts 22:14). Later, after Saul becomes Paul, he writes in his letters about how he saw Jesus. This experience made Paul the same as the Twelve followers of Jesus, who said they saw Jesus alive after He died.

Saul talked with Jesus. That talk with Jesus was more powerful for Saul than seeing the light was. Saul believed that he did God's work by fighting the followers of Jesus. He felt he protected the Jewish religion from false beliefs. But then on the road to Damascus, Saul learned that Jesus was alive. Saul also learned that when he fought Jesus' followers, he fought Jesus Himself.

Jesus said these words of wisdom to Saul: " 'You are only hurting yourself by fighting me' " (Acts 26:14, ERV). For sure, Saul knew these words of wisdom very well. These wise words come from a word picture of an ox trying to move against the sharp stick a farmer used to push the ox. When that happened, the animal only hurt itself even more.

These wise words point to a fight in Saul's mind. The Bible names this fight the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8–11). This fight may have started when Stephen was killed. "Saul had a big part in the trial of Stephen. Saul helped make the decision to put Stephen to death. But Saul saw proof that God was with Stephen. This proof led Saul to feel unsure about his attacks against Jesus' followers. Saul's mind was deeply moved. He was confused. So, he went to the people that he trusted. These were people who were wise and had good sense. In the end, these religious leaders and rulers convinced Saul that Stephen was speaking against God and that Jesus was a false Savior."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 112, 113, adapted.



Paul and his friends saw a bright light from heaven and heard a voice speak.

ANANIAS'S VISIT (Galatians 1:1, 11, 12)

When Saul knows he talks with Jesus Himself, Saul asks the question that Jesus needs him to ask: “ ‘Lord, what should I do?’ ” (Acts 22:10, NLV). Saul’s question shows us what is in Saul’s heart. He is sorry for fighting against Jesus. More important, Saul’s question shows that he is willing to let Jesus guide his life from now on. Jesus tells Saul to go to Damascus and wait there until he is told what to do.

In Acts 9:10–19, the Bible shows us how the Lord worked to get Saul of Tarsus ready for his new life as Paul the apostle. An apostle was one of the men Jesus chose to lead the church in New Testament times. So, what did Jesus do to get Saul ready? First, Jesus gave Ananias a vision. In this vision, Jesus told Ananias to visit Saul and lay his hands on him to give him back his sight. Ananias already knew who Saul was. Ananias also knew that many believers suffered and even died because of Saul. Ananias also knew the reason why Saul was in Damascus. So, we can easily understand why Ananias did not really want to go meet Saul.

But what Ananias did not know was that Saul had a personal meeting with Jesus that changed his life forever. Ananias did not know that Saul no longer worked for the Jewish leaders. Ananias was very shocked and surprised to learn that Jesus asked Saul to work for Him. Jesus chose Saul to be the person to take the Good News to both the Jews and the non-Jews everywhere.

Read Galatians 1:1, 11, 12. What does Paul say about his work as an apostle?

In Galatians, Paul says that no human gave him his message or made him an apostle. But Jesus Himself gave Paul his message. When Ananias comes to visit Saul, of Tarsus, Ananias says again what Jesus already told Saul about the work the Lord gave Saul to do as His apostle. The change in Saul’s life is so amazing that only God could have changed his heart. God’s power is the only explanation for why the one who fought Jesus the most becomes His most loving apostle.

We see Saul’s heart change. How does Saul’s change of heart give you hope for the people you pray for who act as if they have no interest in serving God?



In a vision, Jesus told Ananias to visit Saul and lay his hands on him to give him back his sight.

PAUL STARTS TO WORK FOR GOD (Acts 9:20–25)

Acts 9:19–25 hints that Paul may have stayed in Damascus for a while before going back to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26). But in Galatians 1:17, Paul adds that before he goes to Jerusalem, he goes to Arabia. There, Paul lives alone for some time. “Here, Paul was alone in the desert. He had lots of time to think about God and to study.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 125, adapted.

Read Acts 9:20–25. What does Luke tell us about Paul’s work for God in Damascus? What success does Paul experience?

Paul goes to Damascus to arrest Christians who hide in Jewish synagogues in the city (Acts 9:2). Synagogues are Jewish “churches” or places of worship. But now Paul’s reasons for going to Damascus change. He goes to the synagogues, but it is not to arrest Jesus’ followers. Now Paul goes to the synagogues to help other Jews accept Jesus. Think about what people must feel when they see and hear Paul! Here is the same man who arrested Christians and killed them. Now, he is preaching about Jesus! The Jewish believers are shocked and amazed about Saul of Tarsus and his change. Luke tells us “the Jews living in Damascus wondered about Saul’s preaching” (Acts 9:22, NLV). (Clearly, no one in the church has any idea about how much power Paul will have in the future in bringing other people to Jesus.)

Paul’s attackers cannot argue with his message. So, some of Paul’s attackers decide to kill him. Paul writes about their plan to end his life (2 Corinthians 11:32, 33). Paul’s story about what happens shows us that Paul’s attackers go to the local rulers to get their support for their plan to kill Paul. But Jesus’ followers help Paul escape in a basket from the city.

Paul knows from the start he will suffer many hard times and attacks from his enemies (Acts 9:16). But nothing can stop Paul’s faith or his wish to do his duty.

Paul suffers many attacks in his new life with Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:8, 9). But he does not give up. How can we learn to do the same with our faith? How can we learn to keep going when we feel like giving up?



The Christian believers are shocked and amazed when they hear Paul preaching about Jesus!

PAUL GOES BACK TO JERUSALEM (Acts 9:26–30)

Paul went back to Jerusalem after he escaped from Damascus. This visit was Paul's first time back in Jerusalem since he left that city to go to Damascus. Paul went back to Jerusalem three years after he became a Christian (Galatians 1:18). Paul's visit to the city was not an easy one. Many problems waited for Paul inside and outside the church.

Read Acts 9:26–30. What do these verses tell us happens to Paul when he arrives in Jerusalem?

In Jerusalem, Paul tried to join the apostles. The apostles were the men Jesus chose to lead His church after He went to heaven. By now, Paul was a Christian for three years. But the news about his becoming a Christian seemed so amazing that only a few of the apostles believed it was true. The apostles thought that Paul became a Christian to get Christians to trust him so that he could give their names to the Jews. But Barnabas helped the apostles to accept Paul. Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus (Acts 4:36, 37). He introduced Paul to the apostles. Then the apostles believed that Paul was really a Christian. The apostles also must have been amazed by how God changed Paul.

Sadly, Paul always met people in the church who did not trust him because he hurt believers in the past. Some believers did not trust the message Paul preached. Paul preached that Jesus saves us from sin. But many Jews, including the apostles, were slow to understand that the old Jewish worship plan ended when Jesus died on the cross. Maybe that is why Paul's closest friends in the church were the Greek-speaking believers: Barnabas; Philip; one of the Seven church leaders (Acts 21:8); and Mnason (Acts 21:16).

Paul stayed in Jerusalem for 15 days (Galatians 1:18). During that time, Paul decided to share the Good News about Jesus with the same Jews that he turned against Stephen. But these Jews refused to accept Paul's message and even tried to end Paul's life. Later, Jesus came to Paul in a vision. Jesus told Paul to leave Jerusalem for his own safety (Acts 22:17–21). Christians in Jerusalem helped Paul go to the city of Caesarea. From there, Paul went to his hometown of Tarsus in Cilicia. He stayed in Cilicia for several years before starting his many trips to share the Good News.



Jesus came to Paul in a vision and told Paul to leave Jerusalem for his own safety (Acts 22:17–21).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “When an army general is killed in war, the army loses its leader. But the general’s death does not make the enemy any stronger. But what happens when a powerful man joins the enemy’s side in war? The first thing that happens is that the side he was fighting for loses his special skills. Second, the other army gets this man’s wisdom and strength. The Lord easily could have killed Saul of Tarsus while he was on his way to Damascus. Then the Jewish group who hurt the church would have lost much of their power to hurt Christians. But God in His wisdom let Saul live. Then God changed Saul’s life. In this way, God took a champion who fought for the enemy and brought him over to fight for Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 124, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think more about Jesus’ question to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road: “ ‘Why are you working so hard against Me?’ ” (Acts 9:4, NLV). For Saul, who later became known as Paul, this question proved that Jesus of Nazareth woke up from the dead. This question also meant that there was a special tie between Jesus and His church (read also Matthew 25:34–45). Jesus was connected with His church. The meaning of Jesus’ question to Saul was clear: any harm done to the church was harm done to Jesus Himself. What does that truth mean to us today?
- ② Our witnessing for Jesus means that we must suffer for Jesus. The Greek word for “witness” is “martyr.” A martyr is a person who suffers and dies for his or her faith. What does it mean for you to suffer for Jesus?
- ③ There is an old Latin saying, “Credo ut intelligam.” It means, “I believe so that I may understand.” How does this idea help us understand what happened to Saul of Tarsus? Before Saul became a believer in Jesus, he did not understand the truth about Jesus. But Saul had his experience with Jesus on the Damascus road. Then Saul understood who Jesus was. What lesson can we learn from this story to help us when we are upset with people who do not believe in Bible truths that are so clear to us?



“God took a champion who fought for the enemy and brought him over to fight for Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 124, adapted.

Peter's Work for God



SABBATH—AUGUST 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 9:32–43; Acts 10:9–16; Ephesians 2:11–19; Acts 11:1–26; Acts 12:1–18.

MEMORY VERSE: “Peter began to speak: ‘I really understand now that to God every person is the same. God accepts anyone who worships him and does what is right. It is not important what country a person comes from.’ ” (Acts 10:34, 35, ICB).

PAUL LEAVES FOR TARSUS. Then Peter again becomes the most important person in Luke's story in the book of Acts. Luke tells us that Peter travels everywhere in Judea to share with people the Good News about Jesus. Peter also travels to places near Judea too. Luke tells us three stories about Peter that happen at this time. The first story is about how Peter heals Aeneas. Next, Peter wakes up a dead woman named Tabitha. Then Luke tells us the story about Peter and Cornelius. Cornelius was not a Jew.

Should non-Jewish people be allowed to join the church? Many Jewish Christians argued about this question. But God poured His Holy Spirit on Cornelius and everyone in his house. That gift helped show the truth to Peter and the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. They now believed that the gifts of the Good News were not only for the Jews. At the same time this story happened, the church in Antioch also was beginning to contact the non-Jews.

This week's lesson also talks about the attacks against the church by King Herod. We will learn about the things the believers experienced during this time.



Luke tells us the story in Acts about how Peter wakes up a dead woman named Tabitha.

PETER GOES TO LYDDA AND JOPPA (Acts 9:32–35)

Peter visited the Christian churches that were on the coasts of Judea. Clearly, Peter wanted to make sure these churches had a correct understanding of Bible teachings (Acts 2:42). But God also used Peter to do miracles that were as powerful as the ones that Jesus Himself did.

Read the story about how Peter healed Aeneas in Acts 9:32–35. Then read about the miracle Jesus did in Luke 5:17–26. How are these two miracles the same?

The miracle Peter did helps us remember the story about the man Jesus healed in Capernaum (Luke 5:17–26). See the part about the bed? Both stories are nearly the same. Many people living in Lydda and the plains of Sharon saw Peter’s miracle. Then they believed in Jesus.

Read the story in Acts 9:36–43 about how Peter woke up Tabitha from the dead. What was very special about Tabitha?

The name “Tabitha” comes from an Aramaic word that means “gazelle.” The name for Tabitha in Greek is Dorcas. Many people who lived near Tabitha loved her very much. She did many kind and good things for the people in her neighborhood. The story about how Peter woke up Tabitha from the dead is almost the same as the story about how Jesus woke up Jairus’s daughter from the dead (Luke 8:41, 42, 49–56). Peter saw that miracle happen. So, Peter did what Jesus did. Peter asked everyone to leave the room (read Mark 5:40). Then Peter knelt down and prayed. He said to the dead woman: “ ‘Tabitha, get up!’ ” (Acts 9:40, NLV).

God’s followers did many miracles. But God’s power made the miracles happen (Acts 5:12). There may be a reason why the miracles that Jesus’ followers did were almost the same as the ones that Jesus did. Maybe God wanted to remind the church—and us—about what really matters. What really matters to God is not how important we are. What is important to God is that we give ourselves fully to Him (John 14:12). What happens when we fully give ourselves to God? Then God can use us to do great things.

Miracles can make faith strong. But what is the real reason we should believe in God?



Peter healed Aeneas. God used Peter to do miracles that were as powerful as the ones that Jesus Himself did.

PETER VISITS CORNELIUS (Acts 10:9–16, 28, 34, 35)

In Joppa, Peter stayed with a man named Simon. Simon worked as a tanner. A tanner was someone who made leather from animal skins. About 25 miles away from Joppa in Caesarea, there lived a Roman soldier named Cornelius. Cornelius and everyone in his house were loyal to God. But they did not become Jews. Then God gave Cornelius a vision. In it, God told Cornelius to send messengers to Peter. So, Cornelius invited Peter to visit him (Acts 10:1–8).

What does Peter experience in Acts 10:9–16, 28, 34, 35? What does Peter learn from this experience?

It is important to know that Peter's vision is not about food. Instead, his vision is about people. The vision happens at noon. Peter is hungry. The voice in the vision tells him to kill and eat. But God does not use the vision to get rid of the food laws about eating clean meats and not eating unclean meats. God uses the vision to teach Peter that the Good News is for everyone and not only for Jews.

The vision is meant to stop Peter's dislike of non-Jews. Peter feels that if he goes into Cornelius's house and eats with him, then he, Peter, will become dirty. Then he also will not be able to worship in the temple. Why does Peter think this way? Because Jews from Judea who lived in the first century lived separate from non-Jews.

Why do the Jews in Peter's time behave this way? The problem comes from their wrong idea about God. Many Jews during this time believe it is wrong to eat with non-Jews. This idea goes against God's first plan for Israel to share the truth about Him with everyone on the earth.

But the non-Jews in Bible times are not circumcised. Circumcised means that the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. So, the Jews in Bible times look down on non-Jews because they are not circumcised. The Jews believe God will not bless non-Jews until non-Jews are circumcised and become Jews first. But Jewish Christians start to see that this thinking is wrong.

Read Titus 2:11; Galatians 3:26–28; and Ephesians 2:11–19. As these verses show us, why is the Good News for everyone?



Peter's vision was not about food. It was about people. God used the vision to teach Peter that the Good News was for everyone and not only for Jews.

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 11:1–18)

Acts 10:44–48 shows us an important time in the New Testament church's history. It was the first time that the Good News was preached to a non-Jew by one of Jesus' followers. Before this time, Jesus' followers and other Jewish believers from Judea were not ready to accept non-Jews in the church. Jewish Christians believed that God gave the Good News only to the Jews. So, the Jewish Christians believed that non-Jews must become Jews first before they joined the church. But the Jewish Christians needed to change this way of thinking.

God helped change the way His followers thought about non-Jews. How? God gave the gift of speaking different languages to Cornelius and his family. This gift showed very clearly that God did not love one group of people more than another group. Both Jews and non-Jews are the same in God's eyes. God will save both Jews and non-Jews.

Read Acts 11:1–18. How does the church in Jerusalem feel about Peter's experience at Caesarea?

In Bible times, Jews do not think well of non-Jews. This dislike leads Jewish believers in Jerusalem to blame Peter for eating with people who are not circumcised. To be circumcised means that the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. So, it looks as if the believers in Jerusalem care more about Jewish laws than they care about saving Cornelius and his family. Maybe Jewish believers worry that the Jews will think that Jewish believers turned away from the Jewish faith if the Jews see the Jewish believers eating with non-Jews. That will mean God no longer accepts the believers. Then the Jews may try to kill the believers as they killed Stephen.

"The Jews closed a door against many non-Jews. But the time comes for that door to open. The non-Jews who accept the Good News will be equal to the Jewish believers. They will not need to be circumcised first."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 136, adapted.

God gave His people the gift of speaking different languages when He poured His Spirit on them. God gave His people this gift of languages so they could preach the Good News to everyone on earth. God gave the gift of speaking different languages to Cornelius and his family for a different reason. God wanted to show His Jewish followers that His Spirit was also at work to save the non-Jews.



"The Jews closed a door against many non-Jews, But the time comes for that door to open."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 136, adapted.

THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH (Acts 11:19–26)

Luke is happy when Cornelius accepts Jesus. Luke is so happy about it that he stops telling us the story about Peter’s work for God and starts telling us about how many more non-Jews are accepting the Good News.

Read the story in Acts 11:19–26 about the Jewish believers who are forced to leave Jerusalem. What happens when they come to Antioch?

This part of Acts 11 helps us remember Paul’s attacks against Christians in Acts 8. Some of the Greek-speaking Jewish believers were forced to leave Jerusalem during the time when non-Jews in Judea started accepting Jesus. So, these Greek-speaking Jewish believers took the Good News to places far from Judea.

Luke gives special attention to the city of Antioch. Antioch was an important city in Syria. The believers who were forced to leave Jerusalem started to preach to other Jews. Many of these Jews accepted Jesus. So, Jesus’ command in Acts 1:8 came true. The Greek-speaking Jewish Christians were the ones who made Jesus’ command come true. They started the work of taking the Good News to the non-Jews.

The church experienced success in Antioch. So, the leaders in Jerusalem decided to send Barnabas there to find out what was happening and to tell the leaders about it. Barnabas saw that there were many people in Antioch who wanted to know about the Good News. So, Barnabas asked Paul, who was in Tarsus, to come help him.

Barnabas was right. During the year that he and Paul worked together, large crowds of non-Jews heard the Good News. It was in Antioch that people named the believers “Christians” for the first time (Acts 11:26, NLV). This verse seems to say that people who were not church members gave the name to Christians. It is possible that these people outside the church used the name “Christians” to make fun of the believers. Inside the church, believers had other names for each other: “ ‘brothers and sisters’ ” (Acts 1:16, NIV); “followers of Jesus” (Acts 6:1, ERV); and also “ ‘holy people’ ” (Acts 9:13, ERV). By the time Luke finished writing Acts, the name “Christian” became the name for Jesus’ followers everywhere (Acts 26:28).

What does it mean to be known as a Christian?



Luke is happy when Cornelius accepts Jesus. God pours His Holy Spirit on Cornelius and the people with him.

KING HEROD'S ATTACKS AGAINST THE CHURCH (Acts 12:1–4)

In Acts 12:1–4, Luke tells us about King Herod's attacks against the apostles. The apostles were the men Jesus chose to lead His church after He went to heaven. Herod put the apostle James to death. James was the brother of John and the son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19).

Read Acts 12:1–4. What do these verses teach us about the dangers that the New Testament church experienced?

There were several kings named Herod. The Herod that these verses talk about is Agrippa the First. Agrippa the First was the grandson of Herod the Great (Matthew 2:1). Agrippa the First ruled Judea from A.D. 41 to 44. He was popular among the Jews that he ruled because he followed the Jewish religion very carefully.

Herod planned to kill Peter too. Herod's soldiers arrested Peter. Then they brought Peter to Herod. Herod sent four soldiers to watch Peter at all times. Peter was chained to two of the four soldiers, with one soldier chained on his left and one soldier chained to his right side. The other two soldiers guarded the door. Peter escaped from prison before. So, Herod did not want to let Peter escape from prison again.



Herod sent four soldiers to watch Peter at all times.

Peter was chained to two of the soldiers. But the night before the king planned to kill Peter, an angel helped Peter to escape from prison.

Read in Acts 12:5–18 about the Christians who pray for Peter. What happens to Peter because of their prayers?

The night before Agrippa planned to kill Peter, an angel helped Peter to escape from prison.

Next, Luke tells us the story about how Agrippa dies at Caesarea (Acts 12:20–23). Many people have tried to figure out what caused Agrippa's death. (Here are some guesses about what killed him: Was it because his stomach swelled up from an infection? Or did he die from a painful sore inside his body? Or was he poisoned?) No one knows for sure *how* he died. But Luke is clear about *why* the king died. God judged Agrippa and found him guilty.

Jesus is killed. Peter escapes death. God judges Herod. Sometimes the things that happen make sense, and sometimes they do not. What should this tell us about why we need to trust God about the things we cannot understand?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “In Acts 10 we read about another example of the work done by angels from heaven. In this chapter in Acts, the angels help Cornelius and the people with him to become Christians. Our people should read Acts chapters 8–10 and pay special attention to them. In these chapters, we see that God and His angels work very closely with the Christian worker who is trying to save souls. For sure, God and His angels are nearer to this worker than many people might believe. We should learn from these chapters the lesson of how much God loves each person. We should be kind to everyone. We should remember that each person is God’s tool for doing His work here on the earth.”—Ellen G. White Comments [Ideas], *The SDA Bible Commentary [explanation]*, volume 6, page 1059, adapted.

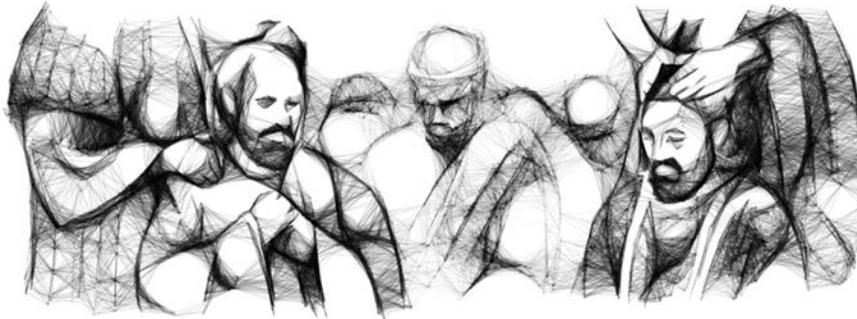
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Luke tells us that Cornelius “was a religious man. He and all the other people who lived in his house worshiped the true God. He gave much of his money to the poor and prayed to God often” (Acts 10:2, ICB). It is clear from this verse that God’s Spirit was already working in Cornelius’s heart long before he met Peter. Do you think Cornelius’s strong prayer life and his loyal worship of God made it easier for God to bring Cornelius the Good News that Jesus saves sinners from their sins? What lesson can we learn from Cornelius’s story about prayer and worship?
- 2 In class, let us go back to the question at the end of Monday’s study and ask ourselves: What are some of the different beliefs and ways of life around us that cause some people to have bad feelings about other people who are different from them? As Christians, we must not let our bad feelings for other people live in our hearts. So, how can we move away from the different beliefs and ways of life around us that cause these bad feelings?
- 3 Saul’s attacks on the church hurt the Christians. But in the end, God used these attacks to make good things happen: the Christians who escaped Saul’s attacks went to Antioch and preached the Good News about Jesus there. Share a story in class about how God made good things happen from the pain you suffered.



“In Acts chapter 10, the angels help Cornelius and the people with him to become Christians.”
—Ellen G. White Comments [ideas], *The SDA Commentary [explanation]*, volume 6, page 1059, adapted.

Paul's First Trip to Share the Good News



SABBATH—AUGUST 11

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 13; 2 Corinthians 4:7–10; Romans 10:1–4; Romans 3:19; Acts 14:1–26; Romans 9–11.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Brothers, understand what we are telling you. You can have forgiveness of your sins through [because of] this Jesus. The Law of Moses could not free you from your sins. But you can be made right with God if you believe in Jesus’ ” (Acts 13:38, 39, ERV).



The first Gentile, or non-Jewish, church started in Antioch.

GOD PLANNED for His followers to share the Good News with both Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles are non-Jews. It took a while for the first Jewish Christians to accept this plan.

The first Gentile church started in Antioch. Many Gentiles joined the Antioch church. Many Jewish Christians belonged to the Antioch church too (Galatians 2:11–13). The church grew very fast. How did that happen? Church members were very excited to share the Good News. Also, Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch. The work they did caused the church to grow fast too. Antioch became the first important Christian center outside Judea. In many ways, the Antioch church became more important than the Jerusalem church.

Antioch became the birthplace for Christian mission. Mission is the special work we do to help God's church to grow. Paul left from Antioch to go on all three of his mission trips to share the Good News. Paul and the other leaders in Antioch helped Christianity to become the church that Jesus wanted it to be: a worldwide religion that would spread the Good News to everyone on the earth (Revelation 14:6).

PAUL'S TRIP TO CYPRUS (Acts 13:1–12)

In Acts 13, Luke introduces us to Paul's first trip to share the Good News (Acts 13, 14). From Acts 13 until the end of the book, Luke writes about Paul and his work with the Gentiles. As we learned, Gentiles are all non-Jews.

Paul's first trip to share the Good News is the first time the church makes a careful plan to reach people with the truth about Jesus. Luke is careful to make it clear that this plan started with God, not with believers. God can work only when we are willing to put ourselves in a place where He can use us.

Read Acts 13:1–12. What important truths does Luke make clear to us in these verses about the work that Barnabas and Paul did in Cyprus?

Some church members in Antioch prayed and fasted. Fasted means that they did not eat any food for a short time for spiritual reasons. Then the church leaders laid hands on Barnabas and Paul and asked God to bless their work for Him in a special way (Acts 14:26).

Barnabas came from the island of Cyprus. Cyprus is found in the northeast part of the Mediterranean Sea. Cyprus was not far from Antioch. So, Cyprus was a good place for Paul and Barnabas to start their trip to share the Good News. Yes, people on Cyprus knew about the Good News. But there was more work for Paul and Barnabas to do there.

In Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas took Barnabas's cousin John Mark (Acts 15:39; Colossians 4:10) with them. They went to Salamis and preached in synagogues. Synagogues are Jewish "churches" or places of worship. Anywhere Paul went, he preached in synagogues first before he preached to Gentiles. Remember, Jesus was Israel's Promised One. So, it made sense to share the Good News with the Jews first.

After Salamis, Paul and his friends went west and came to Paphos. Paphos was the capital of Cyprus. A Jewish magician named Elymas did not accept the Good News. But Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor, did (Acts 13:12).

In this story in Acts 13, a Jew does not accept the truth. But a Gentile accepts it. How can this experience help us understand that it is sometimes harder to reach Christians with "present truth"? Present truth is the truth we need most for our time.



Sergius Paulus was the Roman governor at Cyprus. He accepted the Good News about Jesus.

PAUL'S TRIP TO ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA: PART 1
(Acts 13:38)

Paul and his friends leave Cyprus and sail to Perga. Perga is on the south coast of land that belongs to Turkey today. Then Paul and his friends go to a city named Antioch in the country of Pisidia. But before that trip, Luke tells us about two important changes that happen. First, Paul becomes the group's leader. Up to now, Luke always says Barnabas's name first in the story. Second, Luke stops using Paul's Jewish name, "Saul" (Acts 13:9). Here, Luke starts using the name "Paul." Why? Maybe because Paul is now mostly with people who follow Greek and Roman ways.

Acts 13:13 tells us that John Mark goes back to Jerusalem. Acts does not tell us the reason why John Mark leaves Paul. Ellen G. White says that John Mark feels afraid and hopeless about all the hard times they will meet in the future. "Mark became afraid. He lost all courage. He refused to go forward. So, he went back to Jerusalem."—*The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 170, adapted. God never promises us that the work He gives us will be easy. Paul knows from the beginning that he will suffer a lot for serving Jesus (Acts 9:16). But Paul learns to trust fully in God's power. That trust in God is how Paul stays strong (2 Corinthians 4:7–10).



John Mark goes back to Jerusalem. He feels afraid and hopeless about all the hard times that may happen in the future.

Read Acts 13:38. As this verse shows us, what truth is at the center of Paul's message to the Jews in Antioch?

In Acts 13:16–41, we find Paul's first sermon in the New Testament. Of course, this sermon is not the first one that Paul ever preached. For sure, these verses do not tell us everything Paul says in his sermon.

The sermon has three parts. The sermon starts with two truths. The first truth is that God chose Israel as His people and chose David to be king (Acts 13:17–23). The first part of Paul's sermon shows the Jews that their beliefs are the same as Paul's. Next, Paul's sermon shows the Jews that Jesus is the Savior who makes all God's promises come true. Jesus is a future son of David. Only Jesus can save Israel (Acts 13:24–37). Then, the last part of Paul's sermon is a warning. It warns the Jews not to turn away from God's plan to save them (Acts 13:38–41). Acts 13:38, 39 is about the truth that Jesus makes us right with God. The law cannot save us. Only Jesus forgives us and makes us clean (Romans 10:1–4; Galatians 2:16).

PAUL'S TRIP TO ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA: PART 2 (Acts 13:42–49)

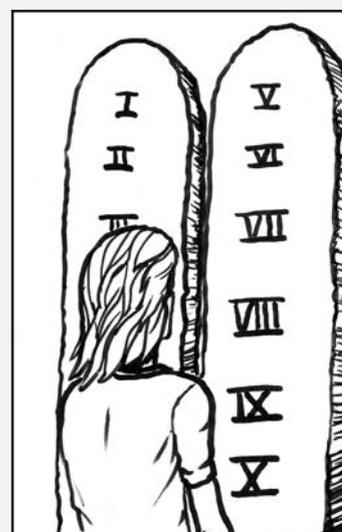
Acts 13:38, 39 tells us that the law cannot make us right with God. Our being made right with God is an important Bible teaching. We must obey the law. But the law cannot make us right with God. Why? Because the law cannot make people obey (Acts 15:10; Romans 8:3). But what if the law did give us the power to obey now and in the future? Great! But that power cannot take away past sins (Romans 3:19; Galatians 3:10, 11). That is why we cannot become right with God by obeying the law. We cannot earn God's favor. We can get this gift only when we have faith in Jesus' death for us (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16). We are not worthy of this gift. Yes, obeying the law is important to the Christian life. But obeying the law does not save us.

Read Acts 13:42–49. As these verses show us, how do the Jews like Paul's message?

Paul ends his message by saying some things that are no doubt hard for the Jews to accept. Most of the Jews accept Paul's message anyway. But the next Sabbath, something changes. Some Jews do not accept Paul's message. Possibly, they are the leaders of the synagogue. A synagogue is a Jewish "church" or place of worship. Why are the leaders mean to Paul? Luke says they are jealous.

But why? In Bible times, there are non-Jews who like many Jewish beliefs. What beliefs do the non-Jews like? A belief in one God, the Jewish way of living, and also the Sabbath. Many non-Jews, at that time, accept the Jewish faith, but they do not fully become Jews. They do not like the idea of needing to be circumcised. To be circumcised means the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. So, many non-Jews worship God in the synagogues but do not become Jews. This group of non-Jewish worshipers is named the "God-fearers." The God-fearers in the Antioch synagogue (Acts 13:16, 43) may help spread the news about Paul's message. At this time, many people join the church in large numbers. Of course, the non-Jews are excited that they can be saved without having to be circumcised first.

This story may help explain why the Jewish leaders are jealous of Paul. These leaders do not accept the Good News. But that helps Paul and Barnabas give their full attention to the non-Jews. The non-Jews thank God for inviting them to accept His plan to save sinners.



We must obey the law. The law is very important to the Christian life. But our obeying the law does not save us.

PAUL'S TRIP TO ICONIUM (Acts 14:1–7)

The Jewish leaders in Antioch asked the local rulers of that city to bring together a large group of people. The local rulers made this large group angry at Paul and Barnabas. Then the rulers and the large group chased Paul and Barnabas out of town (Acts 13:50). But Paul and Barnabas were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52). Then the two men went to the city of Iconium.

As Acts 14:1–7 shows us, what happens because of the work that Paul and Barnabas do in Iconium?

In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas continue their habit of preaching to the Jews first before they preach to the non-Jews. Paul's sermon in Antioch (Acts 13:16–41) shows us his reason for going to the Jews first before going to the non-Jews. What reason is that? Paul's reason is about God's choice. God chose Israel to be His people (Romans 3:2; Romans 9:4, 5). God also made His people a promise. He promised to send them a Savior, born from David's family line. Sadly, many Jews turn away from the Good News. But Paul hopes that many Jews will accept Jesus in the future.

In Romans 9–11, Paul says that “only some of the people of Israel are really God's people” (Romans 9:6, ERV). Also, the reason that some Jews believe in Jesus at all is because of God's mercy. God has not turned away from His people. Even today, “a few of the Jews are being chosen because of God's loving-favor” (Romans 11:5, NLV). Paul continues to preach the Good News to the non-Jews. But Paul believes that more Jews will come to Jesus in the future.

“Paul's words in Romans 9–11 explain more fully his plan to reach the Jews and the non-Jews alike with the Good News. Paul gives Christians a good reason for sharing the Good News with Jews who do not believe in Jesus.”—David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), page 401, adapted.

At first, both Jews and non-Jews accept Paul's Good News about Jesus. But then the Jews who do not believe in Jesus poison the minds of the people against Paul and Barnabas. A large crowd plans to kill Paul and Barnabas with stones. But Paul and Barnabas leave town first.

How can you be a good witness to your Jewish friends?



A large crowd plans to kill Paul and Barnabas with stones. But Paul and Barnabas leave town first.

PAUL'S TRIP TO LYSTRA AND DERBE (Acts 14:5–19)

Paul and Barnabas visit Lystra next (Acts 14:6, 7). Luke tells us only one story that happens in Lystra. It is the story about how Paul heals a crippled man.

Read Acts 14:5–19. How do the people in Lystra behave when they see Paul heal the crippled man? How does their behavior show us that their beliefs are silly?

The crowd in Lystra is very excited about the miracle that Paul does. The crowd thinks that Paul and Barnabas are gods. They believe Barnabas is Zeus. Zeus was the king of all the Greek gods. The crowd believes Paul is the Greek god named Hermes. Hermes was the god who ruled over business, communication, inventions, travel, and stealing. Hermes was also Zeus's messenger and helper. The people in Lystra bring gifts of flowers and bulls to the city gates. The leaders want to burn these gifts in an act of worship to Paul and Barnabas.

There is a story about Zeus and Hermes from that time. It helps explain why the people want to worship Paul and Barnabas. The Roman poet Ovid wrote about this story. Ovid says Zeus and Hermes act as humans. Then they visit a town near Lystra. Ovid says that an older couple is kind to the two gods. But other people are not nice to the gods. The gods reward the old man and old woman. The gods change their house into a temple and turn the old man and woman into holy leaders. Next, the gods put the new holy leaders in charge of the temple. Then the gods destroy the other people in the town (*Metamorphoses*, 611–724).

The people in Lystra know this story very well. No wonder they think Paul and Barnabas are two gods when Paul heals the crippled man! Paul and Barnabas stop the people in Lystra from worshiping them. But some bad men come from Antioch and Iconium and make the people in Lystra angry with Paul and Barnabas. The people throw stones at Paul until they think he is dead.

As Acts 14:20–26 shows us, where do Paul and Barnabas finish their journey? What do they do on their way back?

Paul says: “‘We must suffer many things on our way into God’s kingdom’ ” (Acts 14:22, ERV). What does Paul mean? How can you learn to grow from your suffering?



Paul heals a crippled man in Lystra.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “When Jesus lived on earth, He did everything to show the Jews they were wrong to stop other people from knowing the truth. Jesus worked to save non-Jewish people. Jesus worked to save the Roman army leader. Jesus also worked to save the woman from the country of Phoenicia. Now it was time for Jesus’ followers to bring the non-Jews to Jesus. Whole villages of non-Jews accepted the Good News gladly. They praised God for their new faith. Most of the Jews did not believe in the Good News. They tried to hurt those who believed. But their doubt and hate did not stop God’s plan to save the non-Jews. God’s plan was to join the new Israel to the old Israel. The Jewish places of worship closed their doors to the apostles. The apostles were the men Jesus chose to lead His church after He went to heaven. People opened their homes to the apostles and let them teach there. The apostles also used public buildings owned by non-Jews. The apostles preached God’s truth there too.”—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, page 51, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:



“Jesus worked to save the Roman army leader.”—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, page 51, adapted.

- ① Think more about John Mark’s story. He ran away from Paul and Barnabas when things got hard. Later, Paul and Barnabas argued over John Mark. Barnabas wanted to work with John Mark again. Paul did not want to (read Acts 15:37). But many years later Paul wrote to Timothy: “Get Mark and bring him with you. He helps me in my work for the Lord” (2 Timothy 4:11, NIV). We see Paul changed his mind. What does this story tell us about giving people second chances when they fail to do the work God gives them to do?
- ② Read again what Paul and Barnabas said to the people in Lystra who thought Paul and Barnabas were gods (Acts 14:14–18). What should we do when we feel the desire to accept praise for things that God does?
- ③ Read Acts 14:21–23. What do Paul and Barnabas do to help the faith of new believers grow stronger? How can we do the same?
- ④ The religious leaders who attacked Paul let man-made beliefs get in the way of true faith. How can we escape this trap ourselves?

The Jerusalem Group



SABBATH—AUGUST 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Acts 15; Galatians 2:11–13; Exodus 12:43–49; Romans 3:30; Leviticus 18:30.

MEMORY VERSE: “‘We believe it is by the loving-favor of the Lord Jesus that we are saved. They [the non-Jews] are saved from the punishment of sin the same way’ ” (Acts 15:11, NLV).

AFTER TWO YEARS, Paul and Barnabas came back to Antioch in Syria. They told the church about their work. Paul and Barnabas did not brag about the things they did. They told the church how God used them to do His work.

What is the reason for their report? Paul and Barnabas want to tell the church about their success in sharing the Good News with the non-Jews. After Cornelius accepts Jesus, many other non-Jews join the church too. But several Jewish believers have a big problem with non-Jews joining the church. Why? Because the non-Jews are not circumcised. Circumcised means that the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. Jewish males are circumcised to show they belonged to God. So, many Jewish believers are not happy when large numbers of non-Jews join the church. The Jewish believers feel that the non-Jews need to be circumcised first. Then they can join the church.

Acts 15 talks about this problem and how the Jerusalem Group solved it. The Jerusalem Group made big decisions for the church. They met to solve different problems in the church during this important time in New Testament history.



Paul and Barnabas told the church how God used them to do His work.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE NON-JEWS (Acts 15:1–5)

From the beginning, the church at Antioch in Syria has both Jewish members and non-Jewish members who are not circumcised (Acts 11:19–21; Galatians 2:11–13). Remember, circumcised means the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. The two different groups of people live in peace with each other. But then that peace is broken when some believers arrive in Antioch from Jerusalem.

Read Acts 15:1–5. From what these verses show us, what is the problem in the Antioch church?

The believers from Jerusalem are known as Judaizers. Judaizers believe that non-Jews need to be circumcised first. Then the non-Jews must obey all the laws of Moses before they can join the church. The Judaizers may have been the same group of people that Luke talks about in Luke 15:5. These men are Pharisees. Pharisees were a group of Jews who were very strict about obeying the law. No one from the church in Jerusalem sends the Judaizers to Antioch (Acts 15:24). But later on, something happens in the church that shows us that many Jews and church leaders are not very happy. They do not want non-Jews to join the church (Galatians 2:11–13).

In his letter to the Galatian churches, Paul does not say nice things about the Judaizers. Paul says the Judaizers are troublemakers (Galatians 1:7; Galatians 5:10) and people who “pretended [behaved as] to be believers” (Galatians 2:4, NIV). Paul says these false Christians wanted to take away the Galatians’ freedom that they found in Jesus and make the Galatians slaves to obeying the Jewish laws.

The Judaizers say that non-Jews need to be circumcised first and keep all the Jewish laws before they can be saved. The Judaizers believe that being circumcised is the only way to become a member of God’s people (Genesis 17:9–14; Exodus 12:48). The Judaizers say non-Jews can be saved only if they become Jews first.

Paul and Barnabas do not agree with the Judaizers’ teaching because it does not match the Good News. But the Judaizers’ visit leads to a very angry discussion in the church about the problem. The problem is too important to be solved only by the church in Antioch. The peace of the whole Christian church is in danger of becoming broken. So, the leaders in Antioch send Paul and Barnabas, along with other believers, to Jerusalem to solve the problem.



In his letter to the Galatian churches, Paul does not say nice things about the Judaizers. Paul says the Judaizers are troublemakers.

THE REASON FOR THE FIGHT (Romans 3:30)

One of the reasons for the fight between the believers in Antioch and the Jews from Jerusalem was circumcision. Circumcision means that the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. Jewish males had the extra skin cut off eight days after they were born to show they belonged to God. Circumcision was not something the Jews added to their plan of worship. God Himself commanded circumcision. Circumcision was a word picture for God's Special Agreement with Abraham's future children. Circumcision showed that the Jews were God's people.

Read about circumcision in Exodus 12:43–49. Who else needed to be circumcised? To be circumcised means having the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts cut off.

The promises in God's Special Agreement with His people are not only for the Israelites. God's promises also include any slave or stranger who wishes to experience God's promises. But the slave and the stranger need to be circumcised first. After circumcision, God will then accept the stranger in the same way that He accepts someone who is born a Jew. "He [the non-Jew] will be like [the same as] one who is born in the land" (Exodus 12:48, NLV).

So, in Bible times, a man needs to be circumcised so that he can be a part of God's Special Agreement with His people. That is why the Jewish teachers from Jerusalem say that no non-Jews can be saved until they become Jews first.

Read what Paul says about circumcision in Romans 3:30; 1 Corinthians 7:18; Galatians 3:28; and Galatians 5:6. What does Paul believe about circumcision?

The false teachers say that non-Jews can be saved only if they became Jews first. But just because someone is a member of God's people does not mean that this person is saved. God saves Abraham by faith **before** he is circumcised, not after. The problem is that the Jewish teachers believe that being circumcised makes them right with God. So, to force non-Jews to be circumcised is to twist the Good News. Paul can never agree with this idea.

What danger is there in thinking that all we need to do to be saved is to join the right church?



God's promises also include any slave or stranger who wishes to experience God's promises.

THE LONG TALK (Acts 15:7–11)

In Acts 15:7–11, Luke tells us about the long group discussion that church leaders in Jerusalem have about the non-Jews. What does Peter say about the problem?

Luke does not tell us everything that people said in the meeting. It would be interesting to know what else the false teachers said (Acts 15:5) and how Paul and Barnabas answered them (Acts 15:1). Luke gives us only Peter's and James's sermons. But that fact shows us that both men were very important among the apostles. The apostles were the men Jesus chose to lead His church after He went to heaven.

Peter talks to the apostles and other church leaders. He reminds them about his experience with Cornelius, a non-Jew, many years before. God Himself showed Peter that He approved of Cornelius's becoming a Christian. Cornelius was not circumcised. Circumcised means the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. Jewish males were circumcised eight days after they were born to show they were part of God's chosen people. God showed the Jewish Christians that He accepted Cornelius by giving him the same gift of the Holy Spirit that He gave the apostles at Pentecost. Remember, Pentecost was the time when God poured His Spirit on the church after Jesus went to heaven.

God uses Peter to show the believers from Judea that He saves both Jews and non-Jews alike. No one can say anymore that the non-Jews are not clean. Why? Because God Himself makes their hearts clean. Peter's final words sound almost the same as what Paul might say: " 'We believe it is by the loving-favor of the Lord Jesus that we are saved. They [the non-Jews] are saved from the punishment of sin the same way' " (Acts 15:11, NLV).



No one can say anymore that the non-Jews are not clean. Why? Because God Himself makes their hearts clean.

In Acts 15:13–21, James suggests a way to solve the problem with the non-Jews. What does James think will help solve the problem?

James's talk shows us that he was a leader with lots of power (read also Acts 12:17; Acts 21:18; Galatians 2:9, 12). James wanted to show everyone that God already allowed non-Jews to join the people of God and to become a part of Israel. So, James decided that the church should not force non-Jews to follow Jewish rules.

THE FOUR RULES FOR ALL BELIEVERS

(Acts 15:28, 29)

Read Acts 15:28, 29. The Jerusalem Group was a group of leaders who made big decisions for the church. What four things does the Jerusalem Group say that believers must not do?

The Jerusalem Group said that humans are saved by God’s loving favor, not by their own works. So, believers did not need to be circumcised. To be circumcised means that the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. But the Jerusalem Group said that believers must **not** do four things: (1) They must not eat meat offered to statues and then sold in the markets. (2) They must not eat blood. (3) They must not eat the meat of animals that have been strangled. That means the meat from animals whose blood had not been drained from their bodies. (4) They should not have any sex that breaks God’s law.

The first three rules about food were things that the Jews really hated. So, these laws were meant to help the Jews and the non-Jews to get along better. Most Christians today feel that the first three laws about food no longer need to be followed. Also, some Christians today say that the Sabbath commandment (Exodus 20:8–11) no longer needs to be followed because it is not on this “new” list of rules. They say that the food laws in Leviticus 11 do not need to be followed either, because they are not on this “new” list.

These four laws were **not** a new list of rules for Christians that threw out all other rules in the Old Testament. Clearly, the Holy Spirit led the church leaders to write these four laws (Acts 15:28). The four laws came from the rules found in Leviticus 17–18 that talk only about foreigners living in the land of Israel.

When we read these chapters in Leviticus, we see that the rules are about foreigners giving up their worship of nature and false gods. Any foreigner who wanted to live in Israel had to give up his or her beliefs in false gods (Leviticus 18:30). In the same way, any believing non-Jews who wanted to join the church had to give up their worship of false gods. They needed to keep God’s law holy. They also needed to follow the rules about clean and unclean foods. In the same way, we must follow these rules always.

How can we solve church problems in a spirit of love?



Any stranger from another country who wanted to live in Israel had to give up his or her beliefs in false gods (Leviticus 18:30).

THE LETTER FROM JERUSALEM (Acts 15:22–29)

Read Acts 15:22–29. As these verses show us, how does the Jerusalem church follow the decision made by the Jerusalem Group? The Jerusalem Group was a group of leaders who made big decisions for the church.

First, the leaders of the Jerusalem church wrote a letter to the non-Jewish believers about their decision. This letter was written in A.D. 49. It is one of the oldest church papers today. The Jerusalem church also chose Judas Barsabas and Silas to go with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. Judas and Silas's job was to carry the letter to the leaders in Antioch and to tell the Antioch church that the letter was true.

Read Acts 15:30–33. How does the church in Antioch answer the letter?



Judas Barsabas and Silas joined Paul and Barnabas. Judas Barsabas and Silas had the job of carrying the letter from the church leaders in Jerusalem to Antioch and telling the Antioch church that the letter was true.

The church in Antioch was filled with joy because the message in the letter gave them hope. The letter said that none of the non-Jewish believers needed to be circumcised. To be circumcised means that the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. The church in Antioch agreed with the four rules in the letter that the Jerusalem church sent them.

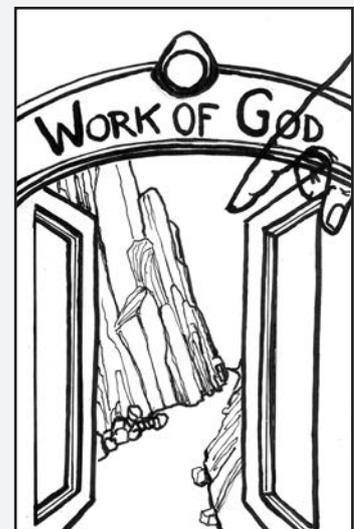
How does the meeting in Jerusalem end? The church leaders in Jerusalem accept Paul's teaching about Jesus. The leaders now accept and trust Paul and Barnabas fully (Galatians 2:9). But there are some Jewish Christians who continue to try to earn God's gift of being saved. No doubt these Jewish Christians will have a hard time eating at the same table with non-Jewish believers. Why? Because under the new rules, the non-Jewish believers do not need to be "clean" to be saved. Ellen G. White says, "Not all of Jesus' followers were ready to accept the decision of the Jerusalem Group."—*The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 197, adapted.

Be honest: Is it hard for you to eat with believers who are different from you? These believers may be from different countries, race groups, or they may follow different ways of life. How can you let go of your wrong feelings and learn to get along with these believers?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “God opens up the way for the Jewish Christians to do His work. But they do not do the work as fast as God wants them to. The work that the church leaders do among the non-Jews clearly shows that the number of non-Jewish believers will be a lot bigger than the number of Jewish believers. The Jews worry about what will happen if the non-Jews do not keep Jewish laws. Then the special laws, beliefs, and behaviors that make the Jews different will be gone. And those special things will not be seen in the lives of the non-Jewish believers who accept the Good News that Jesus saves us from sin.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 189, adapted.

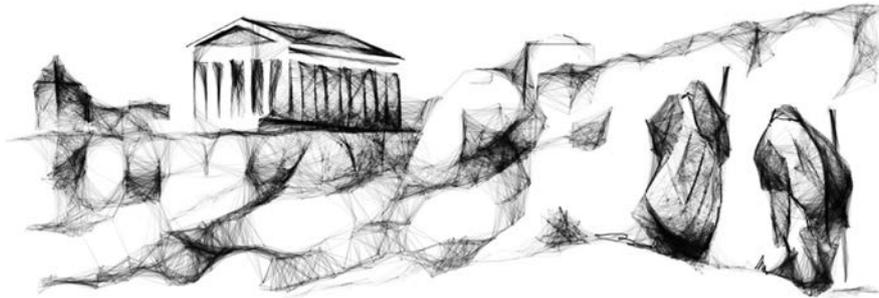
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In class, go back to Monday’s last question. We know that belonging to the “right” church does not mean we are saved, right? Think about Israel’s example in the Old Testament. Clearly, Israel was the “right church.” But that does not mean that every person in Israel was saved. Our being members of the true church does not mean we will be saved either. So then, what is the real reason why we should belong to the true church?
- ② One of the most important decisions the church in New Testament times made was about how to accept non-Jewish believers into the church. Should these non-Jewish believers be circumcised? To be circumcised means the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. What problems do we see in the church today? What do the church leaders in Acts 15 teach us about how to solve these problems?
- ③ In class, ask some people to be the Jews in the book of Acts who say that non-Jews must become Jews first before they can join the church. Now ask these “Jews” to give reasons to support their beliefs. Why do they say that non-Jews must become Jews first before they can join the church? How do you answer them? How does this experience show us that the problems in the early church were harder to solve than we think?



“God opens up the way for the Jewish Christians to do His work.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 189, adapted.

Paul's Second Trip to Share the Good News



SABBATH—AUGUST 25

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 16; Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16; Acts 17; 1 Corinthians 1:23; Acts 18:1–10.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Don't [do not] be afraid! Continue talking to people and don't be quiet! I am with you. No one will hurt you because many of my people are in this city' ” (Acts 18:9, 10, ICB).



Paul and Silas went to Syria and Cilicia and made the churches there stronger.

PAUL AND BARNABAS helped grow the church in Antioch. They shared the Good News about Jesus everywhere. Maybe this time was the last time Paul and Barnabas worked together. Then they separated. Why did they separate? Because of John Mark, who was Barnabas's cousin (Colossians 4:10). Paul invited Barnabas to go with him to the places where they shared the Good News on their first trip. Barnabas wanted to bring John Mark too. But Paul did not want to invite John Mark because of what he did in the past (Acts 13:13).

God made something good happen from Paul and Barnabas's separation. Each man went a separate way. So, the two men visited a larger area than they planned at first. Barnabas took John Mark and went back to Cyprus, his home country (Acts 4:36). Paul invited Silas to go with him. Together, Paul and Silas went to Syria and Cilicia and made their churches stronger. Paul stayed several years in Tarsus before going to Antioch for the first time (Acts 9:30; Acts 11:25, 26). Now Paul had the chance to visit again the churches he started there. Paul had no idea that God had big plans for him.

BACK IN LYSTRA (Acts 15:41)

Luke tells us that Paul traveled straight to Derbe and Lystra. Paul went to Syria and Cilicia, too, and made the churches there stronger (Acts 15:41).

Read Acts 16:1–13. What do these verses tell us about Paul’s deep love for telling people about the Good News that Jesus saves us from sin?

Timothy’s father was not Jewish. But Timothy’s mother, Eunice, was a Jewish Christian. Timothy knew Bible teachings well. He learned them when he was a child. His Bible knowledge shows us he was very religious. As a Christian, Timothy already earned the respect of all the believers in his church.

In the first century A.D., a person was Jewish because he or she had a Jewish father. But because only Timothy’s mother was Jewish, Timothy was not a Jew and never was circumcised. To be circumcised means the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. Male babies were circumcised on the eighth day after birth to show that they belonged to God.

Paul wants Timothy to work with him in synagogues. Synagogues are Jewish “churches” or places of worship. But Paul knows that Timothy needs to be circumcised first before the Jews will let him enter synagogues. So, Paul asks Timothy to become circumcised. What will happen if Timothy does not become circumcised? Then the Jews will shut him out of the synagogues because they believe he is not showing respect to God. But Timothy’s becoming circumcised does not change Paul’s message that God saves us by faith instead of by any good thing we do.

Next, Paul decided to go to Ephesus. But then the Holy Spirit stopped him from going there. So, Paul went north. He tried to go to a country named Bithynia. But again, the Holy Spirit stopped him from going. So, Paul went to the town of Troas, near the sea. God told Paul in a night vision to sail across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia. Paul told his friends about the vision. They felt that God wanted them to go with Paul to share the Good News with the Macedonians.

Think about why Paul circumcised Timothy. What should this decision teach us about why we sometimes need to do things we might not think are important but that will help us do more work for God?



God told Paul in a night vision to sail across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia.

PHILIPPI (Acts 16:11–24)

Paul and his friends traveled from Macedonia to Philippi. There, they started the first Christian church in Europe.

Read in Acts 16:11–24 about the place where Paul and his friends go on the Sabbath. Why do they go there? What happens to them there?

Anytime Paul arrives in a city, he goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath. A synagogue is a Jewish “church” or place of worship. Paul goes there to witness to the Jews (Acts 13:14, 42, 44; Acts 17:1, 2; Acts 18:4). But when Paul gets to Philippi, he and his group go to a river to pray. Some women and some Jewish and non-Jewish believers join Paul and his group at the river. That tells us there is no synagogue in the city. That fact is important. It teaches us that Paul does not go to Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath only to witness. He also goes to synagogues on the Sabbath because he worships on the Sabbath.

Read the story in Acts 16:25–34 about the prison guard who becomes a Christian. What does the prison guard need to do to be saved?



When Paul gets to Philippi, he and his group go to a river to pray. Some women and other believers join Paul at the river.

Paul and Silas answer the prison guard’s question. Paul and Silas tell the prison guard the Good News that we are saved by faith in Jesus alone (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16). But we cannot read this story and say that we only need to believe in Jesus to be baptized. Every believer who wants to be baptized needs to learn Bible truth.

What do we know about the prison guard? Is he a Jew or someone who wants to join the Jewish religion? Either way, the prison guard must believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. What if the prison guard is a non-Jew who already knows and worships God the same as Cornelius, Lydia (Acts 16:14), and several other people in Acts? What if the prison guard already went to Paul’s meetings in the city and heard the Good News about Jesus? We do not know all the facts about the prison guard. So, no one should use his story as a reason or an excuse to baptize people right away before they learn Bible teachings first.

PAUL TRAVELS TO THESSALONICA AND BEREA (Acts 17:1–9)

Paul and Silas were let go from prison. Then they left Philippi (Acts 16:35–40) and went straight to Thessalonica, the capital city of Macedonia.

Read Acts 17:1–9. As these verses show us, how do the Thessalonian Jews act when they learn that Paul’s preaching among non-Jews is a big success?

Again, we see Paul looking for a Jewish place of worship where he can share the Good News about Jesus. Many Greeks who loved God deeply believe Paul’s message. Some of the leading women in the city believe too. These believers decide to join Paul and Silas to worship God (Acts 17:4). Their joining Paul and Silas seems to mean they start a new group for worship. They meet in someone’s house. That house may belong to a new believer named Jason.

The Jews of Thessalonica are filled with jealous anger because of the new group. They start a fight in the city. They want to bring Paul and Silas in front of the city’s leaders and blame them for a crime. But the Jews cannot find Paul and Silas anywhere. The Jews in the city take Jason and a few other new believers to the city leaders. The Jews blame Jason and the new believers for protecting troublemakers. The Jews say that Jason and the new believers want to hurt the city’s government.

Read about the Berean Jews in Acts 17:10–15. How do the Berean Jews act? Do they act the same as, or different from, the Jews in Thessalonica?

The Greek word “eugenes” (Acts 17:11) used to mean “someone of high birth.” But later, its meaning changed. It now means someone who has an “open mind.” Acts 17:10–15 uses the second meaning. The Jews from Berea are praised because they studied the Bible daily to see if Paul and his group taught the truth. It is easy to become excited about the Good News when we first learn about it. But if we do not study the Bible to understand the truth, then our experience in believing the truth will not grow.

When was the last time you studied the Bible the same way as the Bereans?



The Jews from Berea are praised because they studied the Bible daily to see if Paul and his group taught the truth.

PAUL IN ATHENS (Acts 17:22–31)

The city of Athens was the center of learning in Greece during New Testament times. The whole city was full of statues of false gods. Marble statues of persons and gods were everywhere. Many of these statues stood at the entrance to the agora. The agora was a public place in the middle of the city. Paul was very upset about all the statues everywhere. So, he changed what he always did when he first arrived in a city. He did not go first to the synagogue. A synagogue is a Jewish “church” or place of worship. This time, Paul did two things: he argued with the Jews and non-Jewish believers in the synagogue. Also, each day Paul argued in public with the Greeks in Athens. (Read Acts 17:15–22.)

The people of Athens in Paul’s time are always ready to hear something new. Some thinkers in the city like Paul’s teaching. They invite Paul to preach to the Areopagus. The Areopagus is the group that ruled Athens. In his sermon, Paul does not share verses from the Bible or tell the city’s leaders about the history of God’s goodness to Israel. Paul talks about these things anytime he preaches to a group of Jews (read also Acts 13:16–41). But preaching about these things now will not make much sense to a non-Jewish group. So, Paul shares with the Greeks some important Bible truths. Paul uses words in his sermon that the Greeks understand.



The city of Athens was full of statues of false gods. Paul was very upset about all the statues everywhere.

Read Paul’s sermon to the Areopagus in Acts 17:22–31. What important truths about God, being saved, history, and people does Paul preach to the Greeks?

Paul’s words seemed silly to this group who worshiped false gods. Their ideas about God were twisted and wrong. We do not know how Paul planned to end his message. He may have been cut off as soon as he said that God will judge the people on the earth (Acts 17:31). This teaching did not match two Greek beliefs: (1) the Greek belief that God had nothing to do at all with the happenings on this earth. And (2) the Greek belief that anyone who dies cannot wake up from the dead. These two beliefs help explain why the Greeks said the Good News about Jesus was silly (1 Corinthians 1:23). So, not many people in Athens became Christians. But a few of the leading people believed, including Dionysius and Damaris (Acts 17:34).

PAUL IN CORINTH (Acts 18:4–17)

Acts 18:1–11 tells us about Paul’s experience in Corinth. He stayed there for one and a half years. There, he met Aquila and Priscilla. They became Paul’s friends for the rest of his life (Romans 16:3; 2 Timothy 4:19). The story shows us that Aquila and Priscilla already were Christians before they came to Corinth. Many Jews were sent there from Rome by Claudius, the ruler of the Roman Kingdom. The Roman writer Suetonius hints in a book he wrote that the Jews were sent away from Rome because of problems happening in the Jewish community in Rome (*Claudius* 25.4). The problem was happening because Jewish Christians preached the Good News about Jesus to the Jews in Rome. Maybe Aquila and Priscilla took part in preaching the Good News in Rome. Anyway, Paul and Aquila and Priscilla shared the same faith. All three of them were Jews and tentmakers too.

Read about Paul’s work for God in Acts 18:4–17. What happens because of the work Paul does for God in Corinth?

Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia. They brought some money to help support the churches there (2 Corinthians 11:8, 9). This money helped Paul. Now he did not need work to earn money at the same time that he preached. Paul wanted to pay for his own bed and food when he preached the Good News in new places. But he also taught that “those [workers] who preach the Good News should get their living [money] from those [people] who hear it” (1 Corinthians 9:14, NLV).

Many Jews did not like Paul’s message. But some Jews and some non-Jewish worshipers of God believed it. Crispus was one of the new believers. Crispus was the leader of the synagogue. A synagogue is a Jewish “church” or place of worship. Everyone who lived and worked in Crispus’s house also believed the Good News about Jesus. Many Corinthians also believed and were baptized. That upset the Jews in Corinth (Acts 18:12–17). Paul may have planned to leave Corinth. But then God gave Paul a night vision. In the vision, God told Paul to stay (Acts 18:9–11).

Paul felt hopeless about his chance to share the Good News with the Jews in Corinth. Paul needed the Lord to support him. How do the Lord’s words to Paul, in Acts 18:10, give us hope, too, when we need it most?



Paul and his friends Aquila and Priscilla shared the same faith. All three of them were also tentmakers.



“The truth for this time will test us. The people who hear this truth must behave the same as the Bereans. The Bereans read the Bible daily. They wanted to make sure the messages they heard were true.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 232, adapted.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Do not lose hope when you teach truths that people do not like. Sometimes you may meet no one who accepts them. People who say they are Christians may turn away from these truths too. The same thing happened to Paul and his friends. Some of the people they shared the truth with did not accept it. Workers for Jesus must always keep their eyes open. They must pray. These things help God’s workers to stay safe. God’s workers must keep going. They must have faith and stay brave. They must work always in the name of Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 230, adapted.

“The history of this earth will end soon. The truth for this time will test us. The people who hear this truth must behave the same as the Bereans. The Bereans read the Bible daily. They wanted to make sure the messages they heard were true. What if we will do the same thing today? Then many more people will be loyal to God’s law. But we see only a small number of people today who are loyal. . . .

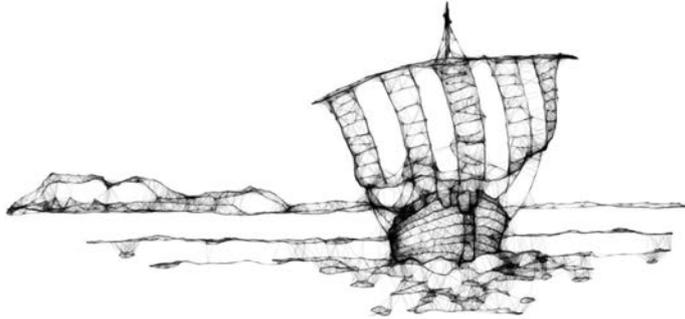
“God will judge each person by the truth he or she learned. The Lord gives His workers the message about being saved. He gives it to them to share with other people. Will these people accept the message, or turn away from it? God holds these people responsible for their choices. People who want the truth will carefully study the Bible teachings God gave them. They will make sure these teachings match the Bible first before they accept them.”—Page 232, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① “People need to study Bible teachings more deeply before they are baptized. There are teachings and important rules about how to live a Christian life. These teachings and important rules should be made clear to believers who are new in the faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [special messages] for the Church*, volume 6, pages 91, 92. What does Ellen G. White mean?

② How can we, together as a church, show the same understanding that Paul had of different ways that people live? Why must we be willing to meet people where they are? At the same time, how do we do that and continue to stay loyal to God and our beliefs?

Paul's Third Trip to Share the Good News



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 1

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 18:24–28; Acts 19; Acts 20:7–12, 15–27; 2 Corinthians 4:8–14; Acts 21:1–15.

MEMORY VERSE: “I do not think of my life as worth much, but I do want to finish the work the Lord Jesus gave me to do. My work is to preach the Good News of God's loving-favor” (Acts 20:24, NLV).

LUKE does not announce to his readers that he is going to start a new story about Paul. Luke just starts telling us about Paul's third trip to share the Good News. The book of Acts says that Paul spends some time in Antioch. Then Luke tells us that Paul is going on another trip. Paul “traveled all over Galatia and Phrygia. He gave strength to all the believers there” (Acts 18:23, NlrV). So, the first 1,500 miles Paul travels are explained in only one verse!

Why did Luke not say much about Paul's trip? Because the next city he traveled to, Ephesus, was more important than what happened on the way to that city. Paul traveled to many places. But he spent the most time in Ephesus. His trip to Ephesus was a big success. “Every Jew and Greek in Asia heard the Word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10, ICB). During this same time, one of Paul's coworkers may have started the churches in Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea.

This trip is Paul's last, or the last one in Acts, that Luke tells us about. Paul starts this trip as a free man. Later, Luke tells us about one more trip Paul makes. But during that trip, Paul travels to Rome as a prisoner.



Paul “traveled all over Galatia and Phrygia. He gave strength to all the believers there” (Acts 18:23, NlrV).

PAUL'S TRIP TO EPHEBUS: PART 1 (Acts 19:1–7)

Acts 18:24–28 tells us that Paul traveled to Ephesus. On his way there, a Jewish believer named Apollos came to that city too. Apollos was a man who was very good with words. He knew the Bible well too. We can see that Apollos was a follower of Jesus from the way that Luke writes about Apollos. Luke says: “He [Apollos] had been taught about the Lord and was always excited to talk to people about Jesus. What he taught was right” (Acts 18:25, ERV). But Apollos knew only about the baptism that John talked about. Apollos learned from John the Baptist himself. So, Apollos learned about Jesus during the time that Jesus was on earth. But then Apollos must have moved away from Jerusalem before God poured His Holy Spirit on the first believers.

That helps explain why Aquila and Priscilla needed to teach Apollos more about Jesus. Apollos knew how to use the Hebrew Bible to show people that Jesus was the Savior that God promised to send to His people. But at the same time, Apollos needed to learn the most up-to-date information and news about Jesus' work. Aquila and Priscilla and the other believers in Ephesus gave Apollos a special letter. This letter was written to the churches in Achaia (Acts 18:27), telling them to accept Apollos and the work he was sent to do. This letter allowed Apollos to work with much success in Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:4–6; 1 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 16:12).



The believers in Ephesus gave Apollos a special letter. This letter was written to the churches in Achaia (Acts 18:27), telling them to accept Apollos and the work he was sent to do.

Read Acts 19:1–7. As these verses show us, what happens to Paul when he arrives in Ephesus?

“Paul arrived in Ephesus. There he met 12 men who had followed John the Baptist. These men also learned something about the work of Jesus, the same as Apollos had. These 12 men were not as wise or as skilled as Apollos. But they had the same faith in Jesus that Apollos had. They also had the same desire to tell people about Jesus.” —Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 282, adapted.

The 12 men are baptized. God gives these 12 men the Holy Spirit. Then they begin to speak different languages. That fact shows us that they are Christian workers, the same as Apollos was. God gives them the gift of speaking in different languages so they can explain the Good News to everyone anywhere they go.

PAUL'S TRIP TO EPHESUS: PART 2 (Acts 19:23–41)

In Ephesus, Paul did the same thing he almost always did when he arrived in a city. First, he preached in the synagogue. A synagogue is a Jewish “church” or place of worship. But many Jews quickly turned against Paul’s message. So, Paul and the new believers moved to a place where a man named Tyrannus owned a school. Paul preached there every day for two years (Acts 19:8–10). All Ephesus heard the Good News about Jesus because of Paul’s work there (Acts 19:10, 26).

In Acts 19:11–20, Luke adds a few more stories about miracles. These miracles show how God’s power wins against magic. Ephesus was a city where magic was everywhere. God used Paul to do many healing miracles. One example may seem strange to us: people took aprons and handkerchiefs that touched Paul’s skin or that Paul touched. Then these people gave the pieces of cloth to sick persons. It seems these pieces of cloth were able to heal people (Acts 19:12)! This miracle helps us remember how Jesus healed the woman who bled for 12 years (Luke 8:44). God used very strange and special miracles to show the Ephesians that His power was stronger than any magic (Acts 19:11). These examples show us how God meets the needs of people where they are.

Then Paul decided to go to Jerusalem after he finished working in Ephesus (Acts 19:21). Luke does not say why. But we know from Paul’s own writing that he wanted to bring the money he collected for the poor to the Jerusalem church (Romans 15:25–27; 1 Corinthians 16:1–3). There was a food shortage during the time Claudius ruled in Rome. Many people were hungry. That hard time made the believers in Jerusalem very poor. Plus, many believers gave the things they owned to people who were poor. So, Paul wanted to help them (Galatians 2:10). Paul wanted his gift to build their trust in him as a leader and to bring peace to God’s church.

Read Acts 19:23–41. In these verses, what is the real reason for the attacks against Paul that start in Ephesus at the end of his stay there?

Demetrius’s fight with Paul was about worshiping false gods. But the real reason for Demetrius’s anger was money. Do you see how Demetrius behaved as if he cared about religion? But all Demetrius wanted was to get more money.



People took aprons and handkerchiefs that touched Paul’s skin or that Paul touched. Then these people gave the pieces of cloth to sick persons. It seems these pieces of cloth were able to heal people (Acts 19:12)! Maybe God did very strange and special miracles for the Ephesians because of their strong belief in magic (Acts 19:11). These examples show us how God meets the needs of people where they are.

PAUL VISITS TROAS (Acts 20:7–12)

Paul decided to leave the city of Ephesus after the trouble with Demetrius (Acts 19:23–41). So, Paul went to Macedonia and Achaia first before going to Jerusalem (Acts 20:1–3). Members from some of the non-Jewish churches went with him on this trip to Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 20:4).

Read Acts 20:7–12. Many people often use these verses to prove that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday. What is wrong with this thinking?

At the end of Paul’s visit to Troas, he went to a church meeting “on the first day of the week” (Acts 20:7, NLV). Everyone gathered “to eat the Lord’s Supper” (Acts 20:7, NLV). So, some Bible thinkers say that this verse proves that in Paul’s time the non-Jewish churches had already started to worship on Sunday instead of Sabbath.

But before we say that this idea is true, we have to make sure we understand the exact day that the meeting happened. We also need to know what the meeting was about. So, let us look more closely at the story. The verses say that lights were used for the meeting (Acts 20:8). The verses also tell us that Paul’s sermon lasted until midnight (Acts 20:7), and then it went on until the sun came up (Acts 20:11). The verses also tell us that Eutychus fell into a deep sleep during the meeting (Acts 20:9). All these things show us that the meeting happened at night.

But the next question we need to ask is: Did the meeting happen before Sunday or the night after Sunday? The answer depends on how Luke counts time. The Jews said a day started at one sundown and ended at the next sundown. But the Romans did not count time in the same way as the Jews. The Romans said a day started on midnight and ended the next midnight. So, if we count time using the Jewish rule for counting, then the meeting happened on Saturday night. But if we use the Roman rule for counting, then the meeting happened Sunday night. Either way, Acts 20:7–12 shows us that the meeting was a special one because Paul was leaving the following morning. Everyone got together to hear what Paul had to say. So, it is hard to see how anyone could use this story to say that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday.



Eutychus fell into a deep sleep during Paul’s sermon. This fact tells us that Paul’s meeting happened at night.

How does the Bible teaching about the Sabbath help make our faith stronger?

PAUL'S TRIP TO MILETUS (Acts 20:15–27)

Paul made one more stop on his way to Jerusalem. He went to Miletus. There he preached a goodbye sermon to the Ephesian church leaders.

Read Acts 20:15–27. What does Paul talk about at the beginning of his sermon?

Paul believes he will never come back again to Asia. He already has plans for a new trip. He plans to go to Rome and Spain (Romans 15:22–29). So, Paul starts his sermon by talking about the years he stayed in Ephesus. Paul tells the church leaders about what happened when he lived with the Ephesians. But he also talks about what he worries may happen to him in Jerusalem in the future.

Paul had a good reason to be afraid. The Jerusalem church felt a little angry at Paul. That was because of Paul's fight against Christians in the past. The church also worried about Paul's message. Paul preached the Good News that Jesus saves us only by faith. So, many Jewish leaders felt Paul was not loyal to Jewish life and the Jewish faith (Acts 23:1, 2). By the middle of the first century (years 1–100), the people of Judea were tired of the Roman government. This feeling was found in all parts of Jewish life. Maybe the church felt this way too. So, it is easy to see that Paul's work with the non-Jews did not make him very popular with the Jews (Acts 21:27–36).

Paul had other things to worry about too. In Acts 20:28–31, Paul talked about what church leaders in Ephesus should do about false teachers. Paul said false teachers were the same as wolves who tried to lead the flock the wrong way and to destroy them. The danger of false teachers was real even in Paul's day. Long before Paul's time, Solomon said: "There is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9, NLV). A history about the Christian church shows that false teachers hurt the church very much. The problem caused by false teachers will continue in the church until the end of time (2 Timothy 4:3).

Yes, Paul had many things to make him worry. But he never stopped believing in God.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:8–14. What is Paul saying in these verses that we need to remember and follow when troubles come? Where did Paul put his hope?



Paul said false teachers were the same as wolves who tried to lead the flock the wrong way and cause them to sin.

PAUL VISITS TYRE AND CAESAREA (Acts 21:10–14)

Luke tells us about what happens to Paul on his way to Jerusalem. After Paul goes to Miletus, he spends a week in the city of Tyre in Phoenicia (Acts 21:1–6). But while Paul is there, the Holy Spirit leads believers in Tyre to warn Paul not to go to Jerusalem. The church’s warning does not go against God’s command to Paul to go to Jerusalem. How do we know? We know by looking at the Greek wording found in Acts 19:21 for “made plans to go” (ERV). The Greek wording really means: “the Holy Spirit led Paul to make plans.” What the words in Acts 21:4 tells us is that Paul does not make this decision by himself. Maybe the Holy Spirit shows the Christians in Tyre the dangers that Paul will experience. So, these Christians warn Paul not to go to Jerusalem right away. Paul himself does not know what will happen to him when he arrives in Jerusalem (Acts 20:22, 23). We see from Paul’s experience that God does not always make everything clear to us all at one time.

Read Acts 21:10–14. In these verses, a man named Agabus gives Paul a special warning in Caesarea. How does Agabus’s warning show Paul the trouble that waits for him in Jerusalem?



Agabus acts out his message to show that Paul will be arrested when he arrives in Jerusalem.

Agabus was a prophet. A prophet is a special messenger that God sends to His people. We already met Agabus earlier in Acts 11:27–30. In Acts 11, Agabus warns the church about the food shortage. In Acts 21, Agabus does what many Old Testament prophets did. He acts out his message to show that Paul will be arrested when he arrives in Jerusalem. Then Paul’s enemies will give him to the Romans.

The Christians who are with Paul take Agabus’s message as a warning. They tell Paul to not go to Jerusalem. Paul’s heart is touched by their worry for him. But he makes up his mind to finish his work, even if he dies. For Paul, the Good News and peace in the church are more important than his own safety.

“Paul never came near Jerusalem before with his heart so sad as now. He knows that he will find few friends and many enemies. He nears the city that had turned away from Jesus and killed the Son of God. God was very angry with the city.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, pages 397, 398, adapted.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “The Jews were very angry at the Christians who preached the Good News. The Christians had a lot of success. Their new teaching helped Jews let go of the false idea that they must follow rules and laws to be saved. This teaching also said that non-Jews were the same as the Jews. Both Jews and non-Jews were the children of Abraham. Paul himself said: ‘There is no difference in men in this new life. Greeks and Jews are the same. The man who has gone through [experienced] the religious act of becoming a Jew and the one who has not are the same’ [Colossians 3:11, NLV]. The Jews felt that the words Paul spoke were a crime against God. So, they decided to stop Paul forever.”—*The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 390, adapted.

“Paul could not trust in his own brothers in the faith to support him and have mercy on him. The Jews who did not believe in Jesus followed Paul closely. They were quick to spread ugly lies about Paul in Jerusalem. They wrote ugly letters about Paul and his work. Some leaders in the Christian church read these letters and believed them. These leaders did nothing to stop these lies or to support Paul.”—Page 398, adapted.

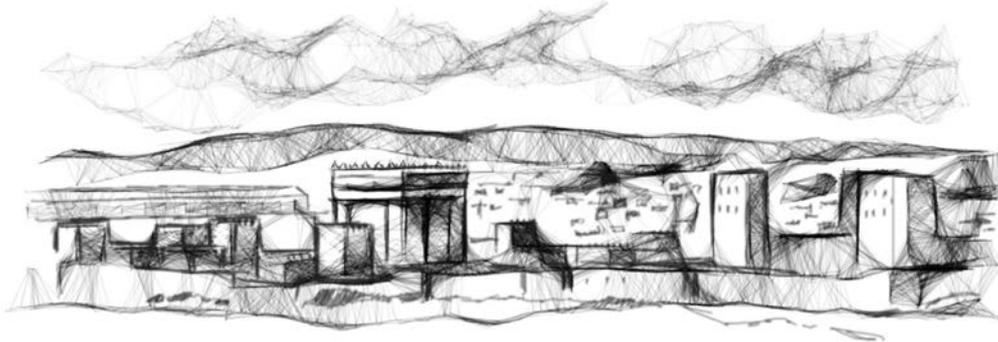
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Paul met some Christians in Ephesus who were followers of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1–7). Some Adventists use these verses to say that Christians from other churches need to become baptized again when they join the Adventist Church. Is that idea correct? If yes, why? Did you see that Apollos was not baptized again? What does that also teach us?
- ② Many Jews who did not believe in Jesus turned against Paul. Many Jews who believed in Jesus also turned against Paul. They accused Paul of changing God’s law. Many people who worshiped false gods hated the message that Paul preached. But Paul continued to do the work God gave him anyway. What can we learn from Paul’s story about not giving up?
- ③ Think about some of the verses and ideas that people use to say that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday. How do we prove that these ideas are false? How do we also show that keeping the Sabbath is not about trying to be saved by obeying the law?



Some leaders in the Christian church read the letters that told lies about Paul and believed them.

Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 8

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 21:23–26; Romans 2:28, 29; Galatians 5:6; Acts 22; Acts 23:1–30.

MEMORY VERSE: “The next night the Lord Jesus came and stood by Paul. He said, ‘Be brave! You have told people in Jerusalem about me. You must do the same in Rome’ ” (Acts 23:11, ERV).



Paul invites the non-Jewish churches to give money to help the believers in Judea (1 Corinthians 16:1). Paul hopes that this gift of money will help stop the fuss.

A FIGHT STARTS IN THE CHURCH soon after Paul makes his first trip to share the Good News about Jesus with other people. We learned about this fight in an earlier lesson. The fight is about the things that non-Jews need to do first before they join the church (Acts 15:1–5). Maybe by the time Paul finishes his third trip, he already knows about the trouble in the future. So, he makes a plan to keep peace in the church. He also invites the non-Jewish churches to give money to help the believers in Judea (1 Corinthians 16:1). Paul hopes that this gift will help stop the fuss.

Danger waits for Paul in Jerusalem. But Paul wants to bring peace to the church. This fact may help explain why Paul goes to Jerusalem anyway. Paul also has a real love for his people, the Jews (Romans 9:1–5). He wants church members to get along with each other (Galatians 3:28; Galatians 5:6). Both Jews and non-Jews are saved in the same way. They are saved by faith, not by obeying the law (Romans 3:28–30). So, Paul is against any teaching that goes against the truth of the Good News about Jesus (Ephesians 2:11–22). This week, let us follow Paul as he enters this new time in his life and his work for God.

PAUL MEETS WITH THE LEADERS OF THE JERUSALEM CHURCH (Acts 21:23–26)

Paul arrived in Jerusalem. There Paul stayed with a believer named Mnason. The Christians who were friends with Mnason gave Paul a warm welcome (Acts 21:16, 17).

In Acts 21:18–22, James and the Jerusalem church leaders said they were worried about how the strict Jews felt about Paul. These strict Jews followed the law of Moses very carefully. The Jerusalem church leaders were told that Paul taught Jewish believers to stop following the law of Moses and the “religious act of becoming a Jew and not to follow old religious ways of worship” (Acts 21:21, NRSV).

Of course, these stories about Paul were not true. Paul always taught that we can do nothing to earn the gift of being saved. Paul said both Jews and non-Jews were saved only by faith in Jesus (Romans 2:28, 29; Galatians 5:6; Colossians 3:11). Paul never taught Jews to stop obeying the law. Paul did not teach the Jews to stop doing what the law asked them to do. Obeying the law does not mean we are saved by our own good works. But some people twist the reason for why we need to obey the law. How? They say we should obey the law because good behavior will save us.

Read Acts 21:23–26. As these verses show us, how does Paul show that he continues to be a loyal Jew?

The church leaders told Paul to do something to prove that he was a loyal Jew. They told him to show his support for some Jews who wanted to take the Nazarite oath. The Nazarite oath is a special promise that a Jewish male said to show that he gave his whole life to God.

Sadly, Paul followed their advice. Heroes, even in the Bible, have their weaknesses. We can see this sad fact in the lives of Abraham, Moses, Peter, and other people. Someone may say that Paul was just following his normal rule of acting the same as a Jew when working with other Jews (1 Corinthians 9:19–23). But Paul gave in more than he should have. His behavior made people think the Good News for the Jews was different than the Good News for the non-Jews. Paul’s behavior made people think non-Jews were saved by faith, but Jews were saved by their works. “God did not give Paul permission to do as much as the Jews asked him to do.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 405, adapted.



In Jerusalem, Paul stayed with a believer named Mnason. The Christians who were friends with Mnason gave Paul a warm welcome (Acts 21:16, 17).

TROUBLE IN THE TEMPLE (Acts 21:27–36)

Paul accepts the church leaders' advice. He agrees to show support for the group of Jews who take the Nazarite oath. The Nazarite oath is a special promise a Jewish male says to show that he gives his whole life to God. What does Paul need to do to show his support? Paul will need to be made "clean." What does it mean to be made "clean"? It means that Paul will need to follow certain Jewish religious rules. This part will last seven days. Paul must follow these special Jewish rules for seven days before he can help the men say their Nazarite oath (Numbers 19:11–13). Jewish laws say that any person who comes from non-Jewish lands is not clean and cannot enter the temple. So, Paul must make himself clean first before he can go to the holy leaders. Then he can tell them that he made himself clean so that he can help the men finish their oath (Acts 21:26).

Read Acts 21:27–36. As these verses show us, what happens to Paul at the end of this seven-day period?

A big fight breaks out. Some men in the crowd blame Paul for trying to destroy the Jewish religion and for not respecting the temple. Trophimus from Ephesus travels with Paul at this time. Trophimus is one of Paul's friends. Trophimus is also a non-Jewish believer (Acts 21:29). The angry Jews beating Paul think that Paul invited Trophimus into the temple where only Jews can enter. If Paul really did do that, then Paul is guilty of an awful crime. A wall separates the inside of the temple from the outside part. There are signs with words in both the Greek and Latin languages on this wall. These signs warn non-Jewish visitors not to enter or they will be put to death.

The Roman army leader in the city hears the news about the wild fight. The Roman army leader's name is Claudius Lysias (Acts 21:31, 32; Acts 23:26). Claudius Lysias comes to the temple with troops. The troops save Paul before the crowd kills him. The troops arrest Paul and put him in chains while Claudius Lysias tries to understand what is going on. The crowd shouts wildly against Paul. So, the army leader takes Paul to the Roman war building in Jerusalem.

False stories help start this wild fight. Why must we take care not to believe false stories or tell them to other people?



The army leader takes Paul to the Roman war building in Jerusalem.

**PAUL STANDS IN FRONT OF THE CROWD
(Acts 22:22–29)**

Acts 21:37–40 tells us what happens next to Paul. The Roman troops take Paul back to the Roman war building to ask him questions. Paul asks Claudius Lysias, who is the Roman army leader, to let him speak to the crowd of people who want him to die.

Paul speaks to the Roman army leader in the Greek language. So, Claudius Lysias thinks that Paul is a certain Jew from Egypt. In the past, this Jew from Egypt started a war in Jerusalem against the Roman rulers. The Roman army stopped this war. The Jew from Egypt escaped, but many of his followers were arrested or killed.

Paul tells the Roman army leader that he is from Tarsus, not from Egypt. So, the Roman army leader allows Paul to speak. Paul does not talk about the crimes that the crowd says Paul did (Acts 21:28). Paul tells the crowd his story about how he becomes a Christian. He talks about how he is a loyal Jew who killed believers in Jesus in the past. But then the Lord showed Himself to Paul. Paul cannot turn away from this truth. Paul's belief in Jesus changes his whole life. That is why Paul preaches the Good News about Jesus to non-Jews. Paul does not argue with the angry crowd about Bible teachings. But Paul tells the crowd about his own experience and why he preaches to the non-Jews.

Read Acts 22:22–29. What does the angry crowd do when Paul says that God chose him to preach to the non-Jews?

The Roman army leader's choice to let Paul speak does not have a good ending. When Paul says that God sent him to work with the non-Jews, the crowd judges Paul guilty of the crimes they say he did (Acts 21:28). They get very angry.

Maybe the Roman army leader does not understand everything Paul says. So, he decides to punish Paul. Paul is a Jew by birth (Philippians 3:5). But he is also a Roman citizen. When Paul tells the Roman army leader that he is a Roman citizen, the Roman army leader does not beat him. That is because Roman soldiers were not allowed to hurt or beat Roman citizens.

Why does Paul tell his story in Acts 22:1–22 about how he became a Christian? What makes our stories so powerful about how we gave our lives to Jesus?



Paul asks Claudius Lysias, who is the Roman army leader, to let him speak to the crowd of people who want him to die.

PAUL STANDS IN COURT IN FRONT OF THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS (Acts 23:1–5)

The Roman army leader saw that Paul was not dangerous to the Roman Kingdom. So, the Roman army leader sent Paul to the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:30; Acts 23:29). The Sanhedrin was the ruling group of religious leaders for the Jews in Jerusalem. They understood Jewish law and acted as judges.

Read Acts 23:1–5. How does Paul start his sermon to the Sanhedrin?

Paul's first sentence earned him a slap on the mouth. Maybe Paul got slapped because what he said about God did not sound loyal. What Paul said next shows us exactly who he is. Paul said the top religious leader in the Sanhedrin was a " 'white-washed wall!' " (Acts 23:3, NLV). These words were a copy of Jesus' words to the religious leaders in Matthew 23:27. But Paul had no idea that he was talking to the top religious leader in the Sanhedrin. So, it is true that he really did have bad eyesight.

Read Acts 23:6–10. What clever words does Paul use to try to break up the trial?

The Sanhedrin is made up of two groups: the Pharisees and Sadducees. These groups often argue with each other about Jewish teachings. Pharisees believe in obeying the law very carefully. Sadducees do not believe that the dead will wake up and come back to life (Matthew 22:23–32).

Paul's smart words (Acts 23:6) are more than just a way to break up his time in court. The Sanhedrin is really judging Paul for teaching that the dead will come back to life (Acts 24:20, 21; Acts 26:6–8). Nothing else explains how Paul changed from chasing and killing Christians to preaching about Jesus. What if Jesus never came back from the dead? Then Paul's work means nothing at all, and he knows it (1 Corinthians 14:15–17).

That night, the Lord comes to Paul with this message of hope: " 'Paul, do not be afraid! You will tell about Me in the city of Rome the same as you have told about Me in Jerusalem' " (Acts 23:11, NLV). This promise must mean a lot to Paul. For a long time, he wanted to preach in Rome (Acts 19:21; Romans 1:13–15; Romans 15:22–29). Finally, he will get that chance.



Paul's first sentence earned him a slap on the mouth.

PAUL IS SENT TO CAESAREA (Acts 23:12–17)

A group of men tried to get rid of Paul by taking him to court. But that plan did not work. So, the group decided to kill Paul on their own.

Read Acts 23:12–17. As these verses show us, what does the group plan to do? How does God make their plan fail? People can have strong feelings that lead them to support wrong ideas. How do these verses show us this truth?

More than 40 Jews made a secret plan to hurt Paul. They took an oath to kill him. This oath shows us just how much they hated Paul. Luke does not tell us who the men were. But they were willing to do anything to protect the Jewish faith from its enemies. Sadly, this story is only one of many examples at this time of stubborn men with hard hearts who wanted to “protect” the Jewish religion.

But God allowed the news about the secret plan to reach Paul’s nephew. It is sad that we know almost nothing about Paul’s family. But it seems that Paul and his sister grew up in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). Paul’s sister married and had one son. Paul’s nephew was a teenager. How do we know? Did you see that, in Acts 23:19, Captain Lysias “took [Paul’s nephew] by the hand” (NLV)? Captain Lysias’s action shows us that Paul’s nephew was young. So does the Greek word “neaniskos” (Acts 23:18, 22). “Neaniskos” is written as “young man” in the ERV. Paul’s nephew visited the war building and told Paul about the secret plan to kill Paul.

Read Acts 23:26–30. What message does Captain Lysias send to governor Felix about Paul?

Lysias’s letter tells Felix about Paul. The letter also shows how good it is for Paul to be a Roman citizen. The Roman law fully protects its citizens. By law, citizens are allowed to stand in front of a judge and explain their behavior in a court of law. They also can go before the King of Rome to complain that the judge was not fair to them in court (Acts 25:10, 11). So, Felix is fair to Paul. Felix asks Paul many questions. Then Felix orders soldiers to guard Paul until his accusers arrive.

Think about everything God does for Paul. How often do you thank God for all the good things in your life?



Paul’s nephew visited the Roman war building and told Paul about the secret plan the Jews made to kill Paul.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “At this time, Paul and his friends take the money that the non-Jewish churches collect and give it to the leaders of the work in Jerusalem. This money helps support the poor Jewish believers. . . .

“The non-Jewish believers give these gifts of money because they want to help. The gifts show that the non-Jewish Christians believe God’s work must be done all over the earth. The leaders in Jerusalem should accept the gifts with thankful hearts. But Paul and his friends see that many leaders in Jerusalem do not see the love in the hearts of their non-Jewish brothers who give the gifts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, pages 399, 400, adapted.

“What will happen if the church leaders stop being unkind to Paul? What if the leaders accept Paul as God’s messenger to the non-Jews? Then the Lord will save Paul’s life. God does not plan for Paul’s work to end so soon. The church leaders do nothing to stop Paul’s death. They start many of the problems that lead to Paul being killed. But God does not work a miracle to stop Paul’s death.

“Today the same unkind spirit is leading people to do the same things that happened in Paul’s day. When we do not thank God for the gifts He gives us, we turn away from many good things that God wants to give us. Many times, God wants to let a pastor work more and for a longer time than the pastor works for. But God does not let him continue to work, because nobody gives thanks to God for this pastor’s work. The church must not allow Satan to twist their thinking so that they do not understand the words and acts of God’s worker. The church must not get in this worker’s way or stop him from helping people. When the church does these wrong things, then God sometimes takes away from the church the many good things that He gave them.”—Pages 417, 418, adapted.



“When we do not thank God for the gifts He gives us, we turn away from many good things that God wants to give us.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, pages 417, 418 adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Paul knew he would not be welcome in Jerusalem, but he went anyway. He made the needs of the church more important than his own. How much should we copy Paul’s behavior?
- ② As church members, we need to get along with each other and have peace. How can we learn to work together when we have different ideas about things?

Paul in Prison



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 15

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 24; Acts 25; Acts 26; 1 Corinthians 1:23.

MEMORY VERSE: “Paul said, ‘My prayer to God is that you and all who hear me today would be a Christian as I am, only not have these chains!’ ” (Acts 26:29, NLV).

PAUL IS A PRISONER for two years in the city of Caesarea (Acts 24:27). Paul lives in a prison at King Herod's palace. Soldiers watch Paul (Acts 23:35). During those two years, Paul goes to court many times to stand in front of two Roman governors and one king. The governors are named Felix and Festus. The king is named Agrippa the Second. Yes, Paul is a prisoner. But Paul does God's work by sharing the Good News with these rulers (Acts 9:15).

Every time Paul speaks to these rulers he says he is innocent. Paul says there is no proof that he did anything wrong. Paul asks, Where are the witnesses that saw him break laws? This story shows us that Paul did nothing wrong and should not be in prison. He should be free. He is in prison only because he asked to stand in court before the King of Rome (Acts 26:32). As a prisoner, Paul has many chances to witness about Jesus. Paul also talks about his wonderful hope that God will bring the dead back to life.

But those two years in prison are hard for Paul. No one from the Jerusalem church gives Paul any support. Why? The church leaders feel it is Paul's fault that he is in prison. They believe that Paul “was to blame for the dislike against him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 403, adapted.



As a prisoner, Paul has many chances to witness about Jesus.

FELIX JUDGES PAUL (Acts 24:10–19)

Paul is sent to Caesarea. Five days later, a group of important Jewish leaders comes to Caesarea from Jerusalem. This group includes the top Jewish religious leader, some members of the Jewish ruling group named the Sanhedrin, and a lawyer named Tertullus. These men come in front of Felix in court and complain about Paul (Acts 24:1–9).

This trial in Acts is the only time the Jewish leaders pay a lawyer to complain for them to a ruler. The lawyer Tertullus uses false praise to make Felix think the Jewish leaders are right. Tertullus says the Jews enjoyed peace for a long time under Felix. That is not true. The truth is Felix hurt more people than any other governor. Felix also took away people's freedom more than any other ruler. Felix's behavior filled many Jews with deep hate for Roman rulers. Tertullus is very smart and sneaky. He makes Governor Felix think that he needs to protect himself as a ruler. The best way to do that is to keep Paul in prison.

Then Tertullus blames Paul for three crimes: (1) Tertullus says Paul is a troublemaker. Tertullus says Paul wants the Jews everywhere to fight against Roman rule too (Acts 24:5). (2) Tertullus says Paul is the top leader of a religious group named the Christians, who are a danger to the Roman Kingdom. (3) Tertullus also says Paul showed no respect for the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 24:6).



A lawyer named Tertullus uses false praise to make Felix think the Jewish leaders are right.

Read Acts 24:10–19. In these verses, how does Paul answer each one of these “crimes” against him?

Two things show that the words of the Jewish leaders against Paul are not true. Paul tells Felix what these two things are: (1) There are no witnesses from Asia against him (Acts 24:18, 19). Felix may decide to throw out the whole trial against Paul because there are no witnesses. (2) The Sanhedrin cannot blame Paul for any crime except for his belief that Jesus will wake up the dead and bring them to life at His Second Coming (read also Acts 23:6).

Felix understands right away that Paul is correct. Felix knows a little bit about Christianity, maybe from his Jewish wife Drusilla. So, Felix decides to judge Paul at some other time. But Felix's decision shows us that a person can change his mind if other people offer him a good gift or enough money. Paul has no chance of a fair time in court with Felix as his judge.

FESTUS JUDGES PAUL (Acts 25:1–5)

Felix holds Paul in prison for two years. Why so long? So Felix can win the Jews' favor. Then Felix leaves. Porcius Festus is made the new governor of Judea (Acts 24:27). Festus ruled Judea from A.D. 60 to 62.

Read Acts 25:1–5. How does the Jewish leaders' behavior in these verses help us see how hate can grow in people who hear the truth but do not want to believe it?

The Jewish leaders do not want to fail again. They already failed before when they tried to make Felix believe he should punish Paul for crimes Paul did not do. So, the leaders ask Festus to help them during Festus's first visit to Jerusalem. They ask Festus to send Paul back to Jerusalem so that the Jewish religious leaders can judge Paul in court under Jewish law.

The Jewish leaders are careful to hide their real plan when they ask Festus for this favor. What is their plan? They want to kill Paul. Festus is ready for Paul to stand in court again. But Festus says that he will judge Paul in Caesarea, not in Jerusalem. That tells us that Paul will be judged under Roman law, not Jewish law.

When Festus goes back to Caesarea, he commands Paul to stand in court again. Paul's enemies start blaming Paul for crimes (Acts 25:7). Luke does not tell us what crimes they blame Paul for. But we can see from Paul's answer (Acts 25:8) that the list of crimes is the same list from two years ago. But there is one difference: Paul's accusers say that Paul himself is a danger to the Roman Kingdom.

Read about Paul's stand in court in front of Festus in Acts 25:9–12. Paul knows that Festus plans to use Paul to win support for his job as governor. What does Paul do when he sees what Festus is thinking?

In the end, Festus is not any better than Felix (Acts 24:27). Festus is not willing to lose Jewish support. So, Festus thinks about sending Paul back to Jerusalem to be judged by the Jews. But Paul does not accept this plan. So, Paul asks to go to Rome to be judged there because he is a citizen of Rome. He knows he will not be judged in a fair way under the Jewish leaders. Paul escapes this problem when he asks for the King of Rome to judge him.



Paul asks Festus to send him to Rome so that the King of Rome can judge him.

AGRIPPA COMES TO HEAR PAUL (Acts 25:13–22)

Festus agrees to allow Paul to go to Rome (Acts 25:12). At the same time, Festus talks about Paul with Herod Agrippa the Second, who is visiting Caesarea. Herod Agrippa the Second is the last member of the family of kings named Herod. Agrippa comes to Caesarea with his sister Bernice to meet the new governor, Festus.

Festus wants to ask Agrippa about what information he should put in his letter to the King of Rome. Festus does not know much about Jewish laws and ways of life. Agrippa can help Festus with any questions he has (Acts 25:23–27).

Read Acts 25:13–22. What does Festus tell King Agrippa about Paul? How does King Agrippa answer?

Festus tells King Agrippa that he is surprised that none of Paul’s “crimes” have anything to do with a crime against the Roman Kingdom. Paul’s “crimes” are about Jewish religion and about someone named Jesus who “died but Paul kept saying He was alive” (Acts 25:19, NLV). Paul already told the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem that he was on trial because he believed Jesus came back to life from the dead. Now Festus clearly says that the real reason Paul is on trial is because Paul believes Jesus is alive.

Read Acts 25:23–27. What does Luke say in these verses about Paul’s stand in front of Agrippa?

“Paul stood in chains in front of the people. There was a big difference between Paul and everyone else. Agrippa and Bernice had power and royalty. So, other people liked them. But they did not have the goodness that God likes. They broke God’s law. They lived lives that were evil. Their hearts were evil too. All of heaven hated their way of life and the things they did.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 434, adapted.

People can look very good on the outside to our eyes. But the story about Agrippa and his sister shows us that how we look at people on the outside often fools us about what is really hidden inside their hearts. How different is the way something looks from how it is inside?



“Paul stood in chains in front of the people.”

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 434, adapted.

PAUL TELLS AGRIPPA WHY HE IS INNOCENT (Acts 26:1–23)

Paul is brought to the governor and his royal guests. Paul tells them the reasons why he is innocent of the crimes against him. Paul talks mostly to Agrippa, because Festus already heard what Paul said before (Acts 25:8–11).

Read Acts 26:1–23. As these verses show us, what does Paul tell Agrippa?

Paul tells Agrippa his life story, both before and after he gave his life to Jesus. This sermon is almost the same as the sermon in Acts 22:1–21 that Paul tells the crowd in Jerusalem. Paul starts by trying to get Agrippa's support. Paul says how thankful he is to Agrippa for letting him tell his story. After all, Agrippa is a very important person. Paul also says he is thankful that Agrippa knows a lot about the Jewish ways of life and the Jewish religion. Because of that, Agrippa can be a big help to the Roman governor. Agrippa can help Festus understand that the crimes against Paul are not true.

Paul's sermon can be divided into three parts. In part one (Acts 26:4–11), Paul talks about his old life as a Pharisee. Pharisees were a group of Jewish religious leaders who followed the law very carefully. Many people in Jerusalem know about Paul's past as a Pharisee. As a Pharisee, Paul believes God will wake up the dead and bring them back to life. This teaching is an important part of the Jewish religion. So, Paul says that the Jews do not make sense when they attack what Paul believes, because the Jews believe it too. But Paul understands why they are upset. In the past, Paul himself also had a hard time believing God woke up Jesus from the dead and brought Him back to life.

In part two (Acts 26:12–18), Paul talks about how his thinking changed after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul tells how Jesus gave him his work to share the Good News with the non-Jews. In part three of his sermon, Paul ends his talk by saying that the only choice he had after he met Jesus was to obey Him. That is the only reason Paul is in court now. The reason Paul was arrested is not because he broke Jewish law or showed no respect to the Jewish temple. It is because of his message about Jesus' waking up from the dead. But this belief fits fully with what the Bible teaches. It also allows non-Jews to be saved too.



Paul ends his sermon by saying that the only choice he had after he met Jesus was to obey Him.

PAUL TALKS TO THE JEWISH LEADERS (Acts 26:27, 28)

Paul talks to Agrippa most of the time. But Festus is the first one to say something (Acts 26:24). Festus seems to have no problem with Paul's sermon until Paul says that God will wake up the dead. But Paul's belief that God will wake up the dead does not agree with the Roman belief that the soul does not die. The Greeks and Romans who lived many years before that time knew that these two beliefs did not agree. So, they threw out the truth that God will wake up the dead. They accepted the lie that the soul does not die. That is why Paul says in a letter that the Good News about Jesus sounds silly to non-Jews (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Paul shows Festus respect when he answers him. Then Paul turns to Agrippa to ask him a question. Agrippa is a Jew. A Jew can understand Paul. A Jew also can say that Paul's teaching about God waking up the dead matches the teaching in the Hebrew Bible (Acts 26:25, 26).

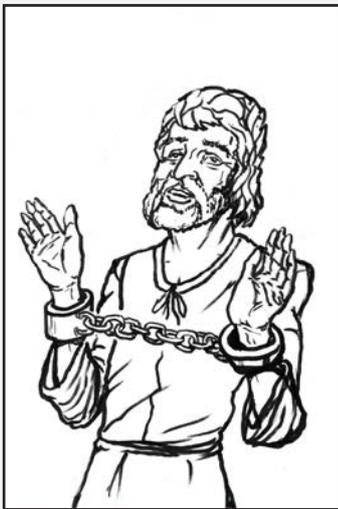
Read Acts 26:27, 28. As these verses show us, what is Agrippa's answer to Paul's question?

Paul's question puts Agrippa on the spot. As a Jew, Agrippa will never turn away from the Hebrew Bible. But if Agrippa says yes to Paul's question, then he will have to accept Jesus as the Savior. So, Agrippa gives Paul a smart and sneaky answer. It allows Agrippa to "escape" from Paul's "trap." "Then Agrippa spoke to Paul. 'Are you trying to talk me into becoming a Christian?' he said. 'Do you think you can do that in such a short time?'" (Acts 26:28, NIV).

Paul's answer shows us his amazing love for the Good News about Jesus and his deep love for serving God. "Paul said, 'My prayer to God is that you and all who hear me today would [will] be a Christian as I am, only not have these chains!'" (Acts 26:29, NIV). In his last words to everyone at court, Paul does not ask to go free. Paul wishes everyone there could be the same as he is, only not with the chains around his wrists. Paul cares about seeing other people accept Jesus more than he cares about being free!

Read Acts 26:30–32. As these verses show us, how does Agrippa's answer show that he believes Paul is innocent?

Festus needs Agrippa's help to write the letter about Paul (Acts 26:25–27). After that, Paul goes to Rome.



Paul says, "My prayer to God is that you and all who hear me today would [will] be a Christian as I am, only not have these chains!" (Acts 26:29, NIV).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Did Paul’s words lead Agrippa to think about the history of his family and how they failed in the past in their fight against the same Jesus that Paul was talking about? Did Agrippa think about his great-grandfather Herod, who killed all those innocent children in Bethlehem? Did Agrippa think about his great-uncle Antipas who killed John the Baptist? Did Agrippa think about his own father, Agrippa the First, who put the church leader James to death? Did Agrippa understand that the awful things that happened to these kings were proof that God was not happy with their crimes against His servants? Agrippa’s father was a more powerful king than Agrippa was. Did Agrippa remember the day when his father stood in that same city, Caesarea, and wore his shining robes while the people named him a god? Did Agrippa forget what happened next? Before the crowd’s shouts stopped, God’s anger against Agrippa’s father was quick and awful. Yes, all these things went through Agrippa’s mind. But his proud heart loved the praise and beauty in front of him. His pride destroyed any holier thoughts about God.”—Ellen G. White Comments [thoughts], *The SDA Bible Commentary [explanation]*, volume 6, pages 1066, 1067, adapted.

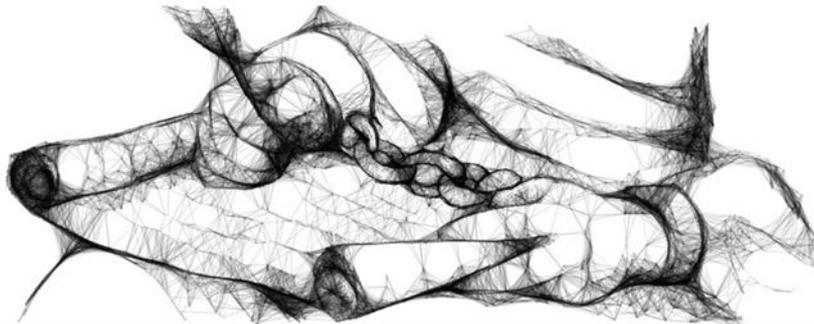
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 In class, talk about Paul’s decision to be judged by the King of Rome. Was Paul’s decision right (also read Acts 25:25; Acts 26:31, 32)? How far should we go in making decisions to protect ourselves before we start trusting fully in God’s care?
- 2 Think about Paul’s words to Agrippa: “‘So then, King Agrippa, I obeyed the vision that appeared from heaven’” (Acts 26:19, NIV). What do Paul’s words tell us about Paul? How loyal are we to the work God gives to us Christians?
- 3 Paul loved people. In his last stand in court at Caesarea, Paul told the people at court that he wanted very much to see every one of them there become Christians. Paul wanted them to be saved by God’s loving-favor (Acts 26:29). Clearly, Paul wanted to save people with the Good News about Jesus more than he wanted to save himself from prison. How can we learn from Paul’s example?



“God’s anger against Agrippa’s father was quick and awful.”—Ellen G. White Comments [thoughts], *The SDA Bible Commentary [explanation]*, volume 6, page 1067, adapted.

Paul's Trip to Rome



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 22

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 27; Acts 28.

MEMORY VERSE: “ “Do not be afraid, Paul. You must go on trial [stand in court] in front of Caesar” ’ ” (Acts 27:24, NirV).

FOR A LONG TIME, PAUL wants to visit Rome. But his arrest in Jerusalem changes all his plans. The Romans leave Paul in prison for almost five years. Why is Paul in prison for so long? Because Paul does what the church leaders want. They want Paul to make the Jewish believers happy more than they want Paul to make God happy. So, Paul puts the Jews first. Later, the Romans arrest Paul. When we fail God, God may give us another chance. But God does not always stop bad things from happening to us when we do wrong.

As a prisoner, Paul travels by ship to Italy. But Jesus promises Paul that he will tell people in Rome about Him (Acts 23:11). Later, we learn that Paul hopes to go to Spain (Romans 15:24) after the Romans let him go free. But the Bible does not say Paul ever travels there. Then Paul is arrested again. This time Paul dies for his faith (2 Timothy 4:6–8), in A.D. 67, when Nero is king.

Paul arrives in Rome. He lives in his house prison while he waits to stand in court in front of the King of Rome. Paul wears chains when he talks about Jesus to his visitors (Acts 28:30, 31). No one stops Paul from preaching. During this time, Paul gets the chance to share the Good News about Jesus with important people who work for the King of Rome (Philippians 4:22).



Paul lives in his house prison while he waits to stand in court in front of the King of Rome. Paul wears chains when he talks about Jesus to his visitors.

PAUL SAILS TO ROME (Acts 27:9–12)

Paul is a prisoner in Caesarea for two years (Acts 24:27). Then Paul goes to Rome in Italy. The trip to Italy is long and hard (Acts 27:1–28:16). Luke travels with Paul. Another Christian named Aristarchus also goes with them (Acts 27:2). Another important person in the story is the Roman army leader named Julius. Julius is responsible for the other prisoners on that trip too (Acts 27:1).

Paul, Luke, Aristarchus, Julius, and the other prisoners leave for Rome in late summer. Wintertime was not a good time to travel on the Mediterranean Sea because of bad weather. Their trip is hard from the start. They stop traveling many times. Then they arrive at a safe place named Fair Havens on the island of Crete (Acts 27:8).

Read the story in Acts 27:9–12 about what happens in Fair Havens. What does Paul offer to do? How do the people in the story feel about the help that Paul offers them?

Paul warns the sailors to stay in Fair Havens. But the sailors do not pay attention to Paul's warning. They decide to keep going west for 40 more miles to a place named Phoenix. Here, they can stay the whole winter. But the weather changes quickly. The ship gets trapped in a very bad storm. The storm moves their ship south and then west, away from land. Soon the ship fills with water. The sailors start throwing wood boxes and other things into the sea. Heavy rain falls, and awful winds blow. The storm lasts many days. No one on the ship sees the sun or the stars during this time. The sailors do not know where land is when the storm ends. They are very tired and have no "hope of being saved" (Acts 27:20, NLV).

Read the story in Acts 27:21–26. What is the next thing that Paul wants to do to help?

Paul tells the sailors that God gave him a special message for them. Paul tells them to not give up or stop hoping. Yes, they will meet more danger, and they will lose more things. But no one will die.

Paul is a loyal servant of God. But he suffers so much. Why? What can we learn from Paul's experiences?



The ship gets trapped in a very bad storm. The sailors start throwing wood boxes and other things into the sea.

THE SHIP SINKS (Acts 27:30–44)

There are 276 people on the ship that Paul sails on (Acts 27:37). Paul tells everyone on the ship that no one will die. But there will be problems. The ship will sink (Acts 27:22). Then the ship sinks 14 days later, just as Paul warns. How does that happen? The ship is in an awful storm. It already is far away from land. The sailors think they are near land because they can hear the noise of waves crashing on shore (Acts 27:27). They are afraid the ship will hit rocks near the beach. So, they try to find out how deep the water is. They drop four anchors from the back of the ship to help slow down the ship. At the same time, they pray to their gods for daylight (Acts 27:28, 29).

Read the story in Acts 27:30–44. What lessons for us do you see in this story?



The ship never touches the beach. On its way there, the ship hits a big hill of sand in the water and breaks apart.

Julius, the Roman army leader, is kind to Paul from the start of their trip to Rome. But Julius has no special reason to trust Paul. Before the ship leaves Fair Havens, Paul warns the crew that their ship will sink. Paul earns Julius's respect because he warns the crew that their ship will break apart before it happens (Acts 27:21–26).

Before the ship sinks, Paul tells the people on the ship to eat. If they do not eat, they will not be strong enough to swim to shore. There is a lesson for us in Paul's advice. God wants us to do our duty. "This story shows us how God and man must work together. God gives the sailors hope that He will keep them safe. But the people also must do their part to make sure they stay safe too."—David J. Williams, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), page 438, adapted.

Then morning comes. The sailors see land with a beach. They decide they will land the ship there. But the ship never touches the beach. On its way there, the ship hits a big hill of sand in the water and breaks apart. The soldiers plan to kill the prisoners so they cannot escape. But Julius stops their plan because of Paul. In the end, no one dies, just as God promises.

Julius tells his soldiers not to kill the prisoners because of Paul. What does that tell us about the power of Paul's witness for God?

PAUL TRAVELS TO MALTA (Acts 28:1–10)

As we learned, the ship was lost at sea for two weeks. The wind carried the ship about 475 miles away from Fair Havens in Crete. The people on the sinking ship swim to the beach. Then they learn they are on Malta. Malta is a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean. It is south of the island of Sicily. Now Paul and his group must wait three months for winter to end before continuing their trip (Acts 28:11).

Read the story in Acts 28:1–10. What happens in this story to Paul on the island of Malta? How is God able to use Paul to witness to other people about the truth?

The people on the island of Malta are very friendly and kind to Paul. Paul and his group are wet and cold when they arrive on the beach. So, the first thing the people on Malta do is light a fire to warm them up. The temperature on Malta at that time of year is less than 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

Then a snake bites Paul. Everyone's attention is on Paul because of the snakebite. At first, the people on Malta believe the snake bites Paul because the gods are punishing Paul for something he did wrong. They think Paul must be a killer. They believe that Paul tried to escape from death by drowning. But the gods caught Paul before he drowned. Maybe the people on Malta also believe the goddess Dikē took Paul from the sea. In the Greek religion, the goddess Dikē controlled justice and revenge. But Paul does not die from the snakebite. So, the people on Malta think Paul must be a god. The same thing happened in Lystra several years ago (Acts 14:8–18). Luke does not write much about what happens on Malta. But clearly, Paul uses what happens there as a chance to tell the people on Malta about his God. One of those people is Publius.

Who is Publius? Maybe he is the Roman ruler of Malta. Or maybe he is a very rich and important man. He welcomes Paul and his group for three days until they can find another place to stay. Paul heals Publius's father. This miracle gives Paul the chance to work for God as a healer. Paul heals many people on Malta. Does anyone on Malta accept Jesus? Luke does not say. But this story about Paul shows that we need to care for people and their needs when we work for God. This work is also an important part of the Good News about Jesus (Acts 20:35; read also Titus 3:14).



At first, the people on Malta believe the snake bites Paul because the gods are punishing Paul for something he did wrong.

PAUL ARRIVES IN ROME, AT LAST (Acts 28:17–22)

Paul and his group stay three months on Malta. Then they are able to continue their trip (Acts 28:11). They arrive in Puteoli (Acts 28:13) in the Bay of Naples. From there, they travel to Rome by road (read Acts 28:11–16).

The news about Paul's arrival in Italy travels to Rome very fast. Some believers from Rome travel many miles south to welcome Paul. Paul never visited Rome before. But he has many friends in the city. Who are they? Family members, coworkers, Christians, and many other people who love Paul (Romans 16:3–16). For sure, the meeting between Paul and the believers touches all their hearts very deeply. After all, Paul could have died when the ship broke apart. Also, Paul wears chains. The love that Paul's friends show him touches his heart. Paul thanks God for their love. It gives Paul hope and courage to stand in court in Rome.

In his letter about Paul, Festus may have said Paul was not guilty of breaking any Roman law (Acts 25:26, 27; Acts 26:31, 32). That may explain why Paul is allowed to rent a house to live in (Acts 28:30) and does not go to a prison. But Paul is chained to a Roman soldier all the time. That is the Roman law for prisoners. Luke tells us that Paul is able to pay for his house. How does Paul have money for the rent? Clearly, Paul is able to continue working as a tentmaker and earn money too (Acts 18:3).



Some believers from Rome travel many miles south to welcome Paul. Paul wears chains. The love that Paul's friends show him touches his heart.

Read Acts 28:17–22. What does Paul do as soon as he moves into his house?

Paul cannot go visit the Jews in the city. So, Paul asks the local Jewish leaders to come to him. He tells them he is not guilty of the crimes that the Jews blame him for doing. He explains that the Romans arrested him because of what he believes about Jesus (Acts 23:6; Acts 24:15; Acts 26:6–8). Paul is not trying to make himself look good. He only wants the Jewish leaders to trust him so he can preach the Good News about Jesus to them. The Jews are surprised that no one from Jerusalem told them anything about Paul. So, they decide to listen to Paul's teachings about Jesus.

Read Acts 28:22. What does this verse tell us about people's anger against Christians at this time? How can we stay loyal to what we believe when others do not believe the same thing we do?

THE POWER OF THE GOOD NEWS (Acts 28:24–31)

The Jews in Rome come in large groups to listen to Paul preach the Good News about Jesus (Acts 28:23).

Read Acts 28:24–31. As these verses show us, why does Paul end his speech with the verses from Isaiah?

The verses Paul shares with the Jews are from Isaiah 6:9, 10. These verses show us what happens when people refuse to accept God’s truth. Some Jews believe Paul’s message about Jesus. Other Jews do not. Many Jews turn away from what Paul says. So, Paul talks with the non-Jews in Rome about the Good News (Acts 13:46, 47; Acts 18:6).

Paul waits two years before he stands in court in front of the King of Rome. While Paul waits in his house prison, he shares the Good News with everyone who visits him. The last chapter in Acts shows us the power the Good News has. Nothing can stop the Good News at all.

It is not clear why Luke ends the book of Acts with this story. We know Paul goes free. Paul goes on one more trip to share the Good News. Then he is arrested and goes to Rome as a prisoner again, where he is killed (2 Timothy 4:6–8). Why does Luke end his book before adding this extra story about Paul? Maybe because Luke’s reason for writing the book of Acts is to show us how the Good News will go to all the people on earth, even to Rome. By the time the Romans let Paul go free, the Good News already went “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NLV). So, that may be the reason why Luke does not add this extra story about Paul.

“Paul is patient and cheerful during the time he is a prisoner in Rome. His courage and faith are a sermon. His spirit is not the spirit of the people on this earth. His spirit shows to everyone that God lives in him. Paul’s example leads Christians to do everything they can to share the Good News with people everywhere. In these ways, Paul’s chains help to change the lives of other people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 464, adapted.

The book of Acts is not finished. Now it is our turn to add the last chapter. It is our turn to finish the work that Jesus gave His followers. When we do our part, “then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14, NLV).



“Paul’s chains help to change the lives of other people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 464, adapted.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Jesus gave the church a duty that is holy. Every church member should allow God to use him or her to share with everyone the news about His special treasures. What are these special treasures? They are His grace. [Grace is God’s gift of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin.] God’s special treasures are also the riches that come from Jesus. These riches cannot be fully understood by humans. Jesus wants so much for His people to show His Spirit and His love to everyone else on this earth. The people on this earth need Jesus’ love so much. They need to see it in God’s people. All heaven waits for men and women who will let God use them to show to other people the power of living a Christian life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 600, adapted.

“God waits for the whole church to serve other people. When that happens, everyone in the church will work for God with the skills, gifts, and talents that God gives him or her. Church members must do the work God gives them at home or in far away places where God needs their work. When they do this work, then everyone on earth soon will be warned that Jesus is coming back with power and much glory.”—Page 111, adapted.



“The people on this earth need Jesus’ love so much. They need to see it in God’s people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 600, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How does Luke show us Paul’s faith during the trip to Rome? How does Paul’s faith change other people?
- ② Paul has some very hard experiences in life. But he never gives up his faith or his work for God. In Rome, Paul is a prisoner, but he continues to preach anyway. How can Paul’s example help us when we want to give up sharing the Good News with someone?
- ③ Read Romans 1:14, 15. Why does Paul feel it is his duty to preach the Good News about Jesus to everyone? Do we have the same duty Paul has? Think about this quotation from Ellen G. White as you answer the question: “The most important work of every Christian should be to save souls. God has given us grace. He has given us light. He has shown us His beautiful and powerful truth. We must repay God for these gifts by sharing them with other people.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [special messages] for the Church*, volume 4, page 53, adapted.

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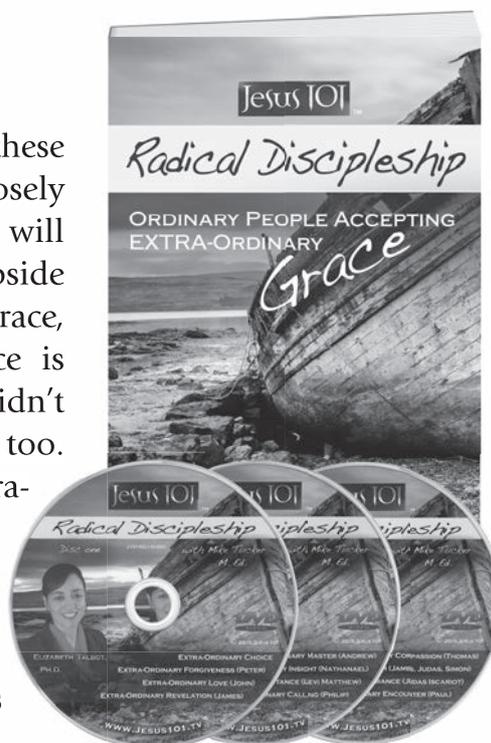
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