

FAITH REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY SCHOOL

CURRICULUM PROJECT ©

**** Grades 5-6, Year II ****

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

by Christine Walton

**Grades 5-6
Year 2
Quarter 1**

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Year 2
Quarter 1

Bible Baseball

Singles

- On what Jewish holiday did the Holy Spirit come upon the disciples?
Name one thing the disciples heard at Pentecost.
What unusual thing did the disciples see at Pentecost?
Name one of the nationalities of those who heard the disciples at Pentecost.
Who spoke to the crowd at Pentecost?
Acts 2 says the disciples devoted themselves to four things; name one.
What did the man at the Temple gate do when Peter healed him?
What did the believers do after the Sanhedrin let Peter and John go?
Who lied about the amount of money they gave to the church?
What do we call men who help serve the church, helping the poor and the like?
Name one of the first deacons.
How was Stephen killed?
Name the magician who followed Philip everywhere.
For what did Simon ask Peter?
Whom did Philip meet on a road riding in a chariot?
Whom did God send to pray for Saul after Jesus met him on the road?
What happened when Ananias prayed for Saul?
How did Saul escape from Damascus?
Name someone whom God used Peter to heal.
Describe the vision Peter had on a rooftop.
Describe how Peter escaped from prison after he had been arrested by Herod.
What did the members of the church who were praying for Peter tell the servant girl when she said Peter was at the door?
What did Herod do after he cross-examined the guards who had been guarding Peter?
What was the name of the Jewish sorcerer who Paul said would be blind for a time?
Name one place Paul visited on his first missionary journey.
Who accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey?
What was the disagreement dealt with in the Council of Jerusalem?
Over what issue did Paul and Barnabas have a sharp disagreement?
Name one place Paul visited on his second missionary journey.
What Philippian woman came to believe in Jesus through Paul's preaching?
Why were a Philippian slave girl's owners angry with Paul?
What thing did Paul and Silas do in a Philippian prison that got the other prisoners' attention?
How did God free Paul and Silas from prison in Philippi?
What was the Philippian jailer going to do when he thought the prisoners had escaped?
How did Paul support himself?
What happened when the sons of a Jewish priest tried to cast out demons from a man?
Who fell out of a window while Paul was preaching?
What did the Holy Spirit warn Paul would happen to him in Jerusalem?
Name one group of Jews.
Who warned Paul of a Jewish plot to kill him?
To where did Paul sail for trial after his arrest and imprisonment in Caesarea?

When the ship landed on an island, what did the centurion prevent the soldiers from doing to their prisoners?
What happened to Paul as he was gathering brushwood for a fire?
What did Paul do for the chief official's father?

Doubles

Who said Acts 1:8 [But you will receive power. . .]?
Name two things the disciples heard at Pentecost.
Name two of the nationalities of those who heard the disciples at Pentecost.
What mocking statement did people make about the disciples at Pentecost?
Name one book from which Peter quoted at Pentecost.
When people, listening to Peter's sermon, asked what they should do, he said what?
Acts 2 says the disciples devoted themselves to four things; name two.
What was the name of the gate of the Temple where Peter healed the lame man?
At what point in his life had the man at the Temple gate become crippled?
Who was with Peter when he healed the lame man?
What happened immediately after Peter healed the lame man at the gate?
What was the name of the Jewish ruling body that tried Peter and John?
To whom does this quotation refer: "The stone you builders rejected which has become the capstone"?
When the Sanhedrin told the apostles to stop teaching in the name of Jesus, what did Peter say?
Who advised the Sanhedrin to be cautious in their dealings with the apostles?
Who were the two groups of believers who had a disagreement about the distribution of food?
How many deacons were chosen in Acts 6?
Name two of the first deacons.
Who was watching Stephen being killed?
Name one person sent to Samaria to pray that the people would receive the Holy Spirit.
From what book of the Bible was an Ethiopian reading?
What did the Ethiopian ask Philip to do for him after the Ethiopian believed in Jesus?
Who said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"
To what city was Saul traveling with letters to bring Christians back to Jerusalem for trial?
On what street did Saul stay in Damascus?
What was the occupation of the man with whom Saul stayed in Damascus?
For how many days did Saul fast and pray after he met Jesus on the road?
Name two things that happened when Ananias prayed for Saul.
What did Saul do right after Ananias prayed for him?
Who supported Saul and brought him to the apostles when the disciples were afraid of him?
Name two people God used Peter to heal.
What was Tabitha's other name?
What did the widows who were crying about Tabitha's death show Peter?
What was Cornelius' job?
What did an angel tell Cornelius to do?
What was the meaning of the vision Peter had on the rooftop?
What happened while Peter was speaking to the people at Cornelius' house?
When Peter was kept in prison by Herod, how many soldiers guarded him at a time?
To whose house did Peter go immediately after he escaped from prison?
Who answered the door when Peter knocked after he escaped from prison?
What strange thing did Rhoda do when she heard the knocking and recognized Peter's voice?
Name a prophet or teacher from Antioch.
Name two places Paul visited on his first missionary journey.
What are both names of the Jewish sorcerer who Paul said would be blind for a time?

Name the proconsul who believed after seeing what happened to Elymas.
 In Lystra, God used Paul to heal a man from what affliction?
 The people in Lystra mistook Paul for what god?
 What did the people in Lystra do to Paul when they realized he wasn't a god?
 Name one person who spoke at the Jerusalem Council.
 Name one requirement urged upon the Gentile believers by the Jerusalem Council.
 Name one person Paul took with him on his second missionary journey.
 Name two places Paul visited on his second missionary journey.
 What led to Paul and Silas' arrest in Philippi?
 What question did the Philippian jailer ask Paul and Silas?
 How did Paul and Silas answer the Philippian jailer's question?
 How did the Philippian jailer help Paul and Silas?
 How did Paul and Silas react when the magistrates ordered their release in Philippi?
 Why did Luke consider the Bereans to be of more noble character than the people of Thessalonica?
 Why was Paul particularly distressed when he visited Athens?
 What two people did Paul meet in Corinth who had the same occupation as he?
 What did Paul ask a small group of disciples he met in Ephesus?
 Name the silversmith who caused trouble for the Christians in Ephesus.
 Paul paid expenses for the purification rites of how many men?
 Name one language Paul could speak.
 How did Paul become a Roman citizen?
 How did the Roman commander become a citizen?
 Name two groups of Jews.
 What was the name of the Jewish ruling body?
 About how many Jews plotted to kill Paul?
 What was the name of the centurion who brought Paul to Rome?
 At what port did Paul advise the ship owner to stay because it was after the Fast?
 Name one way the sailors tried protect their storm-tossed ship.
 On what island did the storm-tossed ship run aground?
 What did the islanders think about Paul when they saw a snake hanging from his arm?

Triples

Name three of the nationalities of those who heard the disciples speak at Pentecost.
 Name two books from which Peter quoted at Pentecost.
 To what Old Testament person did Peter refer in his sermon on Pentecost?
 How many believers were added to the church on the day of Pentecost?
 Acts 2 says the disciples devoted themselves to four things; name three.
 In Acts 3, at what time did Peter and John go up to the Temple?
 Name one Old Testament character to whom Peter referred after he healed the lame man.
 About how old was the lame man who was healed?
 How large did the church grow after Peter healed the lame man?
 When those at Peter and John's trial realized they were unschooled, ordinary men, they took note that . . .
 Name one person to whom Gamaliel referred in his speech before the Sanhedrin.
 Name three of the first deacons.
 Where did God use Philip to preach the Word and do miraculous signs.
 Name both people who were sent to Samaria so that the people might receive the Holy Spirit.
 What is one thing the disciples prayed after Peter and John's release?
 Where did an angel tell Philip to go?
 What was the title given to the queen of the Ethiopians?

From what chapter and book was the Ethiopian man reading?
From what city did Saul come?
With whom did Saul stay in Damascus?
With whom did Peter stay in Joppa where he had the vision on the rooftop?
How many times was the sheet Peter saw in his vision on the rooftop drawn back up to heaven?
What apostle did Herod have put to death with a sword?
What did the people in Caesarea shout when Herod spoke to them in shining royal robes?
How did Herod die?
Name two prophets or teachers from Antioch.
Name three places Paul visited on his first missionary journey.
On what island did Paul meet a Jewish sorcerer?
For what gods did the people in Lystra mistake Paul and Barnabas?
Name two people who spoke at the Jerusalem Council.
Name two requirements urged upon the Gentile believers by the Jerusalem Council.
Name two people Paul took with him on his second missionary journey.
What does the Bible tell us about Timothy's parents?
Name three places Paul visited on his second missionary journey.
Who did a mob drag before the city officials when they were looking for Paul in Thessalonica?
Name one group of people who disputed with Paul in Athens.
To whom did Priscilla and Aquila explain the way of God more adequately?
What extraordinary miracles did God do through Paul?
Sons of what Jewish priest tried to cast out demons in the name of Jesus?
What was the value of the magic books and articles burned in Ephesus?
Name one of Paul's traveling companions seized in Ephesus.
Paul warned the leaders of what church that after he left false teachers would come in like wolves?
Name the evangelist who had four daughters who prophesied.
Who tied his hands with Paul's belt?
Name two languages Paul could speak.
Where was Paul from?
Who was Paul's teacher?
What was the name of the Roman commander who arrested Paul?
Who was the high priest when Paul was arrested?
Where was Paul imprisoned for several years under Felix and Festus?
On what island did Paul advise the ship owner to spend the winter?
Name two ways the sailors tried to protect their storm-tossed ship.
What did Paul warn the soldiers to prevent some sailors from doing, or they would not be safe?
Name the chief official on the island of Malta.

Home Runs

Name five of the nationalities of those who heard the disciples speak at Pentecost.
Acts 2 says the disciples devoted themselves to four things; name all four.
Who was high priest at this time?
Finish this quotation: "Salvation is found in no one else, for. . ."
Name two things the disciples prayed after Peter and John's release.
Who sold a field and gave the money to the church?
Where did the believers often meet together (also where Peter preached after healing the lame man)?
Name two people to whom Gamaliel referred in his speech.
Name four of the first deacons.
At what town did Philip find himself after he met the Ethiopian?

From what town did Aeneas come?
How long had Aeneas been bedridden?
From what town did Tabitha come?
Where did Cornelius live?
What was Cornelius' army regiment?
What did the angel tell Cornelius had "come up as a memorial offering before God"?
Where did Paul and Barnabas teach for a year where the disciples were first called Christians?
Who prophesied that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world?
During what Jewish holiday was Peter arrested?
From what region were the people who had quarreled with Herod and sought the king's favor in Caesarea?
Whose help did the people of Tyre and Sidon secure to bring their petition to the king?
Name three prophets or teachers from Antioch.
Name five places Paul visited on his first missionary journey.
In what language did the people in Lystra shout to Paul and Barnabas?
Name four people who spoke at the Jerusalem Council.
Name the four requirements urged upon the Gentile believers by the Jerusalem Council.
Name four places Paul visited on his second missionary journey.
On his second missionary journey, Paul had a vision of a man from what country asking him to do what?
Name two groups of people who disputed with Paul in Athens.
At whose house did Paul preach in Corinth?
What synagogue ruler in Corinth believed in the Lord?
What did the Lord tell Paul in a vision in Corinth?
How long did Paul stay in Corinth?
Who was the proconsul of Achaia before whom Paul was brought?
Name Paul's two traveling companions who were seized in Ephesus.
During the riot in Ephesus, whom did the Jews push forward to speak?
Where did a young man fall out of a window and die?
Name three ways the sailors tried to protect their storm-tossed ship.
Across what sea did the storm-tossed ship sail?
How many people were on the ship with Paul?

PENTECOST

Acts 2

Lesson Aim

That your students would learn how God poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, fulfilling His promise, transforming the disciples into bold witnesses for Him, and establishing a people who would live for Christ's glory.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Acts 1:8; Acts 2:37-47; this week, Acts 1:8 - "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Lesson Background

"Before and After" pictures - we are all familiar with them. "Oscar was a 98-pound weakling, but after joining Jerry's Gym, he can bench press 300 pounds." "Spot just lay around the house all day, but now that we add N-R-Gee vitamins to his food, he never stops wagging his tail; he even chases the postman." The Bible presents an important "before and after" picture. Before - Peter and the other disciples, a weak gathering of timid doubters, hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews (John 20:19; also Luke 24:19-25). After - Peter and John - boldly defying the Sanhedrin, refusing to succumb to their threats because they preeminently wanted to obey God rather than men (Acts 4). What made the difference? Acts 2 - God pouring out His Spirit on His people.

In Old Testament times, God's Spirit came upon chosen individuals to accomplish certain tasks (e.g. Bezalel and Oholiab - Exodus 31:3; Moses and the elders - Numbers 11:17; David - I Samuel 16:13).

However, Joel prophesied that one day the Lord would pour forth His Spirit on all people (Joel 2:28-32). Jesus, before His ascension, also spoke to His apostles about what would occur: “. . . Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with (or *in*) water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4b-5). This was fulfilled by the events described in Acts 2.

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1). Christians, hearing the word *Pentecost*, immediately think of the Holy Spirit, but to the Jews, Pentecost was a harvest festival, which, along with Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, was one of the three important feasts each year when all Jewish men were required to go to the Temple in Jerusalem (Leviticus 23:15-21; Deuteronomy 16:9-12). It was a time of great rejoicing before the Lord when the Israelites shared with the destitute and their Gentile neighbors God’s abundant provision. This Pentecost was to fulfill that feast as the Holy Spirit brought great joy and a great harvest of souls, including many poor people and foreigners.

“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:2). Wind is symbolic of God’s Spirit. In fact, in Greek and Hebrew, the words for wind and spirit are the same (Greek - *pneuma*; Hebrew - *ruach*), and the meaning can only be determined from context. Fire is also frequently indicative of God’s presence (e.g., the burning bush - Exodus 3; the pillar of fire - Exodus 14:20,24; “the LORD your God is a consuming fire” - Deuteronomy 4:24). Those who were together on the day of Pentecost saw “what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” (Acts 2:3; all were individually to know God’s presence). As this happened, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (some see in this a reversal of Babel). Their loud praise attracted the notice of people native to countries where these languages were spoken. They were amazed at what was occurring (the fact that the men were Galileans - Acts 2:7 - would strike the listeners as particularly strange, for Galileans were not noted linguists, having difficulty in pronouncing gutturals and a tendency to swallow syllables). Some, however, made fun of the disciples’ unusual behavior and charged them with imbibing too much wine.

Peter then stood up as spokesperson for the apostles, denied the accusation of drunkenness (after all, it was only nine o’clock in the morning!) and explained that what they were observing was the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. Peter went on to quote Joel 2:28-32 (adding an enthusiastic “and they will prophesy” to the original text - Acts 2:18) and then launched into a bold apologia for the Christian faith, ending with a call to repentance and the promise of blessing to all who would turn to Christ. God said, through Joel, that in the last days (the time before Christ’s return), He would pour out His Spirit on His servants - all sorts of people; male and female, young and old - enabling them to experience supernatural revelations (prophecy, visions, dreams). Joel’s prophecy also speaks of wonders in the heavens and signs on the earth (the sun turned to darkness, the moon to blood) which have not, it seems, yet been fulfilled.

Peter saw the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy as confirmation of the inauguration of the age of the Messiah, the last days, thus proving that the Messiah had come. Jesus of Nazareth, Peter continued, is the Christ, for He was “accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs.” Peter went on to speak of Christ’s death and resurrection. He attributed these events both to God’s sovereignty and human responsibility, boldly accusing his hearers of culpability in Christ’s death. Peter then supported his contention that Jesus is the Messiah with two Old Testament Scriptures, Psalm 16:8-11 and Psalm 110:1. He pointed out the obvious fact that the patriarch David was dead, and hence the words “nor will you let your Holy One see decay” could not apply to him. As a prophet, David was rather speaking of one of his descendants, Jesus, who rose from the dead, a fact to which Peter and the disciples were witnesses. It was Jesus, ascended to the right hand of the Father, who had poured out the promised Holy Spirit, what they had then seen and heard. Peter then quoted Psalm 110:1, which points strongly to there being more than one Person in the Godhead (“The Lord said to my Lord”).

The people listening to Peter's words were "cut to the heart," and asked what they should do. "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call'" (Acts 2:39). Peter expected and indeed commanded that those who repented of their sins be baptized in water (although we know from other Scripture that this, although our duty, is not necessary to salvation - see, e.g., Luke 23:39-43). Peter's admonition would forcefully strike his listeners, for in the Jewish community usually only pagans were baptized; this radical step placed them on equal footing with those despised for not keeping the Law. His phrase "every one of you" is also significant, for the Jews tended to think corporately, not individually. "In the name of Jesus" is not a baptismal formula, but an expression of the object of their faith by whose authority this was to take place. Peter pointed out that the Holy Spirit was a gift to be received by all whom the Lord would call, no matter how far off (Peter may have been thinking spatially, but the statement applies temporally as well). He also indicates that salvation is a matter of God's sovereign calling.

The end of Acts 2 (verses 42-48) describes some of the wonderful results of God's working on Pentecost. Acts 2:42 presents four foundational activities of the church: teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread (the Lord's Supper), and prayer. As the believers sought God and honored Him in these activities, the Lord worked mightily in their midst. Many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. The believers held their possessions in common (even selling them to meet each other's needs) and met daily, eating together with glad hearts and praising God. They enjoyed favor with all the people and each day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (three thousand on the day of Pentecost alone - Acts 2:41).

The idyllic scene described above was not to last forever. People are sinners and the favor the believers enjoyed with the people was quickly overshadowed by persecution (Acts 4 and following). Sin was manifest even among the Christians themselves (Acts 5). Yet things had changed. The believers were not perfect, but by sending the Holy Spirit the Lord had wrought a great transformation. As people turned to the Lord, He continued to work powerfully among them. He will do so today as well, for "the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off" (Acts 2:39). May we seek God and may we be filled with His Spirit to glorify Him.

Lesson Procedure

Ask your class how they would describe the disciples after Jesus died. "How did they act and how did they seem to feel (see, for example, John 20:19; Luke 24:19-25)? Did the disciples continue to be weak and discouraged? What made the difference?" Tell your students that before He ascended to heaven, Jesus made a promise about something that would radically change their lives. Read Acts 1:4-8. Then read Acts 2 in the sections listed below and discuss, using questions such as the following:

Acts 2:1-13 - The Coming of the Holy Spirit

- Do you think the disciples were surprised by what happened?
- How do you think they reacted to these happenings? How do you think you would have reacted?
- What do you think was the most important thing that happened?
- Why do you think God sent a noise like a violent wind and had tongues of fire rest on the disciples?
- Why did onlookers accuse the disciples of drunkenness?
- What was Pentecost?

Many people were in Jerusalem for the feast and a crowd had gathered when they heard the disciples praising God in different languages. If you had the opportunity to tell these people about Jesus and what was happening, what would you say [write students' suggestions on the board]. Let's see what Peter said on this occasion.

Acts 2:14-40 - Peter's Sermon

- How did Peter explain what had happened to the disciples?
- What were the main parts of his sermon? [quotation of Joel 2; summary of Jesus' life, death and resurrection; how David's prophecies in Psalm 16:8-11 and Psalm 110:1 were fulfilled in Christ; admonition to repent and promise of the Holy Spirit to those who do]
- What Scripture did he use? [Joel 2:28-32; Psalm 16:8-11; Psalm 110:1]
- What did Peter tell his listeners they should do? How does what he said relate to you?
- Does this seem to be the "same Peter" we read about in the Gospels? How was he different? Why had he changed?

Acts 2:41-48 - Transformed Lives

- This passage talks about the beginnings of the first church. How did the early believers act and what things did they do?
- How were the practices of the early church like and different from those of your church today?
- Should churches today be exactly like the early church or are there ways in which they may or should be different? Explain your reasoning, and if you say they may/should be different, how should the church determine what those differences should be?

Activity

This quarter's activities (see activity booklet) should center around evangelism and/or missions if possible. Today you may wish to do a craft project incorporating a symbol of the Holy Spirit (e.g., dove, fire) such as making a bookmark, Christmas ornament, greeting card, or plaque.

Homework

Next week's class is a brief overview of Acts 3-6. In order to cover this much material, students will present passages to the rest of the class through newspaper articles or drama. Having your students read their passages several times at home this week will greatly facilitate matters. Assign at least two students to one or two of the following passages. Although the reading level is beyond sixth grade, you may also give them the background material for their passage (see Year II, Quarter 1, Lesson 3).

Acts 3:1-26 - A lame man is healed by Peter and John. (Acts 3:11-26 - Peter speaks to onlookers)

Acts 4:1-22 - Peter and John are arrested and defend the Gospel

Acts 4:23-37 - God blesses believers

Acts 5:1-10 - Ananias and Sapphira sin

Acts 5:12-16 - Many are healed

Acts 5:17-42 - Apostles are arrested and defend the Gospel

Acts 6:1-7 - Division is healed

Acts 6:8-15 - Stephen is arrested (and defends the Gospel - Acts 7)

THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

Acts 3-6

Lesson Aim

That your students would learn how God causes the church to grow, even in the midst of persecution and sin.

Memory Verse

Acts 1:8 and 2:37-47; this week, Acts 2:37 - “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’”

Lesson Background

God poured out His Holy Spirit on the people at Pentecost; the church had begun. As believers met together in great joy to praise God and to fellowship with each other, they may have thought that nothing could disturb this taste of heaven. But we live in a sinful world. God would continue to bless His people mightily, but the church would grow through persecution and even sin in its midst. Today’s lesson takes a quick overview of the early days of the church as recorded in Acts 3-6. In this account, Luke juxtaposes incidents of God’s blessing with occurrences of persecution and sin (in which God worked powerfully as well).

Acts 3:1-26 - A lame man is healed by Peter and John. (Acts 3:11-26 - Peter speaks to onlookers)

Acts 4:1-22 - Peter and John are arrested and defend the Gospel

Acts 4:23-37 - God blesses believers

Acts 5:1-10 - Ananias and Sapphira sin

Acts 5:12-16 - Many are healed

Acts 5:17-42 - Apostles are arrested and defend the Gospel

Acts 6:1-7 - Division is healed

Acts 6:8-15 - Stephen is arrested (and defends the Gospel - Acts 7)

Acts 3:1-26 - At three o'clock one afternoon, as Peter and John were going up to the Temple for prayer, they encountered a man who had been crippled from birth (such cases were considered more hopeless than recent disabilities). The man was carried every day to the Temple to beg at the Beautiful Gate, possibly the bronze Nicanor gate. This would be a good location to beg, for pious Jews on their way to worship would be prone to acts of charity. Peter and John looked straight at the man when he asked for alms (notice they did not just walk by or try to avoid him), and Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth [i.e. by His authority], walk" (Acts 3:6). With that Peter grasped the beggar's right hand and helped him up; instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He exuberantly (and not caring what others thought; this was hardly dignified behavior) followed Peter and John into the Temple courts "walking, and jumping, and praising God." This attracted a crowd. The people were amazed when they realized that this was the man who used to sit begging at the Beautiful Gate. God had performed a miracle. Note that since the man regularly begged alms at this place, Peter and John would likely have seen him before, but it was not until this day that God used Peter to heal him. Neither, apparently, did Peter heal other disabled beggars at the Temple. Yet God did have mercy on this man, not giving him what he thought he needed (money), but what would benefit him even more.

Peter used the man's healing as an opportunity to speak to the gathering crowd about Christ. He disavowed any credit for what had happened (that miracles could be performed because of the piety of the wonder-worker was common Jewish belief at the time), and pointed out that God had chosen to glorify Jesus by the healing (Acts 3:13). Peter minced no words as he continued to speak of the Lord and the people's culpability in His death: "you handed him over to be killed . . . you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released . . . you killed the author of life" [how ironic] (Acts 3:13-15). God used Peter's message and many who heard it believed, bringing the number of men to about five thousand (Acts 4:4). However, not everyone was pleased with what was occurring.

Acts 4:1-22: Among those listening to Peter were priests, Sadducees and the captain of the Temple guard (the man in charge of order in the Temple precincts; his was a high-ranking position, possibly second in power only to the high priest himself). They were greatly disturbed that Peter and John were "proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 4:3), so they seized them and put them in jail until the next day, when they were brought before the high-ranking religious leaders, including Annas (high priest 6-15 A.D.) and Caiaphas (high priest 18-36 A.D.) who demanded to know by what power or name they had performed the miracle (Acts 4:7). Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, replied that it was "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, that this man stands before you healed" (Acts 4:10). Even in such danger, God gave Peter the ability to proclaim His Word with great boldness. Peter quoted the Messianic Psalm 118 (verse 22) in reference to Jesus and asserted that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13; may people notice the same thing about us). The Jewish leaders were in a quandary, for they wanted to quash the spread of the Gospel but could hardly deny that a notable miracle had taken place, for the man was standing right there with them; they also feared the reaction of the people. Therefore, they decided to release Peter and John but order them to speak no longer to anyone in the name of Jesus. The apostles refused. "Judge for yourselves," they said, "whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). Although we should normally obey those in authority over us (Romans 13), when we are commanded to do something which is clearly contrary to God's Word, we must obey God rather than men.

Acts 4:23-37 - Upon being released, Peter and John went back to the believers and reported what had happened. Their immediate response was to pray. They praised God for His sovereign control over the universe - for His creation (could not the One Who made all things control the circumstances of their lives?) and His foreknowledge and control over the actions of His enemies, even those leading to the death of His Son. In light of this and the opposition against them, the believers prayed that God would enable His servants to speak His Word with great boldness and that He would evidence His power, performing healings and miracles through the name of Jesus. God responded readily to their prayer. "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31). God not only blessed His people with outward manifestations of His power, but with changed hearts. "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had" (Acts 2:32). This was not obligatory, but a natural outflowing of the love God had placed in their hearts for Him and each other. Two people, however, turned this blessing into an occasion for sin.

Acts 5:1-10 - Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of land and brought the proceeds to the apostles to distribute as they deemed best. However, while maintaining that they had contributed the entire amount gained from the sale, the two kept back (the same word is used in the Septuagint for Achan's sin) part of the profit for themselves, thinking they could have the "best of both worlds," the approval of the elders and fellow believers and a nest egg for themselves. There would have been nothing wrong with keeping a portion of the money for themselves had they admitted to doing so (Acts 5:4), but in their deception, they lied not to men but to God (note that the Holy Spirit is here called God; compare Acts 3:3 and Acts 3:5, "lied to the Holy Spirit . . . lied to God"). People lie for many reasons - fear, a desire to gain something for themselves, a desire to protect others, or, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, a desire for the approval of men. None of these is sufficient reason to lie. Lies destroy trust. They evidence a lack of love for our neighbor whom we manipulate for our own ends, and a lack of trust in God to take care of us no matter what the consequences of our honesty.

People today are so accustomed to flagrant transgressions of God's law that Ananias and Sapphira's deception seems almost trite. But God takes sin seriously. In His eyes, there is no such thing as a little sin. God was and is deeply concerned about the purity of His church and the glory of His Name. Ananias and Sapphira's sin would cost them their lives. When Peter confronted Ananias with what he had done, he fell down and died. Three hours later, Peter questioned Sapphira as to the amount of the sale. When she concurred that the amount given was the amount they had received, Peter said, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also" (Acts 5:9), and so she died. To many, the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira may seem harsh punishment, but we all deserve this and far worse for even the smallest of our sins against a holy God. In today's society, the breaking of God's law is seen as a psychological defect or an excusable weakness (if not a laudable character trait!), but we as believers must regard sin as the heinous thing it is and repent individually and corporately if we would have God bless us. For that was the result of what occurred. "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events" (Acts 5:11). God desired to work powerfully among His people, but would only do so in a pure church.

Acts 5:12-16 - And do so, He did. The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. The sick and those afflicted by evil spirits were healed and many men and women believed in the Lord. The believers were held in high regard by the people. Yet not everyone rejoiced at the Lord's hand of blessing.

Acts 5:17-42 - Once again, the high priest and his associates and the Sadducees, filled with jealousy, arrested a number of the apostles. "But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 'Go, stand in the temple courts,' he said, 'and tell the people the full message of this new

life” (Acts 5:19-20). The apostles did as they had been told. What occurred next was almost laughable. The high priest and his associates called together the Sanhedrin, the full assembly of the elders of Israel (probably seventy-one men) to interrogate the prisoners, but even though the jail was securely locked with guards standing at the doors, the prisoners were nowhere to be found! Finally, someone came to report that the men they had put in jail were again preaching the forbidden message in the Temple courts, right under their noses. The Jewish authorities had them brought before the Sanhedrin, where Peter boldly proclaimed that God had raised Jesus, whom they had hung on a tree, from the dead (Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection), and that Jesus had been exalted to God’s right hand to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. Peter insisted that he had to obey God rather than men and so witness to what God had done.

The members of the Council were furious. However, a Pharisee named Gamaliel advised restraint in the handling of the case. Giving examples of two revolutionaries who claimed to be the Messiah, Theudas and Judas, whose missions had failed, Gamaliel said, “Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God” (Acts 5:38-39). The Sanhedrin was persuaded by his speech and, after having the apostles flogged and warning them not to speak in the name of Jesus, they let them go. The apostles left rejoicing that they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name of Jesus. Would this have been our reaction? And so God continued to bless the church as “day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 5:42).

Acts 6:1-7 - As the church grew, problems increased, but God gave His people wisdom in how to deal with them. The church provided for the needs of the indigent among them, but the Hellenistic Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The Hellenists were probably non-Palestinian Jews whose first and perhaps only language was Greek. Since it was considered meritorious to be buried in Israel, foreign Jews would often come to spend their last days there, leaving their widows, who were unable to support themselves as a woman might in today’s society. The Twelve called together the disciples and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2-4). Both spiritual and physical needs are important and neither should be neglected. However, God had called the apostles to the former ministry and they rightly realized that they could not do everything themselves, nor should the people expect them to do so. Thus was the church office of deacon born. The word *diakonos* is not actually used in the passage (although forms of the word are), but the concept of a group of men set aside by the church to serve others in the material realm is clear here and is further established later in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:8-13). That their tasks were physical did not lessen the necessity of those chosen being godly men; they were to be men “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). The church showed wisdom in the very selection of the deacons, for it seems that at least most of them were from the dissident Hellenist group (the names listed are Greek), which would mitigate against any charges of favoritism. The deacons’ service was not limited to the mundane. Luke continues his narrative by relating how two of the Seven, Stephen and Philip, were used by the Lord in a powerful way to perform miraculous signs and to preach His Word (Acts 6:8-10; 8:5-8).

Acts 6:8-15 - As Stephen did great wonders, opposition arose from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (freedmen were former Roman prisoners or their descendants). Their arguments, however, could not stand up to Stephen’s wisdom, so they stirred up the people, saying that he had spoken blasphemies against Moses and God. Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin, where false witnesses brought charges against him. Through it all, Stephen knew God’s peace; even his enemies admitted his countenance was like the face of an angel. Acts 7, not covered this quarter, relates Stephen’s defense, wherein he used the history

of God's dealings with Israel to show his accusers in no uncertain terms their own guilt and God's mercy in sending Christ. Those listening to Stephen lived up to his characterization of them: "stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears" (Acts 7:51). They dragged Stephen out of the city and stoned him. "He fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:60). Still, the forces of evil did not have the last word. Saul, watching the cloaks and giving approval to Stephen's death, would one day become Paul, mighty witness for the Lord. The persecution that broke out against the church on that day would work for the spread of the Gospel, as God's people were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

God worked in mighty ways in the early church in manifestations of power and in the hearts of believers, enabling them to love each other and to preach the Word with boldness. Many people turned to the Lord for salvation. The believers faced great persecution, and sorrow as some turned away from God, but they continued to seek the Lord and they rejoiced greatly in God's goodness to them. May we seek the Lord as well, that He would bless us likewise for His glory.

Lesson Procedure

In today's lesson, your class will concentrate on the "forest" rather than the "trees," surveying the beginnings of the church and how God worked powerfully among the early believers, even turning "Satan's counterattacks" of persecution and sin to His glory. To cover this much material as well as possible, divide the class into groups of one to three people and assign one or two of the passages listed at the beginning of the Lesson Background to each. Although the reading level is somewhat difficult for fifth and sixth graders, you may also give them the appropriate Lesson Background section to help them in their study. When they have read their passages, have them present them to the class in one of the following ways (you should choose the way ahead of time, which should be the same for the entire class).

Newspaper - Have each group report on their passage as if they were writing for a newspaper (if desired, include the events of Acts 2 as well). They may use straight description, editorials, or interviews, but each article should present at least the basic facts of the story covered. Have your students read their articles to the class. During the week, type up the articles your students have written and duplicate them as a newspaper. Have your class choose a name for their paper and give them bylines for their articles. If desired, have your students include comic strips, advertisements and recipes as well. If possible, design your newspaper on the computer, using different fonts and graphics to give a more professional appearance, which your students will appreciate. Make copies for each student and hand them out next week.

To work well, this activity will need enthusiasm on the part of the teacher and instruction to the students as to how to go about the task. Tell your students that your class is going to put together a newspaper as if from the time of the early church. Why is this a rather strange thing to do (there were no newspapers at that time; ask you students why there were not)? Then explain the five Ws and H of good journalism (who, what, where, when, why, and how). You may wish to hand out a worksheet with who, what, etc., written boldly down the left side of the paper with space for your students to take notes on their story to the right, filling in information next to the appropriate word. Very quickly illustrate the procedure by having your class help you fill in the correct information on the board for a well-known children's story such as *The Three Little Pigs* (who: three pigs and a wolf; where: in a forest; when: once upon a time; and so forth). Explain how they can also use quotations from people to enliven their articles. Most articles should be straight-forward reporting, but explain the difference between description, editorial, and interview and allow capable students to try the latter. Be sure to emphasize the veracity of God's Word - that it presents real history, in contrast to the imaginative-type articles (e.g., an interview with a member of the

Sanhedrin about the disturbances caused by the followers of this new Way) you may allow your students to write.

Drama - Have each group in the class act out the different incidents from today's lesson. Your students should plan the action and at least some of the dialogue and practice before they present their passage to the rest of the class. Some groups may prefer to relate their story in an interview format, asking questions, as a reporter would, of one of the disciples, a person who was healed, a bystander or a member of the Sanhedrin. This could even be done in a talk show format as long as you feel it can be done with a seriousness befitting God's Word and works (this may work best if you are the talk show host).

Articles should be read/skits presented in chronological order. Be sure the major facts of the stories are presented and that there are no distortions. However, you will not have time to recount nor will your students remember a large number of particulars. Depending on the time available, you may wish to choose one story on which to focus and discuss in detail. You may also choose to ignore the above activities and relate Acts 3-6 to your students yourself. If you do so, do not read the entire passage to your students, but choose one or two sections to read and discuss fully (see Lesson Background) while summarizing the rest.

THE SAMARITAN REVIVAL

Acts 8:5-25

Lesson Aim

That your students will know that God is more powerful than Satan, that we should seek God's glory, not our own, and that His blessings are a free gift.

Memory Verse

Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:37-47; this week, Acts 2:38 - "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

Lesson Background

God continued to bless the early church. As persecution increased, causing believers to flee Jerusalem, He enabled them, as Jesus had said (Acts 1:8), to spread the Gospel in an increasingly wide geographical area to more and more culturally-diverse groups. Philip (one of the Seven from Acts 6; see also Acts 21:8-9) preached Christ to the people of a city in Samaria and later, as we will study next week, to a man from Ethiopia. When the crowds saw the miraculous signs Philip performed - delivering people from evil spirits and healing many paralytics and cripples - they paid close attention to his words. Many believed the good news and were baptized, including a sorcerer named Simon.

There has been much doubt as to the sincerity of Simon's profession. A number of early church fathers equated the biblical Simon Magus with an early Gnostic heretic, but the identification is uncertain. For a long time the Simon in this passage had amazed the people in Samaria with his occult powers. Satan's strength is real, but God is far more powerful and Satan can do only what God in His providence allows.

When Simon saw what Philip accomplished through the power of God, he followed him everywhere, “astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw” (Acts 8:13). Simon wanted this sort of power himself, and when he saw that the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of hands by the apostles (apparently supernatural manifestations occurred), he offered them money so he could have this ability (sorcerers sometimes bought magical formulas, so this would have seemed logical to Simon). Peter answered Simon in extremely strong terms, *prima facie* evidence to doubt Simon’s salvation: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”

The phrase translated “perish” appears only here, but a related term, meaning *to destroy utterly, to suffer ruin and loss of well-being*, occurs a number of times and often, although not always, has to do with eternal damnation (e.g. John 3:16; John 10:28). When referring to people, it can also indicate loss of life (II Peter 3:6) and even possibly general harm (I Corinthians 8:11). So, although the term is extremely strong, we cannot conclude definitely that Peter condemned Simon to hell. Peter almost certainly would not use such words lightly, and it is difficult to imagine him cursing anyone to everlasting destruction. The words used to describe the bitterness and sin of which Simon was full are also very forceful expressions, but are used at times in Scripture in reference to Christians (Ephesians 4:31; Hebrews 12:15; Romans 6:13; I John 1:9). Upon hearing Peter’s denunciation, Simon asked for prayer that “nothing you have said will happen to me” (Acts 8:24), which seems to indicate a humble, repentant heart, although some have doubted his sincerity, claiming that Simon had not truly turned to the Lord but merely wanted to avoid punishment. False professions of Christ abound, but the text says Simon believed and was baptized. Demons are said to believe (James 2:19) and Jesus, in the parable of the four soils, spoke of those who “believe for a while, but in the time of testing . . . fall away” (Luke 8:13), but it appears that all other references use the word in the sense of actual belief. Philip was apparently convinced of Simon’s sincerity initially, for he allowed him to be baptized.

This passage presents other difficulties in interpretation as well. “When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:14-17). What is the significance of the time lapse between when the Samaritans believed and when they “received the Holy Spirit”? Some say that this was a special circumstance applicable only to the early church, while others, citing Romans 8:9, contend that *come upon/receive* here refers to being filled with the Spirit. Why did Philip not pray for the Holy Spirit to come upon the new believers? Was apostolic authority necessary? Was it a discretionary move so that the Samaritans, who might have been more comfortable with the Hellenist Philip, would accept the authority of the Jerusalem church? Such questions are not likely to arise in your fifth and sixth grade class, but it is at least good for the teacher to consider them even if he or she does not arrive at definite conclusions.

While some matters remain fuzzy, this passage has definite application to our lives and the lives of your students. God is more powerful than Satan. Simon, who had close acquaintance with Satan’s abilities, was astounded by the miracles wrought by Philip. No less an evidence of God’s might is the changed hearts of the Samaritans. Simon thought that he was someone great because of his magic, but he had no ability in himself. Rather, he was a tool of Satan, who only uses his followers and takes from them, giving no lasting benefit. Simon apparently enjoyed his power and the adulation it brought. Do we seek our own glory or that of the Lord? Simon was proud and sought spiritual power for his own benefit. Why do we seek God’s gifts? Do we want people to look up to us and see us as being good Christians? Do we think we can buy God’s favor and love by our performance of spiritual duties (cf. Ephesians 2:8-10; Isaiah 55:1-2,6-8)? Power,

control, self-aggrandizement, personal security - these are reasons people give in to Satan, whether by following the lure of the occult or doing their own will instead of God's in subtle ways each day. May we seek to serve God by His means and for His glory.

Lesson Procedure

Ask your students the following: "What are the three things you want most out of life? Think about your life now and also what you want it to be like in the future. Next to your list write down why you chose those things. Try to be honest and not just write down answers of which you think others would approve. You do not have to share this list or turn it in. Now, see if you can determine what is most important to the kids in the following three stories."

Jacob listlessly kicked at the soda can with the toe of his sneaker. They'd done it again, of course The guys had run off without him, some to play basketball and a couple of others to throw a softball around. Jacob wasn't very good at sports; in fact, he wasn't good at much of anything. Small, dark Jacob could fade into the woodwork and nobody would notice. But not much longer; oh, no, not much longer! Soon things would be different. Soon they'd notice. Yeah, he'd show them. Soon they'd look up to him; they'd do anything he wanted. Jacob had been reading. Not dumb old books like in school, but real books, books that told you how to do things. He'd gotten them at that little store down on Second Street where they sold all those crystals and candles and weird-looking junk. Art, the guy who owned the store, was really cool. He'd talked to Jacob for a long time and showed him the best stuff to buy. Jacob fingered the crystal hanging from a thong around his neck. At first he'd thought the spells were kind of stupid, but the other day he'd bent a spoon with one (at least a little bit, he thought) and after he'd cursed hot-shot Eric, he was out of school for a week with the flu. Yeah, just wait. He'd show them, all right.

Swoosh! Terry sank the three-pointer with ease. Yes! He could do it. Nothing could stop him tonight. Nothing could stop him, period! He was going to the top. All right, so this was just a little junior high basketball game, but he was the star. Everyone knew it. And someday it wouldn't be worn floorboards, bent rims, and secondhand sneaks. It would be a Cadillac (or maybe a Porsche or a Mercedes - why not one of each?), a huge house with horses to ride, adoring looks from beautiful girls, and a new pair of Nikes for every game. Yeah, that's the life. NBA, here I come!

Shanika looked down shyly and smoothed her dress with her hands. She was embarrassed, yet pleased with her teacher's praise. The other girls called her teacher's pet and goody-goody at times because she always had the right answers to the Bible lesson, but she was always nice to them and they never really got mad at her. Shanika wanted people to like her. She always tried to do what was right. Of course, she knew she wasn't perfect, but she wasn't like some girls in her class, always passing notes and giggling over boys. She certainly didn't watch the movies they talked about. Shanika hoped God was pleased with her. She obeyed her parents, went to church twice on Sundays, read her Bible and tried to pray. God wanted people to do those things, so He must be happy with her too.

What did Jacob want out of life? What did Terry and Shanika want? How did they each attempt to get what they desired? What was different and the same about their desires and the ways they sought to achieve them? Is it wrong to want what these kids did? Was anything wrong with Shanika's attitude? Sometimes we can want good things for the wrong reasons. Today's Bible story speaks of a man named Simon who had this sin and a number of others.

Bible Story

Read and discuss Acts 8:5-25. Emphasize God's power over Satan (and warn students of any occult involvement, even Ouija boards, tarot cards, magic cards, crystals, horoscopes and the like), the fact that we cannot purchase God's gifts or earn His favor, and that we should seek God's glory, not our own. You may wish to ask some of the following questions:

- 8:5 - Why is it significant that Philip went to proclaim Christ in *Samaria*?
- 8:6-8 - Give two reasons why the crowds listened to Philip [Word and signs]
- 8:9-10 - What is a sorcerer? What does God say about sorcery (Deuteronomy 18:9-13)? What sorts of occult practices are you aware of today that you should avoid? Do you know anyone involved in the occult? Why do you think Simon and people today want to be involved in the occult?
- 8:11-13 - How does this passage show that God is more powerful than Satan?
- 8:14-17 - Why did the apostles send Peter and John to the new believers? What does it mean that the new believers received the Holy Spirit? [answers may differ]
- 8:18-19 - What did Simon covet in these verses and why?
- 8:20-24 - Peter's reply to Simon's request is extremely strong here. The word translated *perish* in the NIV is like the Greek word which means *to destroy completely, to suffer ruin*, meaning to lose one's possessions, life, or even to suffer eternal damnation in hell. Why do you think Peter spoke so forcefully to Simon? Simon seems to be sorry for his sin. Do you think Simon was a Christian? [Christians disagree in their opinions on this].

To think about: Remember the lists we made about what is the most important to us. What did Simon seem to want most out of life? Is there anything you would like to change on your list? You cannot change your priorities on your own - ask God to do this for you. Simon thought he could buy God's gifts; do you ever try to do this? In what ways? Do you try to earn His favor by your good works?

Activity

Continue with whatever missions/evangelism activity you have chosen to do (see Activity Booklet). You may wish to start a missionary biography or a collection of short stories about missions and read a section to your students each week.

Songs

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #252); “Only in the Cross” (Mark Altrogge PDI/Dayspring/Word Music)

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Acts 8:26-40

Lesson Aim

That your students would know the importance of telling others about Jesus, that Christians would desire to witness, and that those who don't know the Lord would be confronted with the claims of the Gospel; also, that your students would understand the importance of obeying God even when what He says seems foolish to human understanding.

Memory Verse

Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:37-47; this week, Acts 2:39 - "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Lesson Background

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways His ways (see Isaiah 55:8-9). Philip must have thought it absolutely crazy when an angel told him to leave a fruitful ministry in Samaria to travel the road to the deserted region of Gaza. Yet Philip obeyed the angel's instructions (had he hesitated the opportunity might have been lost), and God used his witness to bring an influential Ethiopian official to salvation.

The Ethiopian eunuch had responsibility for the entire treasury of the queen of the Ethiopians. Ethiopia, which covered a different geographic area than the present country of that name, was traditionally ruled by the queen mother (Candace was a dynastic title) in behalf of her son who, as a child of the sun, was considered too holy for everyday state functions. The Ethiopian was probably a Jewish proselyte, a God-

fearer who believed in Jehovah but was uncircumcised. The fact that he rode in a chariot (when few could even afford a donkey) and had bought a rare hand-copied scroll shows his wealth and powerful position. That he had taken the long journey to Jerusalem, had invested his money in the scroll and was avidly reading it showed his interest in God.

As Philip met the Ethiopian along the road, the Spirit told him to go up to the chariot and stay near it. Hearing the man reading aloud from Isaiah (in ancient times it was practically unheard of for someone to read silently), Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading. The Ethiopian asked Philip to join him in the chariot and explain the meaning of the passage, which Philip did, using those verses as a springboard to present the Gospel. Notice that Philip both readily obeyed the Holy Spirit and the angel's instructions and took initiative on his own. His thorough knowledge of the Scriptures enabled him to interpret the passage in Isaiah (which may have involved more than Isaiah 53:7-8, for often before the advent of chapter and verse markings, a portion of a passage was cited as representative of the whole).

God opened the Ethiopian's heart, and, desiring to demonstrate his newfound faith, he asked to be baptized (again, as in Acts 2:38 and Acts 9:18, we see the integral link between belief and baptism). Philip baptized him, and when they came up out of the water "the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away" (Acts 8:39). Whether this indicates an occurrence of a miraculous nature (as when used in the Septuagint in I Kings 18:12 and II Kings 2:16) or not, Philip appeared at Azotus, a town thirty-five miles west of Jerusalem, and continued preaching the Gospel in various towns until he reached Caesarea. The Ethiopian eunuch went on his way rejoicing.

God uses His obedient servants to proclaim His Word to hearts He has prepared to receive it. At times the Lord's ways may seem strange to us, but if we obey Him, He will bring great blessing. We know nothing further of what happened to Philip (other than that he received a visit from Paul and that he had four daughters who prophesied - Acts 21:8-9) or the Ethiopian. Perhaps God used the Ethiopian to preach the good news of Christ in a mighty way in his own nation (according to tradition he founded the first Christian church in Ethiopia), but even if He did not, God had His reasons for desiring that this man come to know Him and did much to arrange circumstances so that he would hear and understand the Gospel. May we pray that, like Philip, we would be obedient to the Lord and that He would use us to proclaim His Word to hearts He has prepared to receive it. May He do so as you share the good news with your students and may He help those students who know Him to do so as well.

Lesson Procedure

Introduce your lesson with the following story:

Justin slowly let go of the envelope and watched it slide down the cold blue metal, plopping softly on the waiting pile below. Ooh, that had hurt, but he couldn't get his letter back now, and really he had no regrets. "I must be crazy," he thought, "turning down a four-year scholarship to an Ivy League school to attend a state university." In general, he agreed with everything his guidance counselor had told him. The scholarship was a great opportunity; he would receive a top education, and doing well at that college would open many doors in the future. Yet Justin had prayed long and hard about the decision and knew that, at this point, he just couldn't accept the offer. How could he leave his ill mother to raise his two little brothers alone, especially with all the problems Jared was having in school? How could he desert the kids at Bible Club who looked up to him so when he could just begin to see God making inroads in their lives? Should he leave his church where there was such good teaching, where God was blessing and where he had such close relationships? Sure, the Lord could provide other people to meet those needs, but it seemed that he had

a responsibility to help and that this was the place God wanted him for now. Justin gave a wry grin. Yeah, he was crazy; but it felt good.

Was Justin crazy? Why or why not? God wants us to use our minds, to weigh the facts when making decisions, and certainly never to do anything that contradicts what He has said in Scripture. But the Lord declares, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. . . . As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). Sometimes God wants people to do things that on first appearance seem odd. He might call a doctor to leave a thriving practice in the suburbs, where he is doing a lot of good, to serve in the inner city. He could call a business executive who is a leader in his church and gives a great deal of money to Christian causes to go back to school and then translate the Bible for a few hundred people living in the jungle. He might even call a person to leave a ministry of speaking to thousands of people to spend his time in prayer.

Something like this occurred in the life of Philip. Remember what we learned last week about how God used Philip [review last week’s lesson]. In today’s passage God worked through Philip as well, but in a different way. An angel appeared to Philip and told him to leave Samaria, where so many people were turning to the Lord, and head south on a road leading to Gaza, a deserted region. Maybe the Lord knew it would take an angel to get Philip to believe such a seemingly crazy command (of course, we don’t know why God sent the angel; Philip very well may have obeyed the Lord no matter how He revealed His will). “What?” perhaps Philip thought, “Leave Samaria with all that’s been happening here? I can’t leave now. God’s using me to do miracles and many people are turning to Him. They need to learn more about God first . . .” But Philip obeyed the Lord. Read Acts 8:26-40 and discuss; utilize any background material you feel appropriate and also point out the following:

- God’s ways are not our ways, and He sometimes has people do things that do not seem to make sense (although He will never have someone do something contrary to what He has revealed in the Bible). Stress the importance of obedience.
- The Ethiopian was probably a black man.
- You may explain what a eunuch is if the question arises, but there is no need to go into this if no one asks. Often those holding powerful and trusted positions in royal courts were eunuchs. The word may just refer to the official position and not necessarily indicate emasculation, although it usually does. God forbade those Israelites so disfigured from “entering the assembly of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 23:1), but promised great blessing to those eunuchs and foreigners who did what pleased Him (Isaiah 56:4-8).
- Stress the importance of knowing God’s Word so that we can proclaim the Gospel and help others by it (as well as learning it in obedience to the Lord and as a benefit to ourselves; see Psalm 119).
- Stress the importance of believers being baptized.

Activity

Have your students try to explain the basics of the Gospel, supporting their points with appropriate verses. If most of your students are not Christians and/or do not know much Scripture, it would be good instead to do this yourself (pray beforehand for an opportunity to lead your students to Christ; this would be a good day to have an assistant available with whom you could leave the class if someone would like to talk with you privately). If most of your students are Christians, perhaps they could role-play sharing the Gospel with one of their friends (or could even actually do so if a friend for whom they have been praying is visiting). You may wish to utilize the evangelistic booklets made Year I, Quarter 1, Lesson 11. Philip began proclaiming the Gospel from Isaiah 53:7-8 (he probably used at least some of the rest of the passage, too). Perhaps your students would like to explain the Gospel from Isaiah 53 or beginning with passages such as

John 3:16-18,36; I John 4:10; John 14:6; Romans 3:10,23, 5:8, 6:23, 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 17:24-30; Hebrews 5:7-10; or Hebrews 9:14-15. An example of using Isaiah 53 to present the Gospel follows. Other verses may supplement points of the Gospel not seen clearly in this passage.

What are sheep like? [stupid, easily led astray, follow other sheep even into danger]

Did you know that the Bible says people are like sheep? That's not a very complimentary picture. Isaiah said, "All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). That's what the Bible calls sin - selfishly going our own way, doing our own thing, doing whatever we think will make us happy and bring us praise no matter what God says. God created us to live for His glory - we owe Him all we are and have because He gave it to us. He has a perfect right to destroy us for rebelling against Him and turning from His ways, which were designed to bring us good. Not only that, He, a holy God, must punish sin, or else He is saying that sin is okay.

However, instead of punishing us as we deserve, God sent a substitute, a spotless Lamb to be killed in our place. Isaiah continues by saying, "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity (sin) of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isaiah 53:6-7). Who is this Lamb? God's Son, Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life on earth (Isaiah 53:9) and knew what it was to suffer (Isaiah 53:3). Then He died, hung on a cross, which was how the Romans killed criminals, not to pay for His own sins but for ours (Isaiah 53:4-5,8-9). Jesus did not stay dead, however. God made Him alive again to live and reign over the universe forever (Isaiah 53:12).

Jesus died to take the punishment sinners deserve. If you believe this, thank Him for dying for you, suffering the wrath (righteous anger) of God you deserve; ask Him to forgive your sins and commit yourself to living with Him as your master, your boss from now on.

Summary:

- We, like sheep, have all gone our way, not God's (Isaiah 53:6).
- God is holy and must punish sin; we deserve His wrath.
- Jesus, God's Son, lived a perfect life on earth (Isaiah 53:9).
- Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God (Isaiah 53:6-7), died for sinners (Isaiah 53:4-5,8-9).
- To be saved from God's wrath, we must accept Christ's sacrifice and give our lives to Him.

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

Acts 9:1-31

Lesson Aim

That your students would realize God's sovereign love in choosing His people; also that they would understand the importance of obeying God as Ananias did, and God's protection of His people.

Memory Verse

Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:37-47; this week, Acts 2:40 - "With many other words he warned them and pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.'"

Lesson Background

God in His great mercy chooses many different kinds of people to be His children and brings them to Himself in many different ways. Last week, we learned about a high-ranking Ethiopian official to whom God sent a man to explain the Scriptures so that he might be saved. Like the Ethiopian, Saul, the subject of today's story, was a man of influence. A Pharisee who knew much Scripture and felt he kept the Law perfectly, he would likely have looked down on the Ethiopian, who was not a full Jew. Saul, however, was in active opposition to the Lord, as much as he thought he was serving Him. Both men were in need of God's saving grace. Rather than initially using a human agent, the Lord spoke directly to Saul and then used a man named Ananias to minister to him.

The story of Saul's conversion is told initially in Acts 9 and is then repeated in Acts 22:3-21 and Acts 26:9-18, where Saul (now Paul) spoke to a crowd and before Herod Agrippa, explaining what the Lord had done for him. Paul was what every good Jew would wish to be, "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (Philippians 3:5-6). Proudly secure

in his own self-righteousness, Saul zealously worked to bring about his conception of God's will on earth. Not content to arrest Christians in Jerusalem and vote for their execution, he obtained extradition orders to Damascus so that he could have believers brought back for trial. Damascus, a flourishing commercial center, had been part of the Roman colony of Syria since 64 B.C. It had a large Jewish and a large Arab population.

“As [Saul] neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ asked Saul. ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting’” (Acts 9:1-5; note Jesus’ identification of Himself with the church). One can imagine a little of Saul’s astonishment, wonder and bewilderment. A bright light and a voice from heaven would be startling enough, but to be spoken to by Jesus Himself and to realize that one had been defying the very God he sought to serve must have put Saul in a state of absolute shock. His companions, who had seen the light and heard the voice (although they did not understand it), led Saul, who had become blind, to Damascus where he spent the next three days in fasting and prayer.

Meanwhile, the Lord spoke in a vision to a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street [usually identified as a long east-west avenue that had colonnaded halls on each side and large gates at each end] and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight” (Acts 9:11-12). Ananias was understandably perturbed by this directive and reminded the Lord of the harm Saul had done to God’s saints in Jerusalem and his mission to arrest believers in Damascus. Ananias had no desire to walk into the lion’s mouth! God, of course, knew all about the situation, as He does when He commands us to do something that seems foolish. He knows the end from the beginning and is all-wise and all-powerful. We can trust Him. But He is not to be argued with. “The Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’” (Acts 9:15-16).

So Ananias went (do we obey the Lord as readily?). He entered the house and “placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul [how amazing, to call *brother* one who had been responsible for the deaths of fellow Christians, perhaps even some very close to Ananias!], the Lord - Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here - has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes and he could see again” (Acts 9:17-18). Saul was then baptized and had something to eat.

“Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God” (Acts 9:19b-20). A true encounter with Jesus Christ will result in a burning desire to tell others about Him, despite the reactions of others and even the prospect of danger. How sad that the incrustations of the world and the fear of men quash the zeal of so many as they grow older in the faith. Those who heard Saul were astonished and could hardly believe that this could be the same man who had persecuted believers in Jerusalem. “Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 9:22). The Jews conspired together to kill Saul and set a watch on the city gates, but one night Saul’s friends lowered him in a basket through an opening in the city wall, and so he escaped.

Saul traveled to Jerusalem to join the disciples there, but they were all afraid of him, doubting that his conversion was real. Barnabas, however, came to his aid. He brought Saul to the apostles and told them about Saul’s Damascus road experience and how he had fearlessly preached in the name of Jesus. Saul continued to preach in Jerusalem, but some Grecian Jews tried to kill him. Learning of this, the brothers sent him off to Tarsus by way of Caesarea. “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31).

We can learn a number of things from the Acts 9 account of Saul's conversion. God is sovereign and in infinite love reaches down to stop those He has chosen in their headlong flight toward destruction. Not all conversions are outwardly as dramatic as Saul's, but they are just as radical, taking a helpless sinner who is serving Satan and in rebellion against God and changing his thoughts, heart, and behavior to love and serve the living Lord. It is extremely important that our witness be grounded in Scripture, but, without the intervention of God speaking through His Word and changing stone-cold hearts, people will remain in their sins. Saul knew Scripture, yet his deceitful heart had twisted its meaning so that in persecuting God's people he thought he was serving the Lord. It took an encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road to turn him back from his fatal path. May we be sensitive to God's Spirit and not arrogantly pursue our own ways, assuming we are obeying God's will, when God wants to change the direction of our lives. Saul needed to know the fact of who Jesus is, but he also needed to bow his knee before Him. This was true of Ananias as well. He had to obey the Lord's command even when it seemed foolish and he thought it might cost him his life. Great blessing resulted as God used Ananias to minister to Saul in healing, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and baptism. Saul was God's chosen instrument to carry His name before the Gentiles and people of Israel (Acts 9:15). He has chosen us for a purpose as well. Like Saul and Ananias, may we be submissive to God, repent of our sins, and glorify Him with our lives.

Lesson Procedure

You may wish to introduce your lesson as follows: "Can you imagine traveling down a road, satisfied because you feel you are on a mission to serve God, when all of a sudden you are confronted with a light shining brighter than the sun and a voice from heaven? This is what happened to a man named Saul, and it changed the entire direction of his life." Read and discuss Acts 9:1-19. Be sure to consider the following:

God's sovereign choice in conversion - Saul was pursuing a course dramatically opposed to God, yet the Lord graciously reached down and turned him in the opposite direction, bringing him to Himself. This is true of all who come to know the Lord, although not all conversion experiences are as dramatic as Saul's. All, however, involve repentance, a change of mind and behavior from sin to God. Emphasize the vital importance of becoming a Christian, of believing in Christ's death and resurrection and turning our lives over to Him. Also point out the importance of being baptized if one is a Christian, and Ananias' courageous obedience (both Saul and Ananias needed to bow their wills to God).

Questions

9:1-2 - What is *the Way*? Why do you think Saul wanted to kill Christians? [Damascus was the capital of Syria where believers had fled to escape persecution.]

9:3-4 - Picture this. How astounded everyone would be! In another account, Saul (or Paul as he was later called) said that the light was brighter than the sun, that it blazed all around him and his companions and that they all fell to the ground.

9:5-6 - What effect do you think what Jesus said would have had on Saul, and why?

9:7-9 - Why do you think Saul did not eat or drink these three days?

9:11-16 - What do you learn about Ananias from this passage [his fear that he would be killed; his obedience despite his fear]? What do you learn about the Lord [He listens to our questions but brooks no disobedience; what may seem foolish from our perspective is really not]? What do we learn about Saul [God chose him to carry His name to the Gentiles, Jews and even kings; he would suffer for Christ]?

9:17-19 What things seen in this passage lead us to respect Ananias [he is being obedient to the Lord; he warmly greets Saul, who may have been responsible for the deaths of family and friends, as “brother”]? What did Saul do that Christians should do today?

9:19-22 - What was the next thing Saul did?

9:23-25 - What was the reaction to Saul’s witness? Our lives may not be threatened, but the Bible says that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (II Timothy 3:12). God, however, protected Saul and will take care of us as well (although there may be times we have to suffer for His Name).

9:26-31 - Why was Barnabas’ behavior noteworthy? What if Saul’s conversion were not genuine, but merely a trick to get information about Christians in order to oppress them further? This has been done in places where Christians are persecuted. Barnabas was willing to take a risk.

God changed the direction of Saul’s life. He has the right to change the direction of ours as well. How was Saul’s conversion to Christ like and different from that of the Ethiopian we learned about last week in Acts 8? [Write similarities and differences on the board.]

- The self-righteous Pharisee and high-ranking Ethiopian official were both respected and influential individuals, but came from different ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds.
- Each man desired to serve God, but Saul was working in active opposition to Him.
- God used a man to explain the Scriptures to the Ethiopian; Saul knew many Scriptures, but God first spoke to him so that he would bow before Him and later used Ananias to minister to him.
- When they heard the truth, both men believed and were baptized.

You should emphasize the importance of salvation for all people, including those in your class, regardless of educational, economic, cultural or ethnic background. The way is the same for the Ethiopian, Saul or them: to admit they are sinners going their own way in selfish rebellion against a holy God and that as such they deserve God’s wrath; to accept the propitiatory sacrifice that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, made on the cross for His people; and to ask Him to forgive their sins and be their Lord.

Activity

Read brief accounts of how God worked to save people in history; share your own conversion experience or have members of the class who know the Lord share how they came to Christ. Continue with your missions project for the quarter.

CORNELIUS

Acts 10:1-11:18

Lesson Aim

That your students would understand that in Christ there is “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” (Galatians 3:28).

Memory Verse

Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:37-47; this week, Acts 2:41 - “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

Lesson Background

Some lessons are difficult to learn. Sometimes we are so used to seeing things from a particular perspective that it takes a dramatic event to realign our vision. This was Peter’s experience as God taught him that His love stretched beyond the confines of Judaism. Gradually the Lord had been breaking down barriers. Jesus Himself occasionally ministered to non-Jews (e.g., the Samaritan woman, John 4; the centurion, Luke 7; and the Syrophoenician woman, Mark 7). God used Philip to bring great blessing to Samaria and then to tell the Gospel to an Ethiopian official (Acts 8). Yet it was not until God gave Peter a vision on a rooftop and poured out the Holy Spirit on Gentiles at the house of Cornelius that Jewish believers began to comprehend the extent of God’s love.

“At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment” (Acts 10:1). Caesarea, sixty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem in the coastal plain of Sharon, had been turned by Herod the Great into a prosperous seaport and had become the provincial capital of Judea. A centurion was a non-commissioned officer who had come up through the ranks to attain a position of

commanding a *century* (supposedly one hundred, but more often about eighty men). “He and all his family [this could mean his household of servants, for it would be unlikely for a centurion to be married] were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly” (Acts 10:2; can the same be said about us?). About three in the afternoon Cornelius had a vision of an angel who said to him, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea” (Acts 10:4-5). Cornelius obeyed the angel’s instruction and sent servants and a devout soldier to Joppa, about thirty miles away.

Meanwhile, God was working in Peter’s heart. It would have been difficult to overcome the years of prejudice that had been built up in Peter’s life. Jews did not associate with Gentiles unless it was absolutely necessary. Tradition held that even entering Gentile buildings or touching their possessions would make a Jew unclean. Accepting the hospitality of a Gentile, particularly partaking of his food, was intolerable. That Peter was staying with a tanner seems to indicate a lessening of his scruples, for this was considered an unclean trade. However, he would never have dreamed of how radically God was going to change his assumptions. Praying on the rooftop at noon and hungrily waiting for food to be prepared, Peter fell into a trance in which he saw something like a large sheet, containing many kinds of clean and unclean animals, coming down from heaven. “. . . a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat’” (Acts 10:13). Peter was astounded. How could he possibly do such a thing? It would be disobeying God (Leviticus 11), it would make him impure, it would dishonor the Lord, it . . . ! “‘Surely not, Lord!’ Peter replied. ‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean’” (Acts 10:14). “The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean’” (Acts 10:15). This occurred three times.

While Peter was wondering what the vision meant, Cornelius’ men arrived at the gate. The Holy Spirit told Peter to go downstairs and go with the men who were looking for him. When Peter went downstairs, the men explained their mission and Peter invited them into the house as his guest. The next day Peter and six Christian brothers from Joppa accompanied the men to Cornelius’ house, where they found him and a number of relatives and close friends expecting them. Cornelius fell in reverence at Peter’s feet (the word is used for homage to men or deity), but Peter told him to stand up, since he himself was only a man. Peter by this time understood the meaning, although not the full implications, of the vision and he explained to Cornelius that although it was against their law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or to visit him, God had shown him that he should not call any man impure or unclean (imagine Gentile feelings, as well, at always being looked down on by the Jews in this way). Peter asked Cornelius to explain why he had sent for him, which Cornelius did. Peter replied, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34-35).

Peter went on to preach the Gospel to the assembled company. Assuming that they had some familiarity with the events that had occurred, he pointed out that Jesus is Lord of all and judge of the living and the dead, that He had, in the power of the Spirit, healed those under the power of the devil, been crucified and raised from the dead (facts to which they were witnesses), and that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all those who were listening to the word. “The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ‘Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have’” (Acts 10:45-47).

Peter found out again that standing for God’s ways often brings opposition, even from friends. “. . . When Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, ‘You went into the

house of uncircumcised men and ate with them” (Acts 11:2b-3). Although Peter later gave in for a time to the pressure of such Judaizers (Galatians 2:11-16), at this point he boldly stood up to his brethren and explained the great work God had done. Peter’s emphasis was on the Lord’s initiative as he told about his vision on the rooftop and what had occurred at the house of Cornelius. Chapter 11 adds a few details not found in Acts 10. Peter includes wild beasts in his list of what the sheet contained (Acts 11:6) and mentions that six brothers from Joppa accompanied him to Caesarea (Acts 11:12). He says that the angel told Cornelius that Peter would bring a message through which Cornelius and all his household would be saved (Acts 11:14), and that when the Holy Spirit came on the Gentiles as he had the Jews at Pentecost, Peter remembered Jesus’ promise of baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:16 cf. Acts 1:5). When the Jewish believers heard Peter’s account, “they had no further objections and praised God, saying, ‘So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life’” (Acts 11:18).

Many people today feel proud of their tolerance of others, yet prejudice can remain in hidden corners of our lives. When was the last time you visited, ate, and prayed with someone from a race, culture, socioeconomic background, educational level, or church (not to downplay the importance of sound doctrine) other than your own? Perhaps your opportunities are limited, but God can make them available. The best way to break down our prejudices is to get to know those with whom we feel uncomfortable. Differences should not be ignored, but we can learn from each other. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, in reference to the enmity between Jew and Gentile, that it is Christ who affects such reconciliation: “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility” (Ephesians 2:14-16; see also Ephesians 2:11-22). God is the One who brings about reconciliation among people, but even more importantly between people and Himself. May we praise Him for His grace and work to break down barriers between people and tell them of Christ (II Corinthians 5:18-20), like Peter standing firmly for His truth even amidst opposition.

Lesson Procedure

Have your class write down whether they would react positively (+), negatively (-), or neutrally (0) to the following people (you may wish to draw pictures of people with these characteristics or have your students each take a person and do so rather than handing out a list; use discretion as to whether your students should share their reactions or just write them down; have them think about or discuss what it is about the person described that elicits their positive or negative reaction):

- A guy in a black leather jacket wearing several earrings.
- A woman in a fur coat and jewels.
- An African man in tribal dress.
- An old man who stutters.
- A black man in a suit and tie.
- A child in a wheelchair.
- An Asian boy playing the piano.
- A heavyset woman in a wild print dress.
- A dark-skinned woman speaking in a foreign language.
- A blind man walking down the street with a cane.
- A kid wearing dress pants, a button down shirt, with big glasses reading a book.
- A woman raising her hands in prayer.
- A teenaged boy with long hair and jeans.
- A kid in rags digging through the trash.

- A husky unshaven man in a flannel shirt, jeans and boots.
- A dark-skinned girl with a missing arm.

“What is prejudice? Does prejudice only involve blacks and whites [no; e.g., whites against Hispanics and Hispanics against blacks; against and among different Asian peoples; between various African tribes such as the Tutsi and Hutu; Serbs and Croats]? Does prejudice only involve race [no - it can involve various ethnic groups, level of education, economic status, language, dialect, accent, physical disability, or even a knowledge of the Bible or the way one worships]? Does God like some kinds of people more than others [Have your students support their answer from the Bible (e.g., Jesus’ ministry to the Samaritan woman, centurion, and Syrophenician woman; Galatians 3:28; Acts 2:5-12,17,39; Isaiah 56:7)]?”

“Think of your list. Do you think you are prejudiced? Why or why not and in what ways do you think this is so? What do you think can be done to get rid of prejudice (e.g., pray about it; ask God to show areas of prejudice in your life; get to know those different from you by visiting, eating, and praying with them)? Sometimes we do not even realize some of our attitudes and it takes God to point them out to us and to change us. This is what happened to Peter in today’s Bible story.”

Before reading and discussing Acts 10:1-11:18, explain to your students the animosity that existed between Jew and Gentile (it may be best to read Acts 10 and summarize Acts 11:1-18).

Questions on Acts 10:1-11:18

10:1-2 - What was a centurion? What was pleasing to God about Cornelius’ life?

10:3-8 - What was the content of the vision and how did Cornelius respond? What was significant about the fact that Peter was staying with a tanner?

10:9-16 - Why was Peter disturbed about the Lord’s command [see Leviticus 11]? Why do you think the Lord gave this vision to Peter? What did it mean?

10:17-23 - How does this passage show Peter’s obedience to God and at least a beginning understanding of the vision [he obeyed the Lord’s command and agreed to go with his visitors; he invited these Gentiles into his house to stay the night]?

10:23-26 - What was Cornelius’ attitude toward this meeting and how do these verses show this [note how he had gathered friends and relatives together not even knowing when or if Peter would come; also his reverence toward Peter]?

10:27-29 - How do you think Peter felt about this meeting?

10:30-33 - How do you think God felt about this meeting? Name at least two purposes He seems to have had in bringing it about (and it was certainly His initiative). Cornelius did not seem to know what Peter was going to speak about, but he had obeyed God in sending for him.

10:34-43 - Peter now understands, although not completely, the meaning of the vision and the purpose for his coming to Cornelius’ house. What are the main points of Peter’s message seen in these verses?

10:44-48 - What happened that astonished the Jewish believers? What was the significance of what occurred?

11:1-3 - What complaint did the Jewish believers have against Peter? In light of what had happened, do you think this was an important and valid criticism? How do you think Peter felt about their reaction [explain how later, for a time, Peter gave in to the pressure of the Judaizers to have Gentiles conform to Jewish law - Galatians 2:11-16]?

11:4-14 - Peter here tells what happened as related in Acts 10. Can you spot any slight differences in detail [see Lesson Background]?

11:15-17 - What two events does Peter compare in this passage? What promise did Peter see as being fulfilled in what happened at Cornelius' house?

11:18 - How did the Jewish believers' attitude change when they heard what God had done? How can God change our prejudices?

As you continue your discussion, emphasize God's initiative in salvation and reconciliation and how He wishes to work in and use our lives in this as well. You may wish to tell your class how God worked in South Africa in the late twentieth century to prevent bloodshed (even secular sources attribute the avoidance of civil war to prayer and the work of God), or areas where you struggle and how God has changed / is changing your attitude toward those who are different from you. Your class may like to make a collage of magazine pictures of people from many different nationalities and ages, entitling it, "God loves all kinds of people."

PETER'S ARREST

Acts 12

Lesson Aim

That your students would realize the power of prayer and know God's goodness in watching over His people.

Memory Verse

Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:37-47; this week, Acts 2:42 - "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Lesson Background

Have you ever been in a situation you thought was hopeless? Sometimes we think things are so bad that not even God can help. The church in Acts 12 knew something of this feeling. King Herod had had James, the brother of John (a son of Zebedee, not James the Lord's brother), put to death with the sword, and, seeing that this pleased the Jews, had arrested Peter as well. Besides their personal grief, the church would feel keenly the loss of such leadership, and many probably wondered as well what such persecution would mean for their own and family members' lives. They knew the importance of turning to God in such a desperate situation, but apparently lacked confidence that the Lord would grant their requests. God, however, not only rescued Peter, but dealt with the ruler who threatened them.

Peter may have been held in the Fortress of Antonia, the prison rebuilt by Herod the Great that overlooked the Temple area. Herod seems to have deemed his prisoner quite important, for usually only one guard was chained to a prisoner. His precautions were useless, however, for the church was praying and God decided to free Peter. The Lord sent an angel to the prison who struck Peter on the side to wake him up

(would we have been sleeping so soundly knowing of our imminent execution?), and told Peter to wrap his cloak around himself (God cares for the little details of our lives) and follow him. Peter did so and the angel led him past the guards and through the iron city gate, which opened for them as easily as the chains had fallen from Peter's wrists. All this time Peter thought he was merely seeing a vision, but when the angel left him, he "came to himself" and went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. The description of Mary's house, having an outer door and with room inside for many people, as well as the fact that she had a servant girl, indicates that the family had some wealth.

The picture next related is almost comical: Many people earnestly praying, "Oh, Lord, save Peter; deliver him from Herod's clutches," Rhoda keeping the door slammed shut in Peter's face, running in to the meeting; "Peter's at the door! Peter's at the door!" "What? You must be crazy ("Oh Lord, save Peter; free him from prison") "Peter's in prison, remember?" ("Oh Lord, save Peter") "It must be his angel." Peter kept on knocking (probably as quietly as possible lest neighbors hear and report the disturbance to the authorities) and eventually the door was opened by the believers, who greeted him with astonishment. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet (one can imagine the uproar with everyone talking at once, greeting him with joy and trying to find out what had happened). He told them how the Lord had brought him out of prison and asked them to relay the news to James and the brothers as well. Peter was freed from an impossible situation by the power of God, but he then used his God-given intelligence and common sense to find a place of safety. Peter's guards did not enjoy such favor. As was customary, a guard was responsible for the life of his prisoner; Herod, after a fruitless search for Peter, having cross-examined the guards in what one would expect was a not very happy frame of mind, ordered them executed.

The Lord not only rescued Peter, but removed the very source of the threat to the church, King Herod. Herod Agrippa I (10 B.C.-44 A.D.), grandson of Herod the Great, son of Aristobulus and nephew of Herod Antipas (the ruler who executed John the Baptist), grew up in Rome, but his profligate ways forced him to flee to Idumea. He later returned to Rome and, after spending a number of months in prison for offending Emperor Tiberius, was made king of northern Palestine by the new emperor, Caligula. After Caligula's death, Emperor Claudius, Agrippa's boyhood friend, also gave Judea and Samaria into his control. Herod Agrippa was popular with the Jews, who were happy to be ruled by someone of like ethnic background (Herod's ancestry was Idumean and Hasmonean), and he wanted to maintain their favor. While living in Jerusalem, he religiously observed Jewish law, although his scruples seemed to vanish when in Rome. Three of Agrippa's children, Agrippa II, Drusilla, and Bernice are also mentioned in Acts.

While Herod Agrippa was staying in Caesarea, a delegation from Tyre and Sidon, which had been at odds with Herod but wanted to reestablish peaceful relations, since they were heavily dependent on Galilee as a source of food, asked for an audience with the king. "On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people" (Acts 12:21). Josephus describes the situation as follows: "On the second day of the spectacles, clad in a garment woven completely of silver so that its texture was indeed wondrous, he entered the theater at daybreak. There the silver, illumined by the touch of the first rays of the sun, was wondrously radiant and his flatterers raised their voices from various directions . . . addressing him as a god" (Antiquities, XIX, 8.2). "Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 12:23). Bowel disease and worms were considered particularly painful ways to die. Roundworms (if this was indeed Herod's malady) can reach a length of sixteen inches and can obstruct the intestines, causing severe pain, vomiting, and death. Whatever the secondary cause, God struck down Herod for accepting the glory due only to Him and "exhausted after five straight days by the pain in his abdomen, he departed this life in the fifty-fourth year of his life and the seventh of his reign" (Antiquities, XIX, 8.2). May we take heed that in our pride we do not usurp God's throne and glory, for He will not share His glory with anyone (Isaiah 42:8).

We may chuckle that the very people praying for Peter's deliverance could be so astounded at his release, but so often our unbelief is of equal or greater magnitude. They at least seemed to understand the power of corporate prayer and had probably met for a number of days to pray earnestly ("in a stretched out manner") for Peter (in Acts 12:5, the verb's imperfect tense indicates continuing action). Do we expect that God will answer our prayers? Of course, God is sovereign and His answers may not always be in accord with our desires. It is likely that the church had prayed for James' deliverance and yet he had been executed. However, God delights to bless His children and will answer positively those requests made in faith which are according to His will (I John 5:14-15; Matthew 18:19). He can free us from circumstances, attitudes and sins that imprison us as easily as He freed Peter from iron chains. May we believe what God says and encourage our students to do likewise. "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). May we and our students seek the Lord in earnest prayer.

Lesson Procedure

Ask your students if they have ever felt that a situation they were in was hopeless. Why did they feel this way? Discuss and then read the first part of the story below, which is adapted from an incident related in *These My People* (Lillian Dickson; Zondervan, 1966, p. 22-24). Read and discuss Acts 12 and then conclude the story. You may also wish to read the story *Trapped in a Well* in the first and second grade curriculum (Year I, Quarter 4, Lesson 12).

During World War II, the Japanese maintained harsh rule over the people of Formosa (Taiwan). The police in the remote mountain districts had the power to deal with their subjects in any way they desired and they were often cruel, especially to Christians. One day, a police chief issued the following order: "Everyone in the village must come to the police station and swear that they will not believe in Jesus; if you do not do this, you will be tied hand and foot, weighted with a stone, and thrown from the bridge into the river far below." The people did not know what to do. The Japanese would find them no matter where they hid and they had no resources to escape the island. Besides, they had lived their whole lives in the village and knew nothing of the outside world.

That night, the people met on the mountain. "How can we be Christians?" some said. "The police will kill us!"

"They will! The chief was serious! You know how they hate us."

"I'm not so worried about me, but if I die who will take care of my children?"

"Maybe they will kill our children, too."

"The Japanese take our Bibles; how can we even know what God expects of us if we don't have God's Word?"

Finally, a boy stood up. "Don't you remember," he said. "Jesus said, 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.'"

"Yes, you are right. The police can only kill our bodies, but if we die we will go and live with Jesus."

They took a vote and everyone agreed that it was better to die than to deny Jesus. The next day they spent time praying and visiting with one another, preparing themselves to die. The police chief did not change his mind, but said that the next morning the executions would take place.

This story happened a number of years ago, but today people in many places in the world suffer for Jesus. They are often rejected by their families and friends, have difficulty getting schooling or a job, are

arrested or even killed because they stand up for their Savior. As we have been learning, the people in the early church faced similar persecution. [Read Acts 12 and discuss; you may use the following questions.]

Questions

12:1-3 - Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great, who slaughtered the babies when Jesus was born. Why did he arrest Peter?

12:3-4 - If you were a reporter, what details would you send to your newspaper about Peter's arrest?

12:5 - Why is this verse significant?

12:6 - What do we learn of Herod's attitude and Peter's attitude toward the situation from these verses [Herod took extra precautions to guard his important prisoner; Peter apparently trusted God enough to sleep]?

12:7-11 - How do these verses show God's power, God's love for Peter [angel rescued him, details of bringing clothes and sandals], and Peter's trust in God [Peter readily did what the angel said, even half asleep thinking he was seeing a vision]?

12:11 - What do you think we can learn by comparing this verse with 12:2?

12:12-16 - What positive and what negative qualities do we learn about the people praying? What do these verses teach us about God and His response to our prayers?

12:17 - How does this verse show that Peter did not presume on God's mercy [the Lord had rescued him, but he remained in danger, and so intelligently went into hiding]?

12:18-19 - God protected Peter, but the guards died as a result of his escape; this was usual procedure when a guard allowed a prisoner to escape.

12:19-25 - [Read Josephus' description of this event from the Lesson Background]. How did God protect His people from future threat? For what sin did God kill Herod?

Herod sinned by pridefully living and speaking for his own glory. The Christians who met in John Mark's mother's house sought God, but did not trust Him to bless them. Are you like Herod? Are you like those early Christians? Let's pray that God would give us the desire and help us to glorify and trust Him.

Things looked as hopeless for the people of the Formosan village as it had for Peter, but God was in control of their lives as well. The police chief decided to have a party for his men the night before they were to kill the Christians, and went to the river to get some fish for the feast. The chief, however, never got to enjoy his catch. A tree trunk or other piece of debris came down the swiftly moving water and broke his leg. He was a good swimmer and might have made it to shore nonetheless, but he had been drinking too much saki. The Christians were praying when someone came to tell them the news; the man who was going to kill them had himself drowned in the river. As a result of this incident, not only were the Christians saved, but many people came to know the Lord.

Activity

Acts 12 is an excellent story for dramatization. Perhaps your students would like to act out the story for another Sunday School class. If so, it would probably be best to have your students write out dialogue ahead of time. Use speeches found in the text, adding appropriate lines as necessary. Simple costumes will also add to the enjoyment of the performance. Characters needed include (double up parts): Narrator (optional), Peter, angel, Rhoda, four guards, pray-ers.

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 13:1-15,42-52; Acts 14

Lesson Aim

That your students would know that God works through those He sends out from the local church to bring many people to Himself despite opposition.

Memory Verse

Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:37-47; this week, Acts 2:43 - “Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.”

Lesson Background

God was working step by step to bring the good news of salvation not only to the Jewish people, but to the Gentiles as well, as His witnesses spread the Gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Today’s lesson examines how the Lord used Paul and Barnabas to accomplish this task despite great opposition. As the church in Antioch was fasting and worshiping the Lord, God revealed to them (perhaps through one of the prophets listed in Acts 13:1) that He had a work for Saul and Barnabas to do. This local church then, having fasted and prayed, laid hands on them and sent them off on their missionary task.

The two traveled from Syrian Antioch on the Orontes River about sixteen miles northeast to its port city of Seleucia. From there they traveled to Salamis, the chief city on the island of Cyprus. Cyprus, which

was famous for its copper mines, had been under Roman control since 57 B.C.. Its population was primarily Greek, although many Jews lived there as well; it was also Barnabas' home (Acts 4:36). Here they proclaimed the word of God in Jewish synagogues. The people may have had some knowledge of the Gospel, for believers had come to Cyprus during the persecution that followed Stephen's death (Acts 11:19).

They traveled across the island to Paphos, where the proconsul Sergius Paulus asked them to see him because he wanted to hear the Word of God. The proconsul had an attendant, however, who was radically opposed to the Gospel and tried to turn Sergius Paulus from the faith. This Jewish sorcerer and false prophet Bar-Jesus ("son of Jesus," also called Elymas) could not stop God's purposes. "Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 'You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?'" (Acts 13:10). This is hardly the conciliatory language one might expect toward someone in the retinue of the highest official on the island, but Paul was concerned for God's glory and that God's Word might have free course in Sergius Paulus' heart. Paul then told Elymas that the hand of the Lord was against him and that he would be blind for a time (Acts 13:11). "Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching of the Lord" (Acts 13:11-12).

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia where John Mark, who had been acting as their helper, left them to return to Jerusalem. Luke does not comment on the reason for his departure, but it later led to a disagreement between Barnabas and Paul so severe that they parted company, Barnabas sailing for Cyprus with John Mark and Paul choosing Silas to accompany him on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-41). The Lord later brought reconciliation, however, for Paul asked Timothy to bring Mark with him, for "he is helpful to me in my ministry" (II Timothy 4:11; see also Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24). From Perga they traveled to Pisidian Antioch, the chief town of Phrygia (that is, southern Galatia) featuring an aqueduct and large altar to a false deity. Paul spoke in the synagogue in Antioch, which message Luke records (we will skip this text recorded in Acts 13:16-41). Many people were touched by God's Word and asked Paul and Barnabas to return the following Sabbath. When the next week almost the entire city turned out, the Jews were filled with jealousy and spoke abusively against Paul. "Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: 'Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles'" (Acts 13:46). "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). The Word of the Lord spread through the whole region, but again the Jews incited persecution against Paul and Barnabas, forcing them to leave.

They went to ancient Iconium, a Greek city state and wealthy commercial center famous for its weaving; it had a mixed Jewish, Greek, and Roman population. As they spoke in the synagogue, many Jews and Gentiles believed, but those Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles against them. Nonetheless, "Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders" (Acts 14:3). "The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles" (Acts 14:4; note that Barnabas is referred to as an apostle here, though he is obviously not one of the Twelve). Some of the Jews and Gentiles conspired together to stone Paul and Barnabas, but they found out about it and fled to Lystra, a Roman military city with many aristocratic Romans, a few Jews, and the native Lyconians.

In Lystra, God used Paul to heal a man who had been crippled from birth. "When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lyconian language, 'The gods have come down to us in human form!' Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker" (Acts 14:11-12). The people's reaction may have come in part from an old legend retold by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* in which Zeus and Hermes, disguised as ordinary human beings, came to the Phrygian hill

country seeking a place to stay. Although they sought shelter at 1000 homes, no one would extend their hospitality except a poor old couple, Philemon and Baucis. Zeus and Hermes transformed Philemon's house into a temple with a golden roof but sent a flood to destroy the houses of those who had refused them lodging. The healing of a lame man obviously indicated supernatural powers were at work, and the Lyconians did not want to make the same mistake twice. When the priest of Zeus brought bulls to offer sacrifice, Paul and Barnabas finally realized what was happening (apparently before they were prevented from doing so by the language barrier), and tore their clothes in horror at the blasphemy (we might not readily accept worship as gods, but do we accept praise for ourselves that rightly belongs to God?). They rushed into the crowd shouting that they, too, were only men, but that they brought good news, telling them to turn from worthless idols to the living God. Paul continued to speak to the mob and, adapting his message to his audience, based his reasoning on the testimony God has given in nature rather than the philosophical arguments he used with a more educated populace in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). Even then, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from offering sacrifice. Yet how fickle men are! Some Jews from Antioch and Iconium came (showing the extent of their hatred for the Gospel) and won over the crowd (possibly convincing them that they were not gods, but evil, dangerous magicians). They stoned Paul, leaving him for dead, "but after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe" (Acts 14:20).

Paul and Barnabas preached in Derbe (a frontier city with little contact with Roman society) and brought a large number of people to the Lord. They then courageously returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, "strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith" (Acts 14:22). They told them, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" (Acts 14:23). The apostles then returned to Antioch on the Orontes by way of Perga and Attalia, preaching as they went. They gathered the church together and reported what God had done through them and how He had brought Gentiles to Himself. The Lord had indeed done great things through Paul and Barnabas despite great opposition. May He use us and our students likewise.

Lesson Procedure

Begin your lesson with the following story:

Once upon a time there was a man named John who had been given a wonderful gift by the king. It was an apple tree, but not an ordinary apple tree. Oh, no! The fragrance of the blossoms and of the ripening fruit beckoned, full of promise. Those who sought the fruit were not disappointed. The fruit from this tree was the most wonderful that could possibly be imagined. The apples had a firm, deep scarlet skin, which when pierced showed pure white flesh without blemish. And the taste! The taste was out of this world, crisp and sweet, yet with just enough tartness to add zest and make the sweetness more prized. As if this were not enough, the apples were magic fruit, bringing deep peace, joy and contentment to those who partook of them.

The king gave John certain instructions when he gave him the tree. "I want you to take good care of this special tree. See that you cultivate it well and that it gets plenty of sun, water and fertilizer. Also, you must not keep this fruit only for yourself. You must share it with your neighbors so that they can enjoy the fruit and even plant the seeds to grow offshoots of this tree for themselves."

John was most anxious to do what the king said. He looked after the tree and even shared some apples with his friends. A few took the fruit and were grateful. However, many people rejected his gift! Some took it politely so they wouldn't hurt his feelings and later threw it in the trash. Some said no thank

you, they didn't like apples, and refused to accept them. Others seized the apples and threw them at him, mocking John for believing in magic fruit. Their harsh laughter ringing in his ears, John went home to munch on the fruit.

That helped, for the magic apple brought him peace. Why, John wondered, should he share his apples with people who didn't appreciate them? It was so much nicer to stay in the garden and not venture outside its walls. John liked to sit under the tree, eating apples and sometimes reading from the book the king had given him (even the parts about taking care of apple trees and sharing the fruit). If people really wanted his apples, they could come and ask him for some. Then he would be glad to share.

Sometimes people did ask about the tree, for they could smell its beautiful fragrance and see its green branches peeking over the wall. Yet more and more, John was reluctant to talk about the tree and after a while, people stopped asking. John stopped spending so much time under the apple tree, too, for somehow the fruit didn't seem to taste as good anymore. Unlike some tree owners, however, John did not neglect his tree. The tree continued to produce apples and John built a shed to store them in. Now he would have plenty of fruit to feed himself during the cold winter. Day by day his hoard of apples grew higher and higher and John smiled contentedly.

One day John noticed an unusual smell as he added more fruit to the ever-increasing pile, but as he continued to sniff the air, his nose got used to the odor, and he assumed it was nothing. The next day the pungent apple smell again greeted his nostrils, but he was in a hurry and again ignored it. Life was busy and it was more than two weeks before John visited the shed. When he opened the door, John was almost knocked down by the fetid stench. His apples were rotten! Maggots crawled over the putrefaction. How could this have happened? Then John remembered the words of the king: "Share the good things you have been given with those in need." And John sat down and wept.

God has given us a gift more precious than John's magic apple tree. He wants us to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with those around us. God used Paul and Barnabas to spread His Word to the Jews and also Gentile peoples. They met with much opposition, but God was faithful to take care of them and used them to bring many people to Himself.

Bible Story

Read and discuss Acts 13:1-15, 42-52 and Acts 14. This passage can be divided into six sections:

- Apostles sent (Acts 13:1-3)
- Cyprus - Sergius Paulus and Elymas (Acts 13:4-12)
- Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-15,42-52; Acts 13:16-41 contains Paul's sermon at Antioch, which we will not study in this lesson)
- Iconium- many believe but Jews persecute (Acts 14:1-7)
- Lystra - lame man healed, Lyconians worship apostles, and Paul stoned (Acts 14:8-20)
- Derbe and return to previous cities (Acts 14:21-28)

Concentrate on the ministry at Paphos on Cyprus and at Lystra, bringing out such lessons as God's power over Satan, giving glory to God rather than ourselves, and the Lyconians' fickleness as compared to the apostles' courageous faithfulness to God in the midst of great opposition. You may also approach the passage by having the class as a whole, or small groups each taking a section, examine the passage for evidences of how God's people triumphed over the power of evil. The following are some of the things they may find:

- Power of evil - opposition by sorcerer (Acts 13:6-8); opposition by Jews (Acts 13:45; 13:50; 14:2,4-6); false worship (Acts 14:11-18); Paul stoned (Acts 14:19).
- Power of God - Holy Spirit set apart Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2-3); believers worship, fast, pray (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23); apostles proclaim Word of God (Acts 13:5,12,14-15; 14:1,7,25); Paul confronts Elymas with the power of God (Acts 13:9-11); people believe in God (Acts 13:12,48; 14:1,21-22); Paul boldly confronts opposition (Acts 13:46-47; 14:3; also courage in Acts 14:20-23); apostles do miracles (Acts 14:3,8-10); Paul revives after stoning (Acts 14:20).

Questions on Acts 13:4-12

13:4-5 - Why could Barnabas and Saul be confident as they set off to tell people about the Lord [they had been sent by the Holy Spirit]?

13:6-7 - How do these verses, which describe the characters of the “story,” point to eventual conflict? Could conflict have been avoided? How, and would that have been good?

13:8-11 - Imagine you have been invited to speak to the governor of your state about the Lord. Amazed that he wanted to speak to you, you would dress in your finest clothes, use your best manners, and carefully choose just the right words you feel would convince him of your beliefs. Can you imagine, on such an occasion, turning to his most trusted advisor and calling him a “child of the devil”? It took courage for Saul to say what he did, but he did so in obedience to the Lord. How did the events in this passage bring glory to God?

13:12-13 - What change occurred in the proconsul’s life? Why did he believe?

Questions on Acts 14:8-20

14:8-10 - Sometimes the miracles in the Bible seem no more real than when Roadrunner jumps up after being flattened by a ten-ton truck. This man in Lystra, however, was as alive as you and underwent the same difficulties as any disabled person today (he perhaps had an even more difficult time in that society where almost no jobs existed for the handicapped). Imagine his feelings and life before and after his healing. Paul “saw that he had faith to be healed.” Is faith always necessary for God to heal someone? Is it important?

14:11-13 - Why did the crowd think Paul and Barnabas were gods [you may wish to share some background information here]? Why might not the apostles have realized what was happening at first?

14:14-15 - Why did Paul and Barnabas tear their clothes?

14:15-17 - What did Paul and Barnabas tell the Lyconians about God. What did they exhort them to do?

14:18-19 - What do you think these verses show about the constancy and dependability of most groups of people? Can you think of examples of this same sort of fickleness?

14:19-20 - God still had a purpose for Paul’s life on earth, and so he recovered from a brutal stoning when others in similar situations had died (Acts 7:54-60). Can you imagine how difficult it would be for Paul to go back to the city where he had been stoned and left for dead?

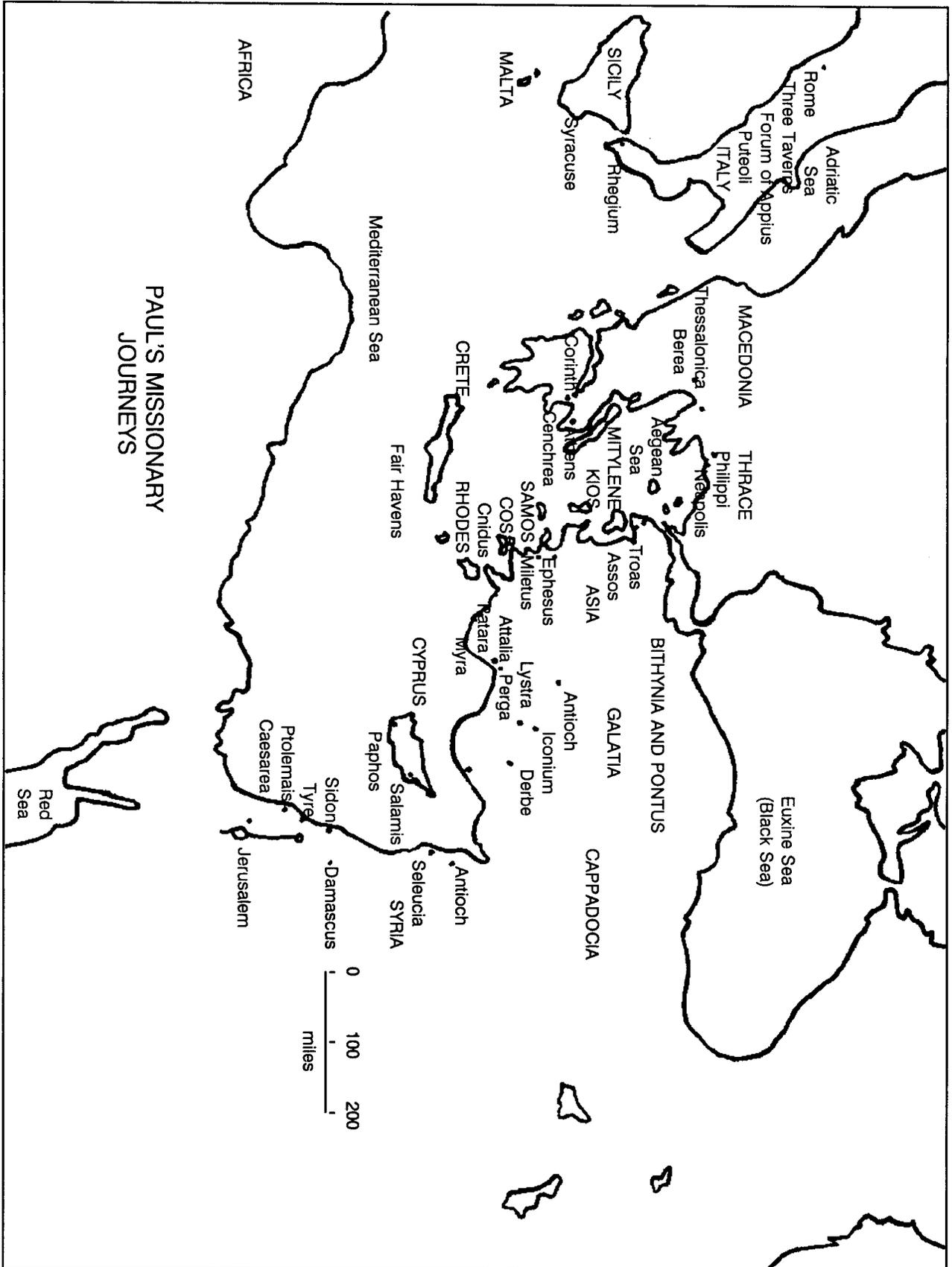
Maps

Have your students color the land and water on their maps with two different-colored pencils (preferably shades of brown or green and blue) and then trace Paul’s first missionary journey in a third color. You may use this exercise to review briefly what happened at each location.

Syrian Antioch ⇒ Seleucia ⇒ Salamis (on Cyprus) ⇒ Paphos (on Cyprus) ⇒ Perga (in Pamphylia) ⇒ Pisidian Antioch ⇒ Iconium ⇒ Lystra ⇒ Derbe ⇒ Lystra ⇒ Iconium ⇒ Pisidian Antioch ⇒ Perga ⇒ Attalia ⇒ Syrian Antioch

Activity

Continue with your missions project, reading a missionary biography and/or practicing your play about Acts 12.



PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

Acts 15

Lesson Aim

That your students would realize God’s unconditional love for His people, which is dependent on His grace, not our works.

Memory Verses

Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:37-47; this week, review Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:37-43.

Lesson Background

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). It can be very difficult to grasp this truth and the extent of God’s love for us, and if accepting the doctrine of justification by faith alone, not only intellectually but in the depths of our hearts, is hard for us in the twenty-first century, how much more so for the early church steeped in Judaism.

“Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). Paul and Barnabas, who had seen many Gentiles come to Christ without following the Law, disagreed vehemently with this position. They and some other believers were appointed by the church to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. Paul and Barnabas were welcomed by the leadership, and they told them all that God had been doing through them. A group of believers who were Pharisees, however, insisted that the Gentiles must obey the Mosaic Law, and so the apostles and elders met to consider the issue.

After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed the group. He first indicated his qualifications to speak: God had appointed him to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles and had used him in this way. He went on to point out that God had demonstrated His acceptance of uncircumcised believers by giving them the Holy Spirit as He had done at Pentecost, making no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Both peoples had been saved by the grace of Christ, so why, Peter argued, should the Jews impose a yoke on the Gentiles that the Jews themselves had been unable to bear? After this, the whole assembly listened in silence as Barnabas and Paul described the miracles God had wrought among the Gentiles through them.

Then James, Jesus' brother, spoke up, giving scriptural evidence for the Gentiles' turning to God (Amos 9:11-12), and suggested that they should impose no burden upon them except "telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood" (Acts 15:20). We assume that James did not regard these regulations as requisites for salvation, but (except for the moral prohibition against fornication) as wise adaptations to the cultural situation so as not to alienate unnecessarily the Jewish faction within the church or society to whom they were witnessing. James concluded by saying, "For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath" (Acts 15:21). Whether he meant this statement as additional support of his advice to avoid needlessly offending Jewish scruples, or to say that Christians should concentrate on grace because there was already plenty of teaching available about the Law, is uncertain.

The apostles, elders, and church as a whole agreed with what had been said and sent Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas to Antioch with a letter to that effect. The letter indicated that the men who had disturbed them by asserting that circumcision was necessary for salvation had come without the authority of the Jerusalem church, and wrote of the four prohibitions recommended by James. The recipients of the letter were glad of its encouraging message. Prophets Judas and Silas also said much to encourage and strengthen these believers. After they left, Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch for a time preaching and teaching God's Word.

After a time, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they revisit the towns where they had preached the Word and see how the Christians were doing. A sharp disagreement arose between them because Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them and Paul did not think it wise because he had deserted them in Pamphylia. The altercation was so severe that the two parted company, Paul taking Silas as a companion and Barnabas sailing with Mark for Cyprus. The Lord apparently brought reconciliation in later days, however, for Paul asked Timothy to bring Mark with him, deeming him helpful to his ministry (II Timothy 4:11; see also Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24).

The issues dealt with at the council at Jerusalem were not minor matters of ceremony, but go to the heart of the Gospel. Paul spoke in strong terms about these matters in his letter to the Galatians: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!" (Galatians 1:6-8). With equal fervor, Paul continued his arguments later in his letter: "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Galatians 3:1-3). God's love for us is not dependent on our obedience. There is nothing we can do to contribute to our justification. In fact, if we rely on observing the law, we are under a curse! (Galatians 3:10). The law condemns rather than justifies. What then is the purpose of the law? Paul says that it has become a schoolmaster, a tutor to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24; see KJV or NASB). The law shows us our utter inability to keep God's standards and please Him of our own initiative (Romans 3:19-20; 7:7-11).

Only by placing our faith in Jesus Christ (a faith that comes from God in the first place!) can we be justified and reconciled to God (Romans 5:1-2; Ephesians 2:8-10; II Corinthians 5:18-19). Are we relying on our work for God as the basis of our approval or trusting in the finished work of Christ? “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling, naked come to thee for dress, helpless look to thee for grace, foul I to the fountain fly, wash me Savior or I die” (Augustus Toplady, *Rock of Ages*). Praise God for His marvelous and unfathomable grace!

Lesson Procedure

Bring in small blocks, boxes, dominoes or pennies and ask your students to stack them. Can they pile them up to the ceiling? Obviously not. Some may do a better job than others, but the task set forth is impossible, as hopeless as our trying to keep the Law of God. Do not discuss the parallel at this point, but tell the following story:

Story

Justin looked up the steep path overhung by branches of towering trees and scrunched up his small face. He could do it. He knew he could. He could climb the mountain. Determinedly he trudged off, his tiny sneakers kicking up dust. At first, it didn't seem too hard. He loved the smell of the pines, the chirp of the robin and coo of the mourning dove. As he climbed, though, he began to get tired. The air got cooler, but Justin hardly noticed as he brushed the sweat from his face with a grimy hand. The perspiration stung the scratches he'd gotten in an encounter with a sticker bush. His jeans were ripped and dirty from having fallen over a small log in the underbrush. The mountain was so big, much larger than he'd thought!

Justin sat down to rest briefly, but got up to continue the trek. He wasn't going to give up now. Shortly thereafter he came upon a dried stream bed. A tree fallen across the high banks seemed the best way across. Cautiously, Justin proceeded several steps onto the trunk. As his distance from the bank and height from the trickle of water many feet below him increased, Justin crouched down and began crawling over the gnarled surface of the timber. All was silent except for the faint murmur of insects and the rapid beating of Justin's heart. Suddenly, a noise shattered the stillness. A huge, wild-looking dog appeared on the bank behind the child, barking furiously. Startled, Justin turned to look, lost his hold on the log, and tumbled ten feet into the mud below. Everything became dark. After a time, Justin came groggily awake to find himself looking into a kind face and feeling strong arms gently cradling his body. “The mountain,” he said. “I gotta climb the mountain.” “Oh, my son,” said the man holding him. “You'll get to the top of the mountain. But you can't do it yourself. I must carry you there.”

There is a mountain that is impossible for us to climb as well: keeping God's Law. Later we will discuss what God's Word says about this, but now we will look at how this issue affected the early church. At first, only Jews believed in Jesus, but as time went on, through the ministry of such men as Philip, Paul and Barnabas, more and more Gentiles came to know the Lord as well. Some Jewish believers insisted that the Gentiles who turned to Christ be circumcised and obey the entire Law of Moses. Peter disagreed.

[Read and discuss Acts 15. Then read Galatians 3:1-5, 10-14, 21-25 and Ephesians 2:8-10 and discuss the purpose of the Law and the nature of grace. You may use the following questions].

Questions on Acts 15

15:1 - What was the basis of salvation according to the men who came from Judea? Why would they think this? What is the true basis of salvation (we will discuss this further later)?

15:2 - What are some ways people deal with each other when they disagree about something? What do you usually do when you have a dispute with someone? How did the believers decide to resolve their differences? Do you think this was a good idea? Why or why not?

15:3-4 - What good news did Paul and Barnabas spread as they traveled? How were they greeted by the church in Jerusalem?

15:5-11 - What were Peter's qualifications to speak to this issue? What arguments did he use to present his case?

15:12 - What other evidence supported what Peter had said?

15:13-19 - What did James advise the leaders to do and what were the reasons he gave for this conclusion? This James was Jesus' brother, not the James who was John's brother, the son of Zebedee who had been killed by Herod (Acts 12:2).

15:20-21 - Why do you think James included these regulations for the Gentiles to follow? Doesn't this seem to contradict what he had just said? Why do you think he made the statement about Moses being read in the synagogues?

15:22-30 - What was the final plan of the Jerusalem Council? Summarize the content of their letter.

15:31-35 - What two things encouraged the recipients of the letter from the Jerusalem Council?

15:36-40 - Over what did Paul and Barnabas have a sharp disagreement? What was the immediate outcome of their quarrel? How may God have used this problem for good? Do you know if Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark ever resolved their differences (see II Timothy 4:11; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24)?

Questions on Ephesians 2:8-9

According to these verses, how is a person saved? What is grace? Where does faith come from?

Questions on Galatians 3

3:1-5 - On what basis were the Galatians trying to be made right with God? What evidence does Paul use to show how foolish this is?

3:10-14 - What does Paul say about those who rely on observing the law to be justified (declared righteous in God's sight)? Who redeemed us from the curse of the law? How did He do so? How did His death bless the Gentiles?

3:21-25 - What was the purpose of the law? Why are Christians no longer under the supervision of the law? Does this mean they can sin and do whatever they want?

To think about

On the basis of what we studied today, do you believe you are a Christian (you do not have to answer out loud)? Are you trying to justify yourself before God on the basis of your good works or on the basis of what Christ has done (even if you are a Christian, you may sometimes fail to rest completely in Christ's finished work)?

Songs

"Rock of Ages" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #499)

Activity

Have your students draw pictures of how people try to justify themselves before God. Tape the word *God* on the wall and tape the pictures at varying distances from *God*, but all woefully short of the mark. Ask them to consider in what ways they try to justify themselves.

Alternate activity: Have your students draw comic strips illustrating God's grace and man's inability to justify himself.

Alternate activity: Continue reading your missions biography and/or continue with your missions project.

Next week

Next week's Bible story is presented as a play for three characters. You should ask two of your students, or preferably two adults, to read two of the parts; give them the script ahead of time. See Year II, Quarter 1, Lesson 10 for details.

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 16:1-18:22

Lesson Aim

That your students may learn the importance of speaking boldly for the Lord and rejoicing in Him no matter what the circumstance.

Memory Verse

Acts 1:8; Acts 2:37-47; this week, Acts 2:44-45: “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”

Lesson Background

Today’s lesson will take a different approach than usual since it covers such a large amount of material. The basic content of Acts 16:1-18:22 is presented in dramatic form as if Silas and Timothy were on a Christian talk show. The dialogue, including Silas’ and Timothy’s comments on their journey, are imaginary, but the basic facts are accurate. This may seem an odd, even irreverent, format for presenting the Bible story, but if done seriously and carefully, it can be used with profit.

Because of the lesson’s length and format, extensive background material will not be incorporated. Here are a few facts, however, that you and your students may find interesting and helpful:

- Philippi, named for Philip of Macedon, Alexander the Great’s father, was a Roman colony.
- Thyatira was famous for a dye made from the madder root, which substituted for a more expensive dye obtained from the murex shell.
- The word used to describe her indicates that the slave girl in Philippi was quite young.

- Thessalonica was the largest port in Macedonia.
- As their host, Jason would be held responsible for Paul and Silas' actions as if they belonged to his family.
- Stoicism was a school of philosophy founded by Zeno around 308 B.C. that emphasized natural law, virtue found out by reason, and remaining indifferent to pain, desire, and emotion. Epicureanism maintained that knowledge came through the senses and that pleasure was the goal of life; they denied the immortality of the soul.
- The unknown God was said to have long ago stayed a plague when prayers to other gods had proved fruitless.
- Corinth was the political and economic center of Greece.
- Tentmakers were skilled craftsmen who dealt in all sorts of leather work as well as leather and goat's-hair tents. Craftsmen belonged to guilds in which members cooperated rather than competed with each other. These guilds were not just trade organizations, but social leagues around which the artisan's whole life would center. Jews and believers would be rejected by these guilds since they would refuse to participate in the pagan sacrifices that were an important part of membership. Therefore, Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla had extra cause to rejoice in their providential meeting.

Lesson Procedure

If possible, have three adults act out the following play, which summarizes Paul's second missionary journey. If this is not feasible, have students who are excellent readers play one or two of the parts (give them the script ahead of time; the moderator is the easiest part), or read all of the parts yourself. Explain to your class that while this conversation is imaginary, the basic events described in it are true. Challenge your students to read Acts 16-18 on their own this week. A few facts from the passage are not included in the play - Timothy, the son of an unbelieving Greek father and Jewish Christian mother, joined Silas and Paul in Lystra. The brothers spoke highly of him. Paul circumcised Timothy so as not to cause offense to the Jews (Acts 16:1-3). Before Paul left Syria with Priscilla and Aquila, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken (Acts 18:18).

Questions on the Bible story

- Name five major cities Paul and his friends visited and tell what happened there [write on board as listed - Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth].
- Identify three people who became Christians as a result of Paul's second missionary journey.
- What did they do after they believed (they were baptized and extended love and hospitality)?
- Give examples of how God guided Paul and his friends on the second missionary journey.
- Give examples of how God protected Paul and his friends on the second missionary journey.
- Can you give an example of a time when God guided or protected you?
- Why do you think there was so much opposition to Paul and his friends?
- Can you tell us about a time when you or someone you know stood up for Christ despite opposition?
- Why do you think Paul and Silas rejoiced despite their suffering? Other places in God's Word command us to do this (Philippians 4:4; James 1:2). Can you tell us of a time when you learned to rejoice in the Lord during a difficult time?

Maps

Have your students trace Paul's second missionary journey on their maps using a different colored pencil than they did for the first missionary journey. Below is a list of the cities and regions (in parentheses) visited:

Antioch ⇒ (Syria) ⇒ (Cilicia) ⇒ Derbe ⇒ Lystra ⇒ (Mysia) ⇒ Troas ⇒ (Samothrace - islands in the Aegean Sea) ⇒ Neapolis ⇒ Philippi ⇒ Amphipolis and Apollonia (passed through) ⇒ Thessalonica (riot at Jason's house) ⇒ Berea (people studied the Scriptures) ⇒ Athens ⇒ Corinth ⇒ Cenchrea *⇒ Ephesus *⇒ Caesarea ⇒ Antioch

*⇒ traveled by ship

Activity

Continue reading a missionary biography and/or doing your missions project for the quarter.

Of course there was no T.V. or radio in Bible times, but imagine that Paul's friends Silas and Timothy had been asked to speak on a Christian talk show program. The following drama presents such a scenario. The situation and dialogue are entirely fictitious, but the facts that come out in their conversation are true. Check out what actually happened in Acts 16:1-18:22.

Silas and Timothy discuss Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Characters: talk show host moderator (M), Silas (S), and Timothy (T)

- M: We have with us Silas and Timothy, recently back from a dangerous trip through Asia Minor and Macedonia where they spread the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are sorry that their fellow-traveler Paul could not join them today. Silas, Timothy, of all the locations you visited, what made the greatest impression?
- T: Oh my, that's a tough question. God worked mightily in so many places.
- S: Certainly Philippi stands out as a place where the Lord touched people's lives. We'd heard that there was a place of prayer by the river outside the city, so we went and spoke to the women there. One Sabbath day, the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, a seller of purple cloth from Thyatira. We stayed at her house and she and her whole household were baptized.
- M: That's great. Did anything else happen in Philippi? How did you decide to go there in the first place? I thought you'd planned to go to Asia?
- S: We did, but the Holy Spirit prevented us. Then God gave Paul a vision of a Macedonian man asking us for help, so we figured we ought to go there. We went to Philippi, the leading city in Macedonia and a Roman colony. That vision was an encouragement considering what else happened in Philippi.
- M: What was that?
- S: Well, one day when we were walking to the place of prayer by the river, we met a young slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She followed us shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept it up for so many days that finally Paul said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!" At that very moment, the spirit left her.
- T: The girl's masters were none too pleased! They made lots of money by having her tell fortunes.
- S: You're telling me they were angry! They seized Paul and me and dragged us into the marketplace to face the magistrates, who ordered us stripped, beaten, and thrown into prison. It was humiliating. They flogged us severely, too. Such pain . . . it's almost beyond comprehension. Yet think of the shame and agony our Lord endured for us! And God gave us such joy in that prison!
- M: Joy? How could you be happy under such circumstances?
- S: I don't know if *happy* is the right word. I certainly don't enjoy being flogged. But it is a privilege to suffer for the Lord. We knew when we were beaten, and later when they put us in an inner cell with our feet fastened to stocks, that God was in control of the circumstances. He put great joy in our hearts.
- M: That is amazing. Well, you are obviously no longer in prison. What happened? Did the magistrates let you out?
- S: About midnight, Paul and I were praying and singing hymns - the other prisoners were listening too - when all of a sudden there was a violent earthquake and the foundations of the prison were shaken. I'm glad the roof didn't fall in on our heads! The prison doors flew open and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open he was going to kill himself with his sword because he thought we'd all escaped.
- T: He must have really been scared. They would have killed him if you had escaped, so he must have thought suicide the more honorable alternative. Not that it is.

- S: Well, he didn't need to worry. Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" and the jailer called for lights and came in trembling and asking, "What must I do to be saved?" We told him to believe in the Lord Jesus. He took us in, washed our wounds and we spoke God's Word to his whole household; they all believed and were baptized that very night. In the morning, the magistrates ordered our release, but Paul refused to slip away quietly. We are Roman citizens and they had us beaten and imprisoned without a trial!
- M: Could you explain to our audience what you mean about being a Roman citizen?
- S: Roman citizenship is an hereditary privilege, although some people do purchase citizenship for large sums of money. Among other things, it means that one cannot be imprisoned without due process of law; regrettably, this can happen to the common people. It is a capital offense to claim Roman citizenship falsely. On the other hand, it is dangerous for authorities to take lightly the prerogatives of true Roman citizenship. The magistrates could have lost their jobs for what they did to us. No wonder they were so conciliatory when Paul told them our status.
- T: Silas almost ended up in jail again at Thessalonica.
- M: Really? What happened?
- S: For three Sabbath days, Paul had been preaching in the synagogue, proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah who had to suffer and rise from the dead. Many God-fearing Greeks and a number of Jews were persuaded by what he said, but some Jews formed a mob and started a riot. They went to Jason's house looking for us. When they didn't find us, they arrested Jason and some other brothers, accusing them of defying Caesar's decrees because we say that Jesus is King. They let them go after making them post bond, but we got out of there as soon as it got dark and went to Berea.
- T: I really liked those Bereans. They were so eager to hear the message, and every day they examined the Scriptures to see if what Paul was saying was true. Many of the Jews believed as well as a number of Greeks.
- S: But some Jews came over from Thessalonica and stirred up the crowds, so we sent Paul to the coast while we stayed on at Berea; he later sent for us to join him in Athens.
- M: Ah, Athens - the capital of Greece. But a city filled with idolatry, I hear.
- T: Yes, it is. That distressed Paul a great deal.
- M: Let's talk a little more about Paul. Did he have good opportunities to speak to the people in Athens?
- T: Yes. If nothing else, the Athenians like to talk and argue about ideas. You should have seen Paul trying to present the Gospel to Stoics and Epicureans at the same time.
- M: Stoics and Epicureans?
- S: Stoics try to live by logic and remain indifferent to pain and emotion, while Epicureans view pleasure as the goal of life.
- T: I appreciated the way Paul used the Greeks' own culture, using words of Greek authors, and even the presence of the idols around him, to communicate the Gospel. He told the intellectual elite who meet regularly on the Areopagus - uh, that's Mars' hill - that Athens' altar to the unknown God was really an attempt to reach the true God who made heaven and earth.
- S: Athens certainly is an evil city, but I think Corinth may be even worse.
- T: Some good things happened in Corinth, though. Paul met fellow-tentmakers Aquila and Priscilla, who had come to the city when Emperor Claudius forced all the Jews to leave Rome. And Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his whole household believed in the Lord.
- S: Most of the Jews didn't, though. They stopped Paul speaking in the synagogue so he had to go next door to Titius Justus' house to preach.
- T: Yet, as you said before, God was in control. It seems when things look the worst, He will often do something to encourage us. God spoke to Paul in a vision and told him not to be afraid, but to keep on speaking, for God was with him and no one would harm him because the Lord had many people in the city.
- S: That word from the Lord must have been heartening when Paul was brought before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, though Gallio threw the case out of court.

M: What did Paul do then?
T: He finally left Corinth after a year and a half and went with Priscilla and Aquila to Ephesus, where he spent some time before sailing for Caesarea and back to Antioch.
M: Well, you certainly had some amazing adventures.
S: Yes, we did, but the Lord was with us through it all, taking care of us and blessing us in many ways. The Gospel of the Kingdom was preached in many places and God brought many people to Himself.
M: Thank you for being on the show with us today. Perhaps you can join us again sometime.
T: We would like that. Thank you for having us.

THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 18:23-21:14

Lesson Aim

That your students can see how God worked in and through the life of Paul, and that He can work in our lives as well.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:37-47; this week, Acts 2:46: “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”

Lesson Background

The Lord worked greatly through Paul as he traveled on his third missionary journey throughout Asia, Macedonia, and Greece, revisiting churches and preaching the Gospel to those who had never heard. The Bible story will again be covered in a summary fashion due to its length.

Acts 18:23-19:7 - When Paul arrived at Ephesus he met a group of about twelve disciples and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” The disciples answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ So Paul asked, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’ ‘John’s baptism,’ they replied” (Acts 19:2-3). Baptism was not a uniquely Christian practice; those who became Jews often went through a ceremonial cleansing. That they had never heard of the Holy Spirit may seem odd to us who have a long Christian tradition and who are used to instant access to information from the other side of the world, but these disciples were not the only ones who were only aware of John’s baptism (John being, of course, John the Baptist). Apollos, a native of Alexandria, was “a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately” (Acts 18:24-25). Yet he, too, knew only the baptism of John, so Priscilla and Aquila

“explained to him the way of God more adequately” (Acts 18:26). Paul told the Ephesian disciples, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus” (Acts 19:4). When they became aware of this, they were baptized in Jesus’ name and when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them as He had the disciples at Pentecost and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Acts 19:8-22 - Paul stayed for more than two years in Ephesus, the chief city in that part of Asia, speaking in the synagogue and then in a nearby lecture hall. Ephesus, which was located at the mouth of the Cayster River, was a free city with its own senate and civic assembly. It boasted a 25,000-seat amphitheater and the temple of Artemis, which was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. This Artemis was regarded as a fertility goddess rather than the virgin huntress Artemis (Diana) of Greek mythology. She was represented by an image carved from a meteor that had fallen there.

Occult practice was rife in the city. The Lord used Paul to cast out demons and do other miracles. Some Jews seem to have been impressed and tried to exorcize the evil spirits “in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches” (Acts 19:13). One day when the seven sons of a Jewish chief priest named Sceva tried this, the evil spirit answered them and said, “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” (Acts 19:15). The demon-possessed man, with supernatural strength, jumped on the men and beat them so that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. “When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor” (Acts 19:17). Many believers confessed their evil practices and a number who had engaged in sorcery burned their scrolls, which together were valued at 50,000 drachmas (a drachma was a day’s wage).

Acts 19:23-41 - The Lord worked powerfully in so many lives in Ephesus that the whole fabric of society began to be affected. Many businesses were tied in with the worship of Artemis, from those who provided sacrificial animals or fodder for them to souvenir sellers and refreshment vendors. A silversmith named Demetrius, upset at the economic slump caused by the believers who no longer frequented the temple, stirred up workmen in related trades by appealing to their loyalty to the goddess, as well as mentioning the monetary implications of what was occurring. The crowd was incensed and seized Paul’s traveling companions Gaius and Aristarchus and dragged them into the theater. Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but his friends prevented him, realizing the danger to his life. When a Jewish man named Alexander tried to speak to the mob, they began to shout, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians,” and could not be quieted for two hours. Finally the city clerk, the most important official in Ephesus, who acted as liaison between the assembly and the Roman government, quieted the crowd. He urged that legitimate complaints be brought before the proper authorities, the courts and proconsuls (apparently two men were temporarily taking the place of the one proconsul who had died). If news of their riotous behavior that day got back to Rome, Ephesus’ privilege of being a free city might be revoked.

Acts 20:1-12 - After this incident, Paul and his companions (see list in Acts 20:4) wisely left Ephesus and traveled through Macedonia and Greece. They visited Philippi, site of such notable happenings on Paul’s second missionary journey, and five days later went to Troas, where they spent seven days. On the evening before they left, as Paul spoke to the believers, a young man named Eutychus fell asleep while sitting in a window (it was midnight and people were used to going to bed at sunset). He fell to his death, but God was merciful and when Paul went down and put his arms around him, he pronounced him alive.

Acts 20:13-36 - Paul and his friends boarded a ship and headed toward Antioch, stopping at a number of islands along the way (see map study). When they got to Miletus near Ephesus, Paul sent for the Ephesian elders rather than unnecessarily imperiling his life by visiting the city. He spoke of his previous time with them, and warned them that when he left they should keep watch as good shepherds, for savage wolves would come and not spare the flock; even from among their own number men would arise and distort the truth,

drawing away disciples after them. Paul committed the Ephesians to God's grace and said that he would not see them again. The Ephesians grieved greatly at this news. They all prayed, wept, and embraced, and then the Ephesians accompanied Paul and his companions to their ship.

Acts 20:22-24; 21:1-14 - Paul informed the Ephesians, as well, that the Holy Spirit had repeatedly warned him that hardships and prison awaited him in Jerusalem. The question arises, then, why Paul, who wisely refused to risk his life by returning to Ephesus, would go straight toward Jerusalem even though he had been warned a number of times that danger awaited him there. Paul told the Ephesians that the same Holy Spirit who spoke of these perils was also the one compelling him to go to Jerusalem, and Paul wanted to obey God no matter what the cost. We cannot ascertain the exact reason for God's telling Paul of his future, but it must have been a great encouragement to him to realize, when these prophecies were fulfilled, that his suffering was in the Lord's plan. Two more prophecies confirmed what Paul had been told before he reached Ephesus. The phrasing of the first presumably indicates that the believers urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem in human response to the prophetic word of danger, not that God was contradicting what He had previously indicated to Paul (Acts 21:4; compare Peter telling Christ that he should not die - Matthew 16:21-28). The second occurred at the house of Philip, one of the Seven (Acts 6:1-6). He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied, but it was Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem, who brought word that the man with whose belt he tied himself (and Agabus suited action to word) would be bound by the Jews of Jerusalem and handed over to the Gentiles. Again, the believers pleaded with Paul not to continue his course, but Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). Could we answer the same? God worked mightily in and through Paul, and He will work in our lives and those of our students as well. The cost, as Paul knew, could be great. However, the reward is greater still. May we seek the Lord, asking that His will be done in our lives for His glory.

Lesson Procedure

Today's Bible passage is again quite lengthy, so it will be summarized in the following story, a discussion between two boys. If desired, you and another adult may perform this narrative as a play. Some parts of the Scripture, such as the second half of chapter twenty, are touched only lightly, and hence you should encourage your students to read this section of Acts on their own this week. When you are finished, discuss with your students how this passage shows the costs and rewards of following Christ (have them find specific instances that illustrate this).

"Hey, Michael. Whatcha doing?"

"Hi Rog. Reading the Bible."

"Ooh, how boring."

"No it's not. It's not boring at all!" I'm reading about Paul's third missionary journey, where he's telling all kinds of people about Jesus. Many people turned to the Lord, but Paul kept preaching even when they didn't and people kicked him out of the synagogues and stuff."

"Yeah? What have you read about so far?"

"A lot of the action takes place in Ephesus. My teacher said that Ephesus was a big city with a 25,000-seat theater and what was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World, a temple to this goddess Artemis."

"I think we studied about her in school. Wasn't she a Greek or Roman goddess also called Diana?"

"Uh huh. Except this goddess was worshiped as someone who would make crops grow and give you lots of kids, which was a little different. In the temple there was this big meteorite that had fallen out of the sky and that represented the goddess."

"Duh. How stupid! How could anyone ever worship a big hunk of rock?"

“Of course it’s foolish, but maybe not quite how you mean. They really worshiped the evil spirits, which they thought were gods or goddesses, not the rock or tree or whatever itself. Ephesus was a big center for demons and occult practice. Anyway, the first thing that happened when Paul arrived at Ephesus was that he ran into this group of disciples, about twelve guys. He asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ ‘No,’ they said, ‘we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ Paul asked them what baptism they’d received, and they said, ‘John’s baptism.’”

“I’m confused. What do you mean, *John’s baptism*?”

“Remember John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus? Paul said John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. There was this other guy named Apollos from Alexandria, who even though he knew the Scriptures really well and spoke about Jesus accurately, only knew the baptism of John, too. Priscilla and Aquila explained stuff to him. Anyway, when Paul told these twelve men about Jesus, they were baptized into His name. Then when Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied like the disciples did at Pentecost. God used Paul to do all kinds of things. If he even touched a handkerchief or apron and it was taken to someone who was sick, God healed him and the evil spirits left him!”

“Wow! You’re kidding!”

“Uh uh. I mean, that was pretty unusual, I guess, even for Paul ‘cause the Bible calls them extraordinary miracles. You think that was something! Listen to this. Later on in his trip he was staying for seven days with the believers in Troas. They got together on Sunday so Paul could talk to them, because he was planning to leave the next day. Well, he kept talking and talking until midnight, which might not seem super late to us, but those guys were used to going to bed and getting up with the sun, so it might have seemed like three or four in the morning to us. Anyway, there was this young man named Eutychus who was sitting in the window listening to Paul, and he was getting sleepier and sleepier as Paul kept talking.”

“Yeah, I’ve almost fallen asleep sometimes when old Mr. Hannigan has gone on too long.”

“I don’t think Paul was all that boring, but Eutychus sure was sleepy. Maybe it was the smell of all the oil lamps. Whatever, he actually did fall asleep and then fell right out of the window! The people rushed down to see if he was okay, but he wasn’t; he was dead!”

“Poor Eutychus! I bet his friends and family felt terrible.”

“Yeah, but not for long. Paul went down, threw himself on Eutychus and put his arms around him. And you know what? Eutychus came back to life again!”

“Awesome! I didn’t know God did all that stuff.”

“The Lord is a great God! It’s God working, not people. The most important thing is to know Him. It’s not like Paul just did a bunch of magic tricks or like he had any power in himself. Special words or techniques were not what was necessary, though a bunch of people back in Ephesus thought that’s all it took. Some Jews tried to drive demons out of people by using the name of the Lord Jesus. They would say, ‘In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.’ One day seven sons of this chief priest named Sceva tried to do this. The evil spirit said, ‘Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?’ Then the demon-possessed man jumped on them and beat them up so badly that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.”

“No way! One guy to seven and he beat them up? That’s so funny.”

“Demons can make a person much stronger than he would ordinarily be. And it’s not really funny. Demons are very dangerous, although God is more powerful and they couldn’t do anything if He didn’t allow it.”

“Yeah, but can’t you picture it? These seven guys who think they’re so smart and wham - suddenly they’re running for their lives naked into the street.”

“Well, the people in Ephesus didn’t see it that way. When they heard about what happened they got scared. Wait, let me see what the Bible says. Uh, yeah, here it is: ‘They were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this

way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.’ The scrolls would have had all their magic spells on them. My dad said there might have been even little scrolls put in amulets around the neck which would supposedly protect the person who wore them, but really opened them up to the demon powers.”

“How much was fifty thousand drachmas?”

“There’s a note in my Bible that says that a drachma was a silver coin worth about a day’s wage. Let’s see, my sister makes \$10.00 an hour. Let’s say she works eight hours, that’s eighty dollars a day. Okay, fifty thousand times eighty is 4000, no 40,000 - come on, Rog; you’re good at math . . .”

“You messed up the decimal point, man. It’s four million dollars! Four million dollars up in smoke - poof! That’s a lot of money! You’d think they’d have sold the scrolls if they didn’t want them anymore.”

“What, and expose other people to demonic power? They wanted to destroy anything evil in their lives. I never stopped to figure out how much money fifty thousand drachmas was, though. It can cost a lot to follow Christ, not just in terms of money of course. Speaking of money, the merchants in Ephesus didn’t like so many people turning to Christ - not at all. Think of it, all those people not buying offerings for the pagan temple anymore, or little souvenir statues of Artemis, or food and drink on the holidays. A silversmith named Demetrius who made silver shrines of Artemis called the craftsmen together from different trades and said that Paul had not only caused problems for their business, but had dishonored their goddess. They were furious. Soon it was this big mob scene. They grabbed Gaius and Aristarchus, two men from Macedonia who were traveling with Paul, and brought them into the amphitheater. Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but his friends wouldn’t let him because they figured he’d be killed before he even opened his mouth. Like I said, it was this huge mob, some shouting one thing and some another. Most of the people didn’t even know why they were there. This Jew Alexander tried to talk to the crowd, but instead of listening to him, they shouted for two hours, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.’ Finally the city clerk got them quiet and told them that they were in danger of being charged with rioting and that they should bring legal action if they really had a case against anyone. The mob went home and when things quieted down a bit, Paul figured he’d better get out of Ephesus, so he said good-bye to the disciples and continued his journey.”

“God sure took care of Paul, didn’t He. What else happened to Paul?”

“He traveled through Macedonia and Greece telling people about the Lord, and even in these travels some Jews made a plot against him. Later he was in Miletus near Ephesus, but I guess he didn’t think it was too safe to go to Ephesus, ‘cause he sent for the elders of the church to come to him. He told them to be good shepherds to the church because savage wolves would come in and hurt the flock.”

“What are you talking about, wolves and sheep?”

“The elders were supposed to look out for the church like a shepherd does his sheep, but Paul said that after he left them false teachers and such would come in, even from within the church.”

“Oh, I get it.”

“He told them a bunch of other stuff too, and that he wouldn’t see them again. They all knelt down and prayed and wept and hugged and kissed him, and then accompanied him to the ship that would take him to Jerusalem.”

“What do you mean, they wouldn’t see him again? Couldn’t he just come back for another visit?”

“I haven’t gotten that far in my reading yet, but I think something bad’s going to happen to him in Jerusalem. Listen to what he said to the Ephesians. ‘And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.’ And look what I was just reading. This is later, after they’d sailed on the ship a while and stopped at some islands. They had stopped at Tyre and the Spirit had apparently told believers there that trouble awaited him in Jerusalem and they urged him not to go, but Paul wouldn’t listen. Okay, I’ll begin reading at verse seven. ‘We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day. Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, ‘The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the

Gentiles.’” But Paul still insisted on going to Jerusalem.”

“Was Paul crazy or just some proud guy who couldn’t take advice? If God told me I’d be tied up if I went somewhere, I’d say ‘thanks’ and head in the op-po-site direction. Or didn’t he believe that what they said was from God? Did he think they were making it up? There were sure enough different ones telling him this stuff.”

“No, I think he believed them all right. He said, ‘Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ Remember when I read, ‘And now, *compelled* by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem?’ *Compelled* means to make someone do something. I don’t think it means God held a gun to Paul’s head or anything, but Paul wanted to please the Lord above all else, and somehow the Spirit let him know that He wanted him to go to Jerusalem despite what was going to happen to him.”

“Then why all this prophecy stuff, telling Paul what was going to happen? Why would God warn him ahead of time when then maybe he’d chicken out from going? Why not just surprise him?”

“Maybe so when he was in Jerusalem and all this terrible stuff was going on, he could say to himself, ‘It’s okay. God is taking care of me. He knew that this would happen. He told me it would and I can trust Him.’ Of course, he could have said that anyway even if God had not spoken through those people, but I bet those prophecies were an encouragement to him. Hey, remember when you were a little kid and had to go to the hospital to have those tubes put in your ears? Aren’t you glad your parents told you beforehand what it was going to be like? You were scared, but I think it would have been worse if all of a sudden one day they just packed you off in the car and brought you to this big building with strange smells and bright lights and people you didn’t know wearing masks.”

“I guess you’re right, but Paul sure was brave. My parents would have taken me to the hospital no matter how I complained because they knew I needed the surgery, but Paul went right ahead and did what God wanted even though he knew he’d have to suffer. I don’t understand it, but it sure takes guts. Hey, Michael, you know what? You were right. The Bible isn’t boring at all! Do you have one I could borrow or could I read over your shoulder? I want to find out if Paul really does get arrested.”

“Sure, Roger. That would be great. Just gimme a minute to run into the house and get one.”

Questions

- What question did Paul ask a group of men when he arrived in Ephesus and what did they answer? What did Paul do then and what happened?
- What extraordinary miracles did God do through Paul?
- What happened to Eutychus?
- What did seven sons of Sceva try to do and what was the result? What can we learn from this incident?
- How did the people of Ephesus react to these happenings?
- How and why did Demetrius cause trouble for Paul and his companions? Can you see any similarities between yourself and Demetrius? How did God protect here [through the advice of his friends]?
- Name another incident in this passage that showed that Paul’s friends loved him. Why do you think they had such great affection for Paul?
- Who was the prophet who used “visual aids” to tell Paul what would happen to him in Jerusalem? Why do you think Paul continued his journey despite this warning?
- What costs and what rewards of following Christ can be seen in this passage?
[costs: economic hardship - burning scrolls, loss of income if involved in trades having to do with idolatry as Demetrius was; social ostracism and persecution]
[rewards: knowing presence of God, His guidance and protection, possibility of being healed and freed from evil spirits, being used by God as Paul was when he did miracles, knowing the love of the brethren]

Map Study

Have your students trace Paul's third missionary journey on their maps using a different color pencil than for the other journeys.

Antioch ⇒ (Galatia and Phrygia) ⇒ Ephesus ⇒ (Macedonia ⇒ Achaia ⇒ Macedonia) ⇒
Philippi *⇒ Troas ⇒ Assos *⇒ Mitylene *⇒ Kios *⇒ Samos *⇒ Miletus *⇒ Cos *⇒
Rhodes *⇒ Patara *⇒ (south of Cyprus) *⇒ Tyre *⇒ Ptolemais *⇒ Caesarea ⇒ Jerusalem

*⇒ indicates travel by ship

Activity

Continue reading the missionary biography and/or working on your missions project for the quarter.

ARREST IN JERUSALEM

Acts 21:15-23:35

Lesson Aim

That your students will learn the importance of courage and being ready to share the Gospel.

Memory Verse

Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:37-47; this week, Acts 2:47: “. . . praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Lesson Background

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.” So wrote Paul to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 16:13), and Paul knew whereof he spoke. As we have studied the book of Acts, we have seen the many times Paul stood bravely for the Lord despite fierce opposition, and today’s passage is no exception.

Having been warned by the Holy Spirit that prison and hardships awaited him in Jerusalem (Acts 20:23), Paul nonetheless, in obedience to the Lord, continued his journey to that city. He arrived in Jerusalem at a time when Jewish-Gentile relations were becoming increasingly strained. Not long before, a Roman soldier’s obscene actions in the Temple area had brought about a riot in which 10,000 people were trampled to death; less than ten years after Paul’s arrest, 20,000 Jews were massacred in Caesarea. The brothers, however, greeted Paul and his companions warmly. They praised God as Paul told them the details of his trip, but made a suggestion as to how the apostle could avoid offending the Jews who had heard that he was teaching the Gentiles to turn away from the Law. He was to join with four men in their purification rites and pay their expenses to have their heads shaved (probably for a Nazirite vow). Paul did so and went

to the Temple to give notice when an offering would be made for each of them. When the seven days of the vow were nearly over, some Jews from Asia saw Paul in the Temple and stirred up a crowd against him. They accused him of bringing Greeks into a forbidden area of the Temple, although this charge was unfounded. Had he done so, there would have been cause for concern. A four-foot barrier separated the court of the Gentiles from the holier precincts of the Temple and a sign gave warning that the penalty for trespass was death.

The disruption escalated into a riot with people coming from all directions intent on killing Paul. When news reached the Roman commander, presumably at the Fortress of Antonia, which was close to the Temple area, he came at once with troops to quell the uproar. Unable to ascertain the cause of the commotion because of the violence of the mob, the commander ordered Paul to be brought into the barracks. Paul asked to speak to the crowd and was given permission to do so. The commander was startled at Paul's facility in the Greek language, thinking him to be an Egyptian terrorist (although a number of Egyptians did speak Greek). Paul then spoke in Aramaic to the crowd, which quieted down when they heard him speak in this tongue. He explained that he was not only a Jew, but zealous for God and thoroughly trained under Gamaliel. He proceeded to tell, in an account similar to that recorded in Acts 9, how Christ had met him on the road to Damascus.

The crowd listened until Paul told how the Lord had sent him to the Gentiles. Then, in a show of mourning, they began shouting and flinging dust into the air, calling for Paul's death. The commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks and flogged to determine the reason for the mob's animosity. This technique, called *coercito*, was often used to obtain evidence but was forbidden to be used on Roman citizens. Paul told the centurion of his Roman citizenship and, as in Philippi, gained the upper hand legally, for the empire placed high value on this privilege.

The commander, still in a quandary as to what to do about the situation, ordered Paul to stand before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body, to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. Paul stated his innocence and was immediately slapped in the mouth by the order of Ananias, the high priest. Paul spoke back in no uncertain terms and was rebuked by those who questioned his impertinence in insulting the high priest. Paul replied that he did not know that Ananias was the high priest. Paul may have been speaking truthfully or sarcastically. The high priest usually sat in a particular place and wore distinctive clothing, but that may not have been the case at this gathering. Ananias was a scoundrel known for his greed. "Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, 'My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead'" (Acts 23:6). A dispute broke out when he said this because, while the Pharisees believed in supernatural matters such as spirits and the resurrection, the Sadducees denied their existence. Some Pharisees began to argue that perhaps Paul was right. The dispute became so violent that the commander ordered Paul brought back to the barracks lest he be torn to pieces. The following night the Lord spoke to Paul, telling him to take courage, for he would testify for Him in Rome as he had in Jerusalem.

The next morning more than forty Jews formed a conspiracy and vowed not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. As serious as this oath was, the men could offer sacrifice if they broke it so they need not have died when they failed to meet its provisions. Paul's nephew warned him of the plot. The wording and the commander's treatment of him (taking him by the hand) indicate that he was rather young, and it probably took a fair amount of courage on his part to approach the Fortress of Antonia and seek out Paul, to say nothing of possible repercussions by the Jews in such a volatile climate. The nephew's warning was passed on to the commander, who decided that his best course would be to transfer Paul to Caesarea accompanied by two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen. This force would be enough to discourage almost any group of dissidents, but most would have to return to Jerusalem quickly, since it is estimated that this was about a third of the force resident there. God gave Paul and his nephew courage to

do what was right. Paul was always ready to testify about the Lord and he obeyed him no matter what the consequences. May God enable us to do the same.

Lesson Procedure

Summarize today's Bible passage in your own words or as follows:

God had warned Paul that hardship and prison awaited him in Jerusalem, but Paul returned there anyway because he knew the Lord wanted him to do so. Jerusalem was like a pot of soup ready to boil over. The Jews and Gentiles hated each other. Not long before, 10,000 people had been killed in a riot. The believers in Jerusalem praised God for the work He had done through Paul on his third missionary journey, but they were afraid of the reaction of thousands of believing Jews who had heard that Paul was teaching Jews to turn away from the law of Moses. They suggested that Paul pay the expenses for four men who had made a vow, part of which involved having their heads shaved (it may have been a Nazirite vow; do you remember what that was?). Paul agreed to do so. One day when he was in the Temple for one of the last of the seven days of purification required for the vow, trouble began.

The Temple was divided into several sections. Anyone could go in the outer part. Only Jews were allowed in the next sector, then only Jewish men, and the innermost area was reserved for the priests. The four-foot barrier separating the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of the Women had a sign that threatened death to any Gentile who crossed it. When some Jews from Asia saw Paul, they thought he had brought Trophimus the Ephesian with him, and they began shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place." People came running from all directions, seized Paul and were trying to kill him. The Roman commander, whose name was Claudius Lysias, heard about what was happening and immediately took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. "When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul." Claudius arrested Paul and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He tried to get to the bottom of what was happening, but there was such an uproar, some in the crowd shouting one thing and some another, that he ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. The violence of the mob was so great that he had to be carried there by the soldiers.

Right before they took him into the barracks, Paul asked the commander if he could speak to him. Claudius was startled that Paul could speak Greek, because he had mistaken him for an Egyptian terrorist who had led a revolt of four thousand men not long before. Paul answered that he was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia. He asked to speak to the people and was given permission. He addressed the crowd in Aramaic, and when they heard him speak in this tongue they quieted down. Paul told them that he was a Jew who had persecuted Christians and explained how he had met Jesus Christ. Can anyone tell me what you know about how the Lord saved Paul? Paul continued by explaining that he had returned to Jerusalem and while he was praying in the Temple, the Lord had told him to leave the city because people would not accept his testimony, and that he was to go to the Gentiles.

"The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, 'Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!'" The crowd started shouting, throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air as an expression of their horror, so Claudius ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks and flogged. This was a favorite Roman way of trying to gain information, but it was illegal to do it to a Roman citizen. Paul told the commander that he was a Roman citizen (remember he did this in Philippi, as well). Claudius had paid a lot of money for his citizenship, but Paul had been born a citizen. The commander could not flog Paul, but he still wanted to find out why Paul was being accused by the Jews, so he had Paul brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body.

“Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, ‘My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.’ At this, the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!’ Those who were standing near Paul said, ‘You dare to insult God’s high priest?’ Paul replied, ‘Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: “Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.”’” Was Paul being sarcastic or did he really not know who the high priest was? Usually the high priest would wear distinctive robes and sit in a special place, but he might not have at this time.

Whatever the case, Paul’s next statement caused an uproar. “My brothers,” he said, “I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.” The Sanhedrin was made up of Pharisees and their arch-rivals, the Sadducees. The Pharisees believed in the supernatural - spirits, miracles, and the resurrection - while the Sadducees believed in none of them. Some of the Pharisees began to think that perhaps Paul was correct after all. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” “The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks. The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.’”

The next morning more than forty Jews formed a conspiracy and vowed that they would not eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They asked the chief priests and elders to petition the commander to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case; then they would ambush him on the way. However, Paul’s nephew heard about the plot and went to warn him. He told Paul about the ambush and Paul asked the centurion to take his nephew to the commander. When Claudius heard of the plot he cautioned Paul’s nephew not to tell anyone that he had reported this message to him. He then ordered two centurions to get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to bring Paul to Caesarea to Governor Felix at nine o’clock that night. The Bible calls the nephew a young man, so he may have been about your age. We know nothing else about him, whether he was a believer or not or how well he knew Paul, but like his uncle he seems to have been courageous. It must have been rather frightening to enter the prison with the rough guards, to say nothing of the fact that there could have been real danger to him and his family from the Jews. But Paul’s nephew apparently cared for his uncle and did what was right. Paul, too, stood firm and testified for the Lord. Can you point out incidences of his courage seen in this passage? May God give us the courage to do likewise.

Activity

Paul testified to how he met Jesus Christ both here and in giving defense during his subsequent trial before Herod Agrippa. We, too, ought always to be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us the reason for the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15). This can involve more than our conversion story, but this should certainly be a part of our witness as it was for Paul. If you did not do so in lesson 5, you may wish to share with your students how you came to know the Lord; encourage your Christian students to testify as well, but do not pressure them into doing this.

Paul was willing not only to go to prison for Christ’s sake, but to die if necessary (Acts 21:13). We should pray that the Lord will give us this same dedication seen in Paul and in many others who gave their lives for Christ’s sake. Tell your class the story of someone who did so as recorded in such books as *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* or missionary biographies. One of the most famous martyrs in church history is Polycarp.

Polycarp was born about 70 A.D. and knew people who had seen Jesus, perhaps even the apostle John. He became bishop of Smyrna when he was around forty years old and served the Lord for many years. When he was an old man, a terrible persecution broke out against the Christians. Christians were arrested and if they stood for the Lord, they would be beaten, thrown to wild beasts or burned alive. In the amphitheater, crowds would cheer as they watched these tortures. If the believers would curse Christ or even just put a little pinch of incense in the fire in sacrifice to the emperor, they would escape punishment. Many could not understand why the Christians refused to do such “little” things. “What difference did a few words make if you didn’t mean them? Shouldn’t all good citizens show their loyalty to Caesar by burning the incense? Yes, it was an act of worship, but what difference did it make? Maybe Caesar was a god, maybe he wasn’t, but it didn’t hurt to participate in the ceremony. After all, there were lots of gods. That was the trouble with those Christians. They were atheists; they didn’t believe in gods.” So thought a large number of people about the Christians. Sometimes Christians did give in, but many such as Polycarp stood for the Lord and suffered greatly.

At the urging of friends, Polycarp left the city to stay at a small estate where he and a few friends spent practically all their time praying for different people and churches throughout the Roman world. One day while praying he fell into a trance and saw his pillow burning, which indicated to him that he would be burned alive. Three days later he was arrested.

Polycarp could have escaped to another farm, but would not go into hiding, saying, “The will of God be done.” When those who came to arrest him arrived, he ordered that they be given as much as they wanted to eat and drink, and asked if he could have an hour to pray. This they granted, and he was so filled with the grace of God that he prayed for two hours and the men did not stop him, for they regretted that they had to arrest such a righteous old man.

When he entered the arena Polycarp heard a voice from heaven encouraging him to “Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.” The proconsul tried to persuade him to turn from the Lord, to remember his old age, to swear by the genius of Caesar and say, “Away with the atheists!” meaning the Christians who did not believe in the false gods. Polycarp waved his hand toward the unbelievers in the stadium and said, “Away with the atheists!” (meaning those who refused to believe in the true God). The proconsul continued to urge him, saying, “Swear, and I will release thee; curse the Christ.” Polycarp replied, “Eighty and six years have I served him, and he hath done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?” When the proconsul threatened to send him to the wild beasts, Polycarp said, “Send for them.” When the Roman official said he would have him burned with fire if he refused, Polycarp answered, “You threaten the fire that burns for an hour and in a little while is quenched; for you know not of the fire of the judgment to come and the fire of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly.” Polycarp was filled with courage and joy as he spoke these words.

And so Polycarp was sentenced to death. The crowd wanted to set a lion on him, but the time for the animal sports was over, so he was led to the stake to be burned alive. They were going to nail him to the stake, but he said, “Let me be as I am. He that granted me to endure the fire will grant me also to remain at the pyre unmoved, without being secured with nails.” And the Lord did so. He gave Polycarp, like Paul and others, strength and courage to stand for Him no matter what the consequences.

Polycarp was not the only one to die for his faith at this time. Many nameless martyrs were killed, and some of whom we know a little through written accounts. About fifty years after Polycarp’s death, a twenty-two year old married lady named Perpetua was taken with her infant son to prison. Her father and others begged her to think of her mother, brothers, and child, but she refused to give in to their pleading. She was dragged in a net into the stadium and there a mad heifer and later a leopard were let loose to kill her.

She did not die at once from the wounds inflicted by these beasts, and finally left this world with the thrust of a gladiator's sword through her throat.

These events occurred many hundreds of years ago. The Roman persecutors died as surely as those whom they persecuted. Yet today, many still suffer for Christ and undergo torture and death as severe as those of the early Christians. Such happenings may seem far removed from your lives, but we do not know what our future holds. It is hard for most of us to imagine suffering in such ways for the Lord, but following Christ is no game. It may involve severe trials. We are utterly incapable of following Him on our own, but He can enable us to do so. May God give us grace to stand for Him, whether it means the mockery of classmates or the giving of our lives.

JOURNEY TO ROME

Acts 27-28

Lesson Aim

That your students will recognize God's sovereignty as seen in Paul's life, emulate positive character qualities seen in Paul, and understand the value of listening to the advice of godly men.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Acts 1:8; Acts 2:37-47; this week, review these verses.

Lesson Background

After his arrest in Jerusalem, Paul remained in prison for several years under the control of Governor Felix and his successor, Festus. He had several opportunities to present his case, but was not released. When the Jews asked that Paul be transferred to Jerusalem, Paul, in legitimate fear of the consequences of this action, exercised his right to have his case brought before Caesar. It may seem strange that Paul would ask to stand trial before such an evil, insane tyrant as Nero, but in his early years Nero, under the influence of his tutor Seneca and Afranius Burrus, prefect of the Praetorian Guard, governed with some judgment and prudence. Acts 27-28 records the details of Paul's trip to Rome, including the shipwreck on the island of Malta.

Paul and the other prisoners (the latter perhaps intended for the gladiatorial games) were put in the charge of a centurion named Julius. They boarded a ship from Adramyttia headed for ports along the coast of Asia. The ship stopped at Sidon (where Paul visited friends), sailed past the lee (east and north) of Cyprus and off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia before landing at Myra in Lycia. Myra was the chief port for ships carrying grain between Egypt and Rome, and here they found an Alexandrian ship on which to continue their journey. These grain ships were the largest in the empire, up to 800 tons; most ships were less than 250 tons.

Due to weather conditions, they could not hold their course and made slow headway, passing off Cnidus and to the lee (east side) of Crete, opposite Salmone, finally arriving at Fair Havens, on the south side of Crete.

Ships did not sail at all during the winter (November through March) because of adverse weather conditions, and sailing in the late fall and early spring was extremely hazardous. Paul pointed out the risk involved since it was already past the Fast and warned that the voyage would be disastrous with great loss to ship and cargo and possibly even their very lives (the Fast was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which took place on the tenth of Tishri, but since the Jews used a lunar calendar the exact date remains uncertain). The centurion, who as a Roman officer would have authority even over the captain of the ship, listened not to Paul but to seemingly logical advice of the pilot and owner of the ship, who advised that they continue and try to reach Phoenix, since Fair Havens was not a suitable winter haven. Do we tend to listen more readily to the advice of godly men (not, of course, that such advice is infallible) or those of the world? Are we swayed by majority opinion even when it seems unwise?

A gentle south wind encouraged them on their way, but before long a hurricane-force northeaster swept down the island. The ship, caught by the storm, could not head into the wind and so was driven along, passing to the lee of a small island called Cauda. The sailors took various measures to ensure their survival - securing the lifeboat, passing ropes around the ship to help hold it together, lowering the sea anchor, and even throwing overboard the huge spar, almost the length of the ship, which in a lesser storm would have been lashed to the ship, but to little avail. When the storm continued to rage and for several days they saw neither sun nor stars, which were essential for navigation, they gave up all hope of being saved.

Then Paul stood before them and said that they should have listened to his advice. However, God was going to save their lives. An angel had told Paul that he was not to be afraid, for he was to stand trial before Caesar and that those on the ship would be preserved as well. On the fourteenth day as they were being driven across the Adriatic (a larger body of water than that which now bears that name), at about midnight, they approached land. Some sailors attempted to escape in the lifeboat, but Paul warned that the men must stay with the ship if all were to be safe, and so the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall into the sea. Just before dawn, Paul urged everyone to eat, since for the fourteen days of the furious storm they had not done so. He gave thanks to God in front of them all (there were 276 on board) and they were encouraged. They then threw the grain into the sea so that the ship would ride as high as possible. They cut loose the anchors, untied the rudder ropes, hoisted the foresail, and headed the ship toward shore. The ship struck a sandbar, the bow stuck fast, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding surf. The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners, for if they escaped their own lives would be forfeit, but the centurion, wanting to spare Paul's life, forbade them to do so. Those who could swim jumped overboard first and then the rest followed on planks or pieces of the ship, so everyone reached land safely.

The company had arrived on the island of Malta, probably at what is today known as St. Paul's Bay. The inhabitants were of Phoenician descent and still spoke the Punic dialect, although many would also speak Greek. As Paul began to gather brushwood for a fire, a snake, probably a deadly viper, fastened itself on his arm. The islanders expected Paul to drop dead from the snakebite, for they believed him to be a murderer who, although narrowly escaping drowning, would not escape the proper fate meted out to him by the goddess Justice. When he did not die, they changed their minds and said he was a god (how like the Lyconians in their fickleness and their quickness to jump to conclusions).

God used Paul to bless the kind and hospitable Maltese islanders. The father of Publius, the chief official of the island, had been sick in bed with fever and dysentery (this may have been a disease caused by microbes in goat's milk). When Paul prayed and laid his hands on him, he was healed. Paul then prayed for the rest of the sick on the island, who were also cured. When it was time to go, the islanders provided the supplies that were needed and so after three months, Paul and his shipmates set out on an Alexandrian ship.

They headed toward Rome, stopping at Syracuse for three days, at Rhegium, and at Puteoli, where they spent a week with some brothers. When they finally reached Rome, Paul was placed under house arrest. From there he preached the Gospel and explained to the Jews who visited him and were unaware of the situation the reason for his arrest. Some believed as he declared the Gospel to them, but others remained in stubborn rebellion. “For two whole years Paul stayed in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:30-31).

We can learn much about God’s sovereign control of lives from Acts 27-28. Paul could have been tried and either condemned or released in Caesarea, but the Lord wanted him to travel to Rome. The Lord protected Paul, for He had further work for him to do (Philippians 1:21-25). God ensured Paul’s safety, despite men who did not follow the best course of action by staying in Fair Havens. The ship was strong enough and the sailors skilled and wise enough that they survived until they reached Malta. God’s amazing provision in bringing them to that tiny island in the midst of a huge sea (see map) is yet another instance of His merciful and powerful control of circumstances. Julius, although he did not at first listen to Paul’s advice, did not allow him and the other prisoners to be killed and earlier was kind enough to let Paul visit friends who provided for his needs. The Lord also kept Paul from being harmed by the snake.

We can also observe positive character traits in Paul that we can emulate. He was courageous, spoke God’s Word boldly, was submissive but not intimidated by those in authority (note the centurion’s regard for him), obedient to the Lord and kind. He was thankful and apparently did not complain. Even his “I told you so” does not seem to be arrogant, but a humble pointing out of the fact that God’s ways are best. He was calm and practical in an emergency. Arriving on Malta, exhausted and cold, he helped gather brushwood (the prisoners may have been ordered to do so, but it is just as likely that this was a voluntary action). Paul continued to be a man of prayer used by God (healing Publius’ father and the other Maltese islanders). May we recognize God’s sovereign working in our lives and live to His glory, as did Paul.

Lesson Procedure

Introduce your lesson by telling one or both of the following stories. Discuss the importance of listening to good advice and how decisions your students make can have important consequences. Do your students listen to godly people and those with experience (of course, even the wisest people can give bad advice and we must pray and consider our actions carefully)? Perhaps one of your students would like to share from his experience the results of listening to wise or foolish counsel.

Two Roads

“But Dad, Mr. Saunders said to take route 26. He told me his cousin was up at the campgrounds just last week and Butler Road is closed.”

“Thank you, Ben, but I’ve driven back and forth to these campgrounds since before you were born. I know how to get there. Mr. Saunders is a nice guy, but he doesn’t know what he’s talking about. The tourist bureau back at the rest stop said nothing about any road closings and route 26 takes us way out of the way.”

“But there’s a new bypass on 26 and on Butler Road the bri. . .”

“Benjamin, enough back talk. Thank you for your advice, but I know what I’m doing!”

They turned onto Butler Road and continued driving. They had not seen any other cars since passing the last turn-offs twenty minutes earlier when they arrived at a large orange sign: “Bridge Closed: Detour.” Mr. Richards slowed down, jerked the car around and sped off in the direction they had come. Ben knew better than to say anything. They finally arrived at the campsite an hour and a half later than planned.

After they unpacked their gear, Mr. Richards asked Ben to take a walk down to the lake with him. “Ben,” he said, “I really want to apologize to you. I should have listened to your advice instead of being too proud to consider your input. Then when we found out you were right I was so mad at being wrong and being late and everything that I didn’t feel like talking much on the rest of the trip. So I made the trip unpleasant when I really wanted us to have a good time together. Will you please forgive me?”

“Yes, Dad. It’s okay. Hey, could we walk to that snack shop on the other side of the lake?”

“Sure can, and I’ll buy you a double fudge sundae. Sound good?”

“Great.”

- In what ways did Mr. Richards sin and act unwisely?
- How did he act in a way that pleased God?
- Name two times when Ben acted in a God-honoring way?

Mr. Richards did not listen to good advice. Sometimes it is difficult to know what to do.

Advice for a King

When David was king of Israel, his son Absalom rebelled against him. Little by little Absalom brought the people over to his side by sympathizing with their troubles and telling them what good things he would do if he were king. Eventually he gathered enough support to chase David out of Jerusalem. However, Absalom wanted to destroy David completely, so he asked his advisors Ahithophel and Hushai the best way to do this. What Absalom didn’t know was that Hushai was really on David’s side [read II Samuel 17:1-14].

Bible Story

A bad decision by an official in today’s Bible story almost brought disaster and the death of many people. Explain to your students that after Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem, he remained in prison in Caesarea for more than two years. When the Jews again requested that Paul be brought to Jerusalem, Paul exercised his right of appeal to Caesar, meaning he would stand trial before the emperor in Rome. The trip was made by ship. Can you describe travel by ship in Bible times? Do not just relate facts, but really try to imagine what it would be like.

Discuss the nature of traveling by ship during this period of time: many people and animals squeezed into small wooden-hulled ships; the smells, the short tempers from being cooped up in a small space for a long period, many days on end without seeing land, navigation by stars, being at the mercy of the wind, the danger of storms or being becalmed, the resultant fear, damp, cold and/or excessive heat, hunger and thirst as provisions ran out; ships were steered with paddles and by rudder. Try to have your students imagine what this would be like. If possible, show your students pictures of ships from the period from a Bible encyclopedia or handbook. Then read Acts 27-28. As you do, explain unfamiliar terms or occurrences such as *lee*, *Fast*, and why they would throw cargo overboard (see Lesson Background).

After reading Acts 27-28, have your students find instances of God’s sovereignty and protection in Paul’s life, e.g., the company sailed when they did; the ship was well-built enough to withstand the storm; the sailors were skilled; the centurion who guarded Paul was kind enough to let him see his friends and did not allow the prisoners to be killed; Paul was not killed by the poisonous snake. Then discuss positive character qualities we can see in Paul: he was thankful and apparently did not complain despite very difficult circumstances; he was helpful and gathered brushwood, even having endured such difficult circumstances and being cold and tired (actually, the prisoners may have been ordered to do this, but in such circumstances his volunteering is just as likely); he was submissive but not intimidated by authority; his behavior was such

that Julius seemed to respect him even though he did not, at first, listen to his advice; he was courageous and spoke God's Word boldly; he prayed; he obeyed God and was used by Him. You may wish to write these on the board and pray that God would help you and your students emulate Paul in these matters.

Map Study

Have your students complete their maps by tracing Paul's trip to Rome. They should use a different colored pencil than they did for the other journeys.

Caesarea ⇒ Sidon ⇒ (to east and north of Cyprus) ⇒ Myra ⇒ (off Cnidus) ⇒ (east of Crete opposite Salome) ⇒ Fair Havens ⇒ Malta ⇒ Syracuse ⇒ Rhegium ⇒ Puteoli ⇒ Rome

Activity (optional)

Have your students write a log as if each were a cabin boy on the Alexandrian ship sailing from Myra. An example of such a log in different circumstances is presented in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (C.S. Lewis, Narnia Series, Macmillan, p.58-62).

Alternate activity - Finish reading the missionary biography and/or complete your missions project (these may continue into quarter 2 if so desired).