Let's Read Acts!

International Edition

T. Pandit

This book is the International version of a college level textbook prepared a few years ago for a Bible college in South India.

It can also be used for Bible study groups in local churches and for individual students of the Bible. It was written it with the South Indian Christian context in mind. But with minor adaptions it should be useful in any cultural context.

The Bible quotations are based on the World English Bible (WEB) translation.

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T. Pandit has many years of experience as an educationist, as a Bible teacher and as a college principal, in India as well as internationally.

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Introduction to the book of Acts

### Introduction

A brief background

Before we start reading the book of Acts in detail, it will be useful to have some background knowledge. So in this introduction we will very briefly answer a few important questions about Acts: Who wrote the book? What is the book about. For whom was it written? What kind of book is it? When was it written? What is the structure of the book? What is its historical and cultural setting? When did its stories take place? What is the message of Acts for us today?

We will also explain a little about the aims of this textbook.

More information and comments will be given in the Comments section of each lesson. This textbook also has a separate Reference unit. There you find seven maps and other additional general information. You also find more information about people, history, culture and religion at the time of the early church.

Who Wrote Acts?

The author of Acts does not mention his own name. But from his introduction it is clear that he has also written the New Testament gospel that is called Luke's Gospel in our Bibles. The problem is, however, that even that gospel does not mention the name of its author. Church history has always claimed that Luke was the author of Luke's Gospel and Acts. Luke was a close friend and travel companion of the apostle Paul. There are no good reasons to question this claim. A close reading of Acts and Paul's letters will also confirm that “Doctor Luke” must be the author. See also the reference article Luke, the author of Acts ([Go to this article](#LukeTheAuthorOfActs)).

What is Acts About?

The gospel of Luke and the book of Acts belong together. They are part of the same main story. Luke's gospel is about Jesus, the Savior of the world (Luk 2:30–32; 3:6). Acts is about how this gospel (this good news) about salvation through Jesus is taken to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8), represented by Rome, the Gentile capital of the Roman empire.

Both Luke’s gospel and Acts are addressed to a person called Theophilus. We do not know much about him. His name is Greek, and Luke addresses him with the words “most excellent,” which shows that he must have been a man of high position and authority. See also the reference article The message of Acts ([Go to this article](#TheMessageOfActs)).

What Kind of Book Is Acts?

Other ways of putting the same question would be: What is the “literary style” of Acts? or What “genre” does Acts belong to? Most Bible scholars see it as an excellent example of historical writing in the style of the first century Greek-Roman culture. In those days, the purpose of historical books was not just to document past events but also to present a message to the readers. This message was based on the historical events. So undoubtedly Luke had a message with his book.

Then we should remember that Luke was also influenced by the historical writings of the Old Testament. The perspective of the Old Testament authors was that God is in control of history, the history of Israel as well as of the surrounding nations. In the same way, Luke's perspective is that God is at work throughout the historical account that he presents.

Consequently, Luke selects and shapes his historical material so that his message becomes clear. Luke's message is about how the Holy Spirit transforms the gospel from its first geographical base in Jerusalem and from its totally Jewish beginnings to a worldwide movement dominated by Gentile believers. It is a message about the expanding Spirit-filled church bringing the gospel into new geographical and cultural territories. See also the reference article The Genre of Acts ([Go to this article](#TheGenreOfActs)).

When Was Acts Written?

Bible scholars have debated when Acts was written. But they all agree on one point: it must have been written after the gospel of Luke. There are, however, some strong reasons (based on the book of Acts itself) to date the book to AD 62, soon after the conclusion of the story about Paul’s two-year imprisonment in Rome. See also the reference article The Dating of Acts ([Go to this article](#TheDatingOfActs)).

How Should We Understand the Structure of Acts?

The two most common ways of understanding the structure of Acts have been:

1. Basing the structure on the apostle who is the main character: We find that Peter is the main character in the first part of the book (chapters 1–12), and Paul is the main character in the second part of the book (chapters 13–28). As we compare the stories about Peter and Paul, we will also find many parallels between them. See also the reference article The Structure of Acts ([Go to this article](#TheStructureOfActs)).

2. Basing the structure on Jesus' words in 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.” The first seven chapters of Acts take place in Jerusalem. Then the gospel spreads to Samaria and Judea (chapters 8–12). The rest of the book describes how the gospel reaches out into the Gentile world of that time. In the final chapter Paul reaches Rome, the center of world in those days.

But the English theologian John Stott proposes a third way of understanding the structure of Acts:

3. Basing it on six key verses that summarize what Luke has described in the previous chapters and from which the story (and the gospel) takes off in a new direction. In this way, Luke has painted six wonderful pictures of the joyful expansion of the gospel. This textbook follows this structure – each unit contains one of Luke's six pictures of the gospel expanding in new directions, to new areas and to new people. For more details see the introduction to each unit and the reference article The Structure of Acts ([Go to this article](#TheStructureOfActs)).

What Is the Historical and Cultural Setting of Acts?

We can understand and appreciate the book of Acts much better, if we have some knowledge about its historical and cultural setting. We need to know about:

* + - The situation in Palestine at the time of the early church in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. This was where it all started. ([Go to Palestine](#Palestine))
    - The large Jewish population (the dispersion or the diaspora) in the Roman empire. These people became an important doorway for the expansion of the church into the Gentile world. ([Go to The Jewish dispersion](#TheJewishDispersion))
    - The Greek culture (Hellenism) of the Roman empire. This was a precondition for the early Christian movement and its fantastic expansion. ([Go to Hellenism](#Hellenism))
    - The conditions in the Roman empire. These helped the gospel to spread so quickly to so many countries and to so many people. ([Go to The Roman empire](#TheRomanEmpire))

Some of the chapters in the Reference unit take up historical and cultural matters

When Did the Stories in Acts Take Place?

Some important general historical persons or events are mentioned in Acts. These can be fixed in time through various historical sources from that time.

* + - The death of king Herod Agrippa I (12:23) – AD 44
    - Emperor Claudius’s expulsion of the Jews from Rome (18:1-2) – AD 49
    - Gallio becomes proconsul in Corinth (18:12) – AD 51
    - Felix' term as governor in Caesarea comes to an end, and Festus becomes governor after him (24:27) – AD 59

With the help of these fixed dates we can make a chronology of the events of the book of Acts: It begins in AD 30 with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the First Day of Pentecost. It ends with Paul's imprisonment in Rome AD 60–62.

It must, however, be pointed out that Bible scholars do not agree on each detail of a chronology of Acts.

See also the reference article The Chronology of Acts ([Go to this article](#TheChronologyOfActs)).

What is the Message of Acts for Us Today?

A common approach to Acts among various groups of Bible-believing Christians is to read its stories as directly applicable to our own lives and our own churches. The book is understood as not only telling us the history of the early church, but also as presenting a normative pattern for the church of all times.

But did Luke purposely lay down a normative pattern for the church for all time, as he told the story of the early church? If he did so, then that pattern becomes normative also for us today.

So we need to find Luke’s intent with the book of Acts in order to find out its message for us today. What was Luke's message for Theophilus – and for the early believers who must have been in Luke's mind as he wrote his book?

When we study Acts carefully, we will see that Luke records the history of the early church in a way that is more descriptive than normative. For example, the organizing of the churches and the appointment of church leadership is not the same in Jerusalem as it is in Antioch in Syria or in the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch in Asia Minor. Another example is that the practice of the Jerusalem church for the believers to keep everything in common does not seem to have been followed by other churches.

Instead we should probably understand Luke's message in the overall picture that he presents of the early church. The church of Acts is a church empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is a church that triumphantly and joyfully carries the gospel forward into the Gentile world. As a result, lives and communities are transformed. In Acts, Luke presents God’s plan – or God's pattern – for the universal church: It should be a triumphant, forward-moving, and Spirit-filled church. This is the message of Acts for us today.

This textbook

This textbook has been written with the following aims for you as a student or a reader:

* + - You should read all the 73 stories in Acts with understanding.
    - You should take every opportunity to reflect on and draw conclusions from what you have read.
    - You should get to know the book of Acts well: the stories, the persons, the historical and cultural setting.
    - You should be encouraged to apply what you have studied and learnt to your own situation, and to see your own life and practice in the light of the New Testament church.
    - You should be inspired to use texts from Acts in your own ministry: for devotions, for Bible studies and for sermons.

This textbook must, of course, be used together with the Bible text.

You are encouraged to make frequent use of the maps provided at the beginning of the textbook.

This textbook is based on six units. Each describes a new direction of the spreading of the gospel message. Each study contains a number of questions – some very easy, others more difficult. Answers to the questions are found at the end of each unit. There are a total of 73 studies that the book of Acts can conveniently be divided into. The studies are numbered from 1 to 73. To encourage you to use texts from Acts for your own devotions and for your ministry, many of the studies end with a section called Teach and preach! There you can find outlines for sermons and Bible studies. The book ends with a final Reference unit.

([Go to the Reference unit](#ReferenceMapsAndArticles))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark1))

### Questions and answers to Introduction

These questions will help the teacher make sure that his students understand the text. They can also be used by the students (and the general reader) to reinforce learning and to review the contents of the chapter called Introduction to the book of Acts.

I have also provided my answers – just as a matter of convenience for the user. You must understand that these answers may not be exactly like yours. If you are in doubt, please read the relevant passage in the textbook again. There you will find all the information you need!

Question 1. In what way do Luke’s gospel and Acts belong together?

Answer

* 1. They are both written by Luke.
  2. They are both addressed to Theophilus.
  3. They are meant to be read together and understood together. They are two parts of the same main story. So they are really two volumes of the same book.

Question 2. How would you describe the literary style of Acts?

Answer

It is a historical book. But it is not “historical” in the modern sense. The purpose of historical books in the Roman culture was to present a message to the readers based on historical events. As Luke was also influenced by the Old Testament, his perspective is that God’s Holy Spirit is at work through the transformation and extension of the early church.

Question 3. Explain three ways to understand the structure of Acts!

Answer

* 1. You can base it on the apostle who is the main character: Peter in the first part of the book, Paul in the second part of the book.
  2. You can base it on 1:8: The expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and then to the rest of the world.
  3. You can base it on six key verses that summarize the previous section of the book: Luke paints six beautiful pictures of the expansion of the gospel.

Question 4. What kind of background knowledge do we need to understand and appreciate Acts better?

Answer

* 1. The historical and cultural situation in Palestine of those days
  2. The situation and importance of the Jewish dispersion in the Roman empire
  3. The Greek culture (called Hellenism) that dominated the Roman empire
  4. The political and geographical conditions in the Roman empire

Question 5. Which are the two most important dates for us to understand the chronology of Acts?

Answer

* 1. Around AD 30, when the first events of the book took place
  2. AD 60–62, when the book ends with Paul’s imprisonment in Rome

Question 6. Explain the statement that the narratives in Acts seem to be more descriptive than normative!

Answer

It means that Luke describes what happened in the early church and that his intention is not that these happenings must become the norm (or the rule) for other people or other churches.

Question 7. Give two examples that supports this statement!

Answer

* 1. Churches seem to have been organized in different ways, compare Jerusalem with Antioch in Syria and the churches that Paul founded on his first missionary journey.
  2. “Believers keeping everything in common” seems only to have applied to Jerusalem, not to any other church.

Question 8. So what is the message of Acts for us today?

Answer

Luke’s message for us is primarily found in the overall picture that he presents of the early church. Every church – whatever its geographical, historical and cultural setting – should be a triumphant, forward-moving, and Spirit-filled church, a church that carries the gospel into the world.

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark2))

Unit 1: In Jerusalem (Acts 1:1 – 6:7)

### Introduction to unit 1

Luke’s first picture of the early church introduces the church in Jerusalem in its totally Jewish setting. He begins with Jesus’ ascension and continues with a vivid account of how the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost. Peter’s healing of a crippled beggar leads to the first confrontation between the believers and the Jewish leaders. The fellowship of the believers is sweet, as they share their possessions. But the dishonesty of Ananias and Sapphira becomes a warning example to them. Luke concludes with an account of how the church solves its first leadership crisis by the appointing of the Seven.

The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied exceedingly. And many of the the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark3))

### Study 1. Jesus is taken up into heaven, 1:1–11

The passage

Luke starts his second volume to Theophilus by giving a summary of what happened between Jesus’ resurrection and his ascension. Jesus showed himself repeatedly to his apostles proving that he was alive, and he taught them more about the kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit. The passage ends with the most detailed account of Jesus’ ascension found in the New Testament.

Comments

The first book I wrote (v 1): Luke refers to the gospel of Luke.

Theophilus (v 1): Theophilus, who is also mentioned in the beginning of Luke’s gospel, was perhaps a Roman official or at least a person of high position and wealth. But nothing definite is known about him.

apostles (v 2): Acts uses the word “disciples” for believers in general, and the word “apostles” for Jesus’ 11 disciples and for persons like Paul, Barnabas and James the brother of the Lord.

restore the kingdom to Israel (v 6): The apostles were still expecting Jesus to deliver Israel from the Romans and to establish an earthly kingdom.

two men in white clothes (v 10): Two angels

You men of Galilee (v 11): All the remaining eleven apostles came from Galilee.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map The Roman province of Judeae: Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. ([Go to this map](#Map1TheRomanProvinceOfJudaea))
2. What did Jesus do during the 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension?
3. What is the “gift” that Jesus told his apostles to wait for? See also Luk 24:49.

Think and discuss

1. What could Luke mean by saying that his former book (the gospel of Luke) contains what Jesus “began both to do and to teach”?
2. It can be said that the apostles through their question to Jesus in v 6 revealed that they had three major misunderstandings about the kingdom of God. Explain!
3. In what way can we say that Jesus’ words in v 8 are an outline of the whole book of Acts?
4. Luke ends his gospel with Jesus’ ascension. Compare Luke’s two ascension stories – similarities and differences (see also Acts 1:12)? What do the other three gospels say about Jesus’ ascension?
5. The angels told the apostles not to stand and look at the sky waiting for Jesus to come back. Why did they say that? And what “order of events” includes Jesus’ ascension?

Sharing and application

1. Sometimes we come across people who want to “go into ministry” very soon after they have accepted Jesus as their personal savior. How should we as church leaders deal with such people in the light of Jesus’ words in 1:4–5?
2. Is it common in your church that the pastor or visiting preachers teach a lot of details about the second coming of Jesus? What do you think of such preaching/teaching in the light of Jesus’ words to his disciples in 1:7?

Teach and preach

1. Acts 1:6–8 can be the basis for a Bible study or sermon called The nature of the Kingdom of God. These could be the main points:
2. Introduction: Jesus’ disciples, who had walked with Jesus more than three years and who had witnessed his death and resurrection, still didn’t have a correct understanding of the kingdom of God. This is clear from the question they asked Jesus soon before his ascension (1:6). So, in what way did they misunderstand it? And what is a correct understanding of the kingdom of God?
3. The kingdom of God is not territorial or earthly, but spiritual in character. It transforms the lives and values of its citizens.
4. The kingdom of God is not the re-establishment of Israel as a Jewish kingdom, but it is international and it includes people from all nations, Jews as well as Gentiles.
5. The kingdom of God was not fully established at that time in history when Jesus walked on earth. It did come with Jesus at that time, but it will also gradually expand (like the growth of the mustard seed and the yeast that penetrates the dough, Matt 13:31–33) during the time between Jesus’ first and second coming, and it will be fulfilled in glory with the return of Jesus.
6. So what about us?
   * Do our lives reflect the values of the kingdom of God? Do we allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives so that the fruit of the Spirit is evident in what we say and do (Gal 5:19–26)?
   * Do we understand the universality of the kingdom of God? Do we – and does our church – reach out to all nations and people groups so that they can become part of the kingdom of God (Matt 28:18–20; Matt 24:14; 1 Tim 2:4)?
   * Do we work for the expansion of the kingdom of God during this “church age”? Have we received the baptism with the Holy Spirit so that God’s power is at work through us and so that we can be Jesus’ witnesses to the “ends of the earth” (Luk 24:49; Acts 1:4–5, 8)?
7. The ascension story can be used for another Bible study or sermon called Why do you stand here looking into the sky? (Acts 1:11). Your outline can be something like this:
8. Why did Jesus have to leave his disciples and return to heaven? Answer: So that he could send the Holy Spirit to carry on his work through this disciples – John 15:26; 16:7, Acts 2:33
9. Why did the angels tell the disciples not to stand there looking into the sky? Answer: The disciples would not be able to bring Jesus back by looking into the sky. They should not devote their time to stargazing.
10. Instead the disciples should
    * Go back to Jerusalem and wait for the promised Holy Spirit
    * Then they should go on with their lives and be Jesus’ witnesses to the ends of the earth, spreading the gospel in wider and wider circles
11. What did the angels mean by saying “He will come back in the same way as you have seen him go into the sky”?
    * That Jesus would come back in a personal way, in his glorified body
    * That Jesus at his return would be visible and glorious (Luk 21.27)
    * That the same cloud, which had hidden Jesus from the sight of the disciples and which throughout the Old Testament was the symbol of God’s glorious presence, would be the “chariot” of his coming as it had been of his going (1 Thess 4:17)
12. What are the differences between Jesus’ going and his coming back?
    * His ascension was a “private” event in which only his 11 apostles were present. But when he comes back “every eye will see him” (Rev 1:7). It will be a very public affair!
    * When Jesus ascended to heaven he left alone. But when he comes back, he will come with crores of believers and angels (Luk 9:26; 1 Thess 4:14; 2 Thes 1:7)!
    * His ascension happened in a very local place, the Mount of Olives. His return will be “like a lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to another” (Luk 17:23–24). Everybody throughout the earth will see him!
13. So what about us?
    * We should not spend our time looking into the sky, speculating about when Jesus might come back.
    * No, we should fulfill his great commission (Matt 28:18–20), winning souls for his kingdom, preaching and teaching, showing Christ’s compassion to people around us.
    * But we must always be ready for his return, waiting for him to come back at any time.
    * And as we wait for his return, our lives should reflect the principles of the kingdom of God. We do not belong to this world. No, we are aliens and strangers in this world (1 Pet 2:11).

([Go to Answers 1](#Answers1))

### Study 2. Matthias replaces Judas, 1:12–26

The passage

After the ascension the believers gathered in Jerusalem to wait and pray for God’s promised gift of the Holy Spirit. One day Peter suggested to the believers that Judas, who had betrayed Jesus and who had died, should be replaced. So Matthias became the person to occupy Judas’s empty place among the apostles.

Comments

Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s journey away (v 12): The ascension took place on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives towards Bethany (Luk 24:50), about 1 km from Jerusalem. A faithful Jew would not travel further away on the Sabbath.

along with the women (v 14): Probably the women who had been ministering to Jesus (Luk 8:2–3), and perhaps also the wives of the apostles.

his brothers (v 14): Jesus’ brothers included James, who later became the leader of the Jerusalem church (12:17; 15:13; 21:18).

in their language (v 19): Many modern translations put v 18–19 within brackets to indicate that Luke is inserting his editorial comment. This makes sense, as Peter would not have used the expression “in their language” to refer to his own language Aramaic.

cast lots (v 26): Casting lots is mentioned several times in the Old Testament (for example Lev 16:8; Josh 18:6; 1 Chr 25:8; Neh 11:1; Prov 16:33).

Text questions

1. Who were the believers gathered for prayer in the room upstairs, and how many believers were there totally?
2. What was Akeldama?
3. Which Old Testament verses did Peter quote? Why did he quote these two verses?

Think and discuss

1. Why did the believers pray in the room upstairs?
2. What is the significance of the expression “in their language” in v 19?
3. Who were present when Matthias was chosen to replace Judas? Why is it interesting for us to note this?
4. What were the qualifications for an apostle, according to Peter’s words in this story?

Sharing and application

This is a story about choosing a new church leader. How was it done? Do you follow this practice in your church? Why – Why not?

Teach and preach

Use Acts 1:12–14 for devotions or a short Bible study about Two Essentials for True Prayer. This is a possible outline:

1. How was their prayer?
   * Their prayer was united: “with one accord (v 14)
   * Their prayer was persevering: “continued steadfastly in prayer and supplication” (v 14)
2. How should our prayer be?
   * United, unanimous, in agreement, in unity, in harmony
   * Persevering, determined, purposeful, committed, without getting tired. But also: every day, continuous, unceasing.
3. Was their prayer answered?
   * Yes, after a few days (on the Day of Pentecost) the Holy Spirit came and filled them with power to witness.
4. Will our prayers be answered?
   * Yes, if we pray for the Holy Spirit (Luk 11:13)
   * Yes, if we pray according to God’s will (1 John 5:14)

([Go to Answers 2](#Answers2))

### Study 3. The day of Pentecost, 2:1–13

The passage

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit arrived in a way that was both heard and seen. The believers began to speak in other tongues proclaiming the wonders of God in many languages. The crowds of Jews that had come to Jerusalem from the dispersion to celebrate the feast of Pentecost heard this proclamation in their own languages and were utterly amazed. So they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

Comments

the day of Pentecost (v 1): “Pentecost” comes from a Greek word meaning “50th.” This refers to the 50th day after the Sabbath of the Passover. It was also called the Feast of Harvests, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of the Firstfruits. There were two backgrounds to this feast: 1. The agricultural background – the celebration of the completion of the grain harvest, which began at Passover and took seven weeks to complete, 2. The historical background – the celebration of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, which was thought to have happened fifty days after the Exodus from Egypt.

in his own language (v 6): The Jews who had come to Jerusalem for the festival could understand Aramaic (the spoken language of Palestine at that time), but their mother tongues were the languages of the countries they lived in.

Parthians ... Arabians (v 9–11): Luke lists 15 names of nations, counties and places, starting east of the Tigris River and stretching to Rome in the west. The people present in Jerusalem were not literally “from every nation” (v 5; for example: no people from India or the Far East are mentioned). As biblical writers usually did, Luke is speaking from his own horizon. He is referring to the Greek-Roman world, and to every nation in which there were Jews in those days. Luke includes in his list descendants of Shem, Ham and Japhet (compare Gen 10). So he is implying that on the day of Pentecost the whole world was there represented by the 15 nations mentioned.

Text questions

1. Who were gathered on the day of Pentecost, and where were they gathered?
2. Which three manifestations of the arrival of the Holy Spirit are recorded in v 2–4?
3. What was the message that was spoken “in other tongues”?
4. How did the people who heard the message react?

Think and discuss

1. The Jewish festival of Pentecost was also called the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Harvests and the Day of the Firstfruits. It celebrated the end of the spring harvest in the Jewish agricultural year. What was the “harvest” on the first day of Pentecost? And what were the “firstfruits”?
2. In later Judaism the festival of Pentecost became associated with the giving of the Law and the making of the covenant at Sinai. Even if Luke does not mention the events at Mount Sinai openly, he still calls attention to them indirectly by the way he tells the story of the first day of Pentecost. What are the “new covenant” implications of the first day of Pentecost?
3. Many Bible scholars understand the first day of Pentecost in the light of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9). Do you agree that this is reasonable? And why would it be reasonable?

Sharing and application

1. Do you celebrate the Day of Pentecost in your church? Why – Why not? How do you celebrate it, if you do?
2. The Jews on the Day of Pentecost asked the question, “What does this mean?” What is the meaning of Pentecost for you personally?
3. Do you think that your own church has been able to help the believers understand the meaning of Pentecost? Explain!
4. How could the Day of Pentecost be celebrated in a more meaningful way in your church? Give details!

Teach and preach

This passage can be used for two sermons:

1. Pentecost – God’s Promises fulfilled! Here are some points that you can use for this sermon:
2. John the Baptist’s promise fulfilled, Luk 3:16
3. Jesus’ promises fulfilled:
   * Live with us and in us, John 14:17
   * Power to witness, Acts 1:8
   * Teach us, remind us and guide us, John 14.26; 16:13; Luk 12:12
   * Testify about Jesus, John 15:26
4. Old Testament promises fulfilled:
   * A new people
   * A new covenant
   * The fulfilment of the law in the hearts of the believers
5. What about you?
   * Have you received this good gift from God? Luk 11:13
   * Do you live by the Spirit and walk in the Spirit? Gal 5: 25, 22–23
   * Do you have the power to witness in your life, like Paul? Rom 15:17–19, 1 Cor 2:4
6. The Significance of the Day of Pentecost. Here are some points that you can use for this sermon:
7. A harvest festival: Pentecost was also called the Feast of Harvests, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of the Firstfruits. The completion of the spring (grain) harvest was celebrated.
   * 3000 people saved and baptized on the first day of Pentecost, Acts 2:41 – a firstfruit!
   * Hundreds of millions of people from every corner of the earth have been saved since that day – a big harvest that is still going on!
8. Pentecost was also a feast commemorating the Old Testament covenant that God made with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. The day of Pentecost seals the new covenant that God makes with his people. Two aspects of this:
   1. A new covenant
      * God’s covenant with his Old Testament people was made at Sinai (Ex 19–20).
      * God’s covenant with his New Testament people was made at Easter and sealed at Pentecost. The seal was put on “a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life,” (2 Cor 3:6).
   2. The fulfilment of the law
      * The Law was given at Mount Sinai (Ex 19–20)
      * The Spirit was given at Pentecost. The fire of the Spirit in the hearts of the disciples was the fulfilment of the law, just as the Old Testament prophets had foretold (Jer 31:31–33; Ezek 11:19–20; 36:26–28).
9. The curse of Babel reversed
   1. At Babel human languages were confused and people could not understand one another. But on the first day of Pentecost the language barrier was supernaturally overcome and people from many different countries could understand the apostles as they declared the wonders of God.
   2. The result of the Tower of Babel was that the people were scattered all over the earth. But on the first day of Pentecost the people “from every nation” came together in Jerusalem as a sign that the nations would now be gathered in Christ. Nothing could have demonstrated more clearly the multi-racial, multi-national, multi-lingual nature of the kingdom of Christ.
   3. At Babel, people proudly wanted to make a name for themselves and reach heaven. But on the first day of Pentecost, God the Holy Spirit came down to earth to fill and enable his humble disciples.
10. The fulfilment of Easter in our lives. Pentecost was also called the Feast of Harvests and the Feast of Weeks celebrating the end of the spring (grain) harvest, which started during the Passover week seven weeks earlier.
    1. At Easter we celebrate the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, when he died for us. He took the curse of our sin and death upon himself, fulfilling the demands of the law in our place (Gal 3:13–14; Rom 8:3).
    2. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came to fulfill this saving work of Christ. Christ lives in us through his Spirit and controls our lives (Gal 2:20; Rom 8:9–11).

([Go to Answers 3](#Answers3))

### Study 4. Peter speaks at Pentecost, 2:14–41

The passage

The twelve apostles stood up, and Peter addressed the confusion of the people by explaining that they were not drunk but that this was the fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy. Then Peter preached the first sermon recorded in Acts. He clearly presented the gospel about Jesus. The listeners were deeply touched by the message. On that day 3000 persons were saved and baptized.

Comments

only nine o’clock in the morning (v 15): On a festival day like Pentecost, the Jews would not have breakfast or drink wine before ten o’clock. So how could they be drunk?

The Lord said to my Lord (v 34): The Lord (God) said to my Lord (the Son of David, the Messiah).

cut to the heart (v 37): Describes both belief in Jesus and regret over their earlier rejection of him.

the gift of the Holy Spirit (v 38): The promise of the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit is given to all believers (Rom 8:9–11).

Text questions

1. Who were the people listening to Peter? See also the map Countries of people at Pentecost ([Go to this map](#Map2CountriesOfPeopleAtPentecost))
2. Joel’s prophecy (recorded in v 17–18) lists several groups of people who would receive the Spirit of God and prophecy. Who were they?
3. What question did the crowd ask the apostles at the end of Peter’s sermon? And what did Peter tell them to do?

Think and discuss

1. This passage contains the first of the nineteen Christian speeches (or sermons) in the books of Acts – eight by Peter, one each by Stephen and James and nine by Paul. These speeches make up one fourth of the total text. Do you think that these speeches are word for word recordings of what was said? Why – Why not?
2. Peter’s sermon consisted of three main sections. Which were they?
3. Peter made an interesting change as he quoted the beginning of Joel’s prophecy (v 17). What was the change, and why did Peter change the words?
4. The word “Trinity” cannot be found in the Bible. In spite of this the three persons of the Godhead are clearly taught in the New Testament. In this passage there are two verses, where we can see the Trinity at work together. Which are these verses?

Sharing and application

1. This is the first sermon recorded in Acts. It very much focused on Jesus Christ. Try to remember the last five sermons that you have heard preached in your own church. To what extent were they focused on Jesus?
2. From v 38 we find that Peter put “conditions” for Jesus’ gifts of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. In addition to believing and accepting the gospel message, the people had to “repent and be baptized.” What about your own church – to what extent does it require repentance and baptism from the new converts? Do you have any personal comments about this?

Teach and preach

Peter’s gospel message about Jesus in 2:22–39 (with the addition of one extra point based on 2:40–41) has a six-point structure, which we can use today as we preach and teach the gospel:

1. Jesus’ life and ministry (2:22): Jesus was a man, sent and authorized by God through miracles (special powers), wonders (acts that made people astonished) and signs (acts that communicated spiritual truths). God worked through him openly and publicly.
2. Jesus’ death (2:23): Jesus was put to death (nailed to the cross) by people who were wicked and did not have the law, but this was done according to God’s purpose.
3. Jesus’ resurrection (2:24–32): Jesus was raised from the dead, as the prophets had foretold (David in Ps 16:8–11 and applied by Peter to his resurrection) and the apostles had witnessed. The written words of the prophets and the spoken testimony of the apostles joined together.
4. Jesus’ exaltation (2:33–36): Jesus was exalted to God’s right hand. Peter supports this point by quoting Ps 110:1 and stating that God “made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ,” placing him in a position of supreme honor and absolute power. From the Father, Jesus received the promised Holy Spirit, which he had now poured out over his people.
5. Jesus’ salvation (2:37–39): To all who repent, believe (note that those who accepted Peter’s message are called “believers” in v 44) and are baptized Jesus gives
   * + forgiveness (even to those who had rejected him earlier and participated in his crucifixion),
     + and the Spirit (who gives them a new birth, who will dwell in them, who will transform their lives and who will incorporate them in the new people of God)
6. Jesus’ new community (2:40–41): He forms a new community of those people who accept the gospel message – of those who repent, believe and are baptized. This is why the first day of Pentecost has been called “the birthday of the church.”

([Go to Answers 4](#Answers4))

### Study 5. The fellowship of the believers, 2:41–47

The passage

Luke describes the effect of Pentecost on the life and fellowship of the early church in Jerusalem. The believers enjoyed the favor of the public, and the Lord blessed them as people were saved and added to the church daily.

Comment

the breaking of bread (v 42): This phrase seems to refer to the Lord’s supper in this verse. The same Greek expression is used in v 46, where it seems to refer to fellowship meals in the homes. These fellowship meals were probably followed by the Lord’s supper.

Text questions

1. Which were the four activities that the first believers in Jerusalem devoted themselves to (v 42)?
2. Which were the two places of activity for the Jerusalem church as recorded in v 46?

Think and discuss

1. How is the fellowship of the early church in Jerusalem described in this passage?
2. What does Luke write about the reactions from the general public to the life of the Jerusalem church in this passage?
3. The apostles who were the teachers in the Jerusalem church (v 42) are no longer alive. So how can we fill this “teaching gap” in our own churches? Are there “apostles” like that in each generation?

Sharing and application

1. Luke presents a wonderful picture of the life of the early church in Jerusalem in this passage. Compare this picture with your own church! Similarities? Differences? What could be the reasons for the differences?
2. What aspect of the life of the early church in Jerusalem do you find particularly attractive? Why? Do we need to strengthen this aspect in the life of our own South Indian churches? How can we do this?

Teach and preach

The description in Acts 2:42–47 of the life of the early church in Jerusalem is an excellent basis for a Bible study or a sermon. A suitable title could be Characteristics of a Spirit-Filled Church. This outline can be used:

1. Background: The first day of Pentecost, Peter’s address to the crowd, 3000 people saved and baptized
2. Five characteristics of the life of the Jerusalem church after the coming of the Holy Spirit:
   1. It was learning church (v 42):
      * The apostles, who had been appointed by Jesus, were the teachers. All the thousands of new converts were happy to listen to these teachers and to get instruction from them. The teaching of the apostles has been handed down to us in the form of the New Testament. So a Spirit-filled church today must be a church that eagerly studies the New Testament and willingly submits to its instruction.
   2. It was a church where wonders and miraculous signs were manifested (v 43):
      * So a Spirit-filled church today should be a church where the Holy Spirit is powerfully at work, also through this kind of manifestations.
   3. It was a loving church (v 42, v 46, v 44–45):
      * The believers had close and regular fellowship with each other. They spent much time together. They enjoyed each other’s company. They met in their homes and had meals together, sharing their food.
      * They shared their resources. They even sold their “possessions and goods” to help those in need. There was no needy person among them (4:45).
      * So a Spirit-filled church today must be a loving church!
   4. It was a worshipping church (v 46, v 42, v 46–47; 3:1):
      * They attended formal type of services, as they met in the temple and attended the prayer times there (v 46; 3:1).
      * Also in their homes they must have had some kind of worship services, as they listened to the teaching, prayed and took part in the Lord’s supper (v 42).
      * Their worship and fellowship was full of joy, praise and reverence (“with gladness and sincerity of hearts,” “praising God”, v 46–47).
      * So a Spirit-filled church today must be a worshipping church!
   5. It was a praying church (v 42; 4:24):
      * They “devoted themselves to ... prayer”. So a Spirit-filled church today must be a praying church!
   6. It was a witnessing church (v 47):
      * One dominant theme in Acts is mission or evangelization, the continuous expansion of the Christian faith. In Jerusalem “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved”. It is Jesus who saves and adds people to his church. But a condition for that is that the believers witness.
      * This witnessing, this evangelization, this outreach to new people must have been an ongoing process, something that happened daily (“day by day,” “were being saved”).
      * So a Spirit-filled church must be a witnessing church, a church involved in outreach, evangelization and mission!
3. What about your church?
   * + Learning?
     + Wonders and miraculous signs?
     + Loving?
     + Worshipping?
     + Praying?
     + Witnessing?

([Go to Answers 5](#Answers5))

### Study 6. A crippled beggar is healed, 3:1–10

The passage

As Peter and John walked up to the temple in Jerusalem one afternoon to pray, they came across a beggar who had been crippled since birth. The man was healed and all the people were filled with wonder and amazement as they realized that a physical healing miracle had taken place.

Comments

Peter and John were going into the temple at the hour of prayer at three in the afternoon (v 1): Peter and John, who had belonged to the inner circle of Jesus’ disciples, seem to have become the leaders of the church in Jerusalem at this stage. There were three times of daily prayer in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem: at 9.00 in the morning, at 3.00 in the afternoon (shortly after the sacrifice; this was the most important time of prayer for a devout Jew) and at sunset.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (v 6): This miracle was not performed by the power of Peter and John. It was done by the authority of the Messiah.

into the temple area (v 8): The gate called Beautiful (v 2) was made of brass, 23 meters high and had huge double doors. It was situated between the outer court or the “Court of the Gentiles,” which was open to everybody, and the “Court of Women,” which was open to all Jews. From there Jewish men could proceed further into the temple to the “Court of Israel.” Only the priests could go beyond that and enter the “Court of the Priests.”

Text questions

1. What did the beggar expect Peter and John to do?
2. How did the beggar react after he had been healed?
3. How did the people react when they saw the beggar healed?

Think and discuss

1. Where did Peter and John go to pray? Do you find this surprising? Why – why not?
2. How does Peter show that he had faith for the beggar to be healed?

Sharing and application

1. Have you experienced this kind of dramatic physical healing in your ministry or in the ministry of your church? What happened? How did people react to the miracle?
2. Is miraculous, physical healing an important aspect of the preaching of the gospel? Why – why not?

Teach and preach

The story in Acts 3:1–10 about the apostles and the healing of the crippled beggar at the gate called Beautiful can be used for a good gospel message. You can use this outline:

1. Summarize the story of the healing of the crippled beggar
2. Summarize the message that Peter spoke to the onlookers
   * It was not the power or godliness of the apostles that healed him (3:12)
   * It was God who glorified Jesus by performing this miracle (3:13)
   * Present the main points about the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Use additional Bible quotations.
3. Jesus is the same today!
   * There is salvation in Jesus!
   * There is healing in Jesus!
4. Invitation to people to accept Jesus as their personal Savior
5. Invitation to people to accept Jesus as their Healer

([Go to Answers 6](#Answers6))

### Study 7. Peter speaks in the temple, 3:11–26

The passage

A crippled beggar had been healed. People were astonished and came running to the part of the Jerusalem temple called Solomon’s portico to see what had happened. Peter used this opportunity to preach a gospel message about Jesus Christ. By faith in the name of Jesus the man had been healed.

Comments

Solomon’s portico (v 11): This was a pillared hall along the eastern inner side of the wall enclosing the outer court of the temple. It was one of the places where the early church used to meet (see 5:12).

the author of life (v 15): The Greek word can mean either “author, originator, founder” or ”leader, ruler”. You killed the “author of life” is a striking expression, in which the originator (or ruler) of life is himself deprived of life.

Repent therefore and turn around (v 19): Repentance is the regret of your old sinful ways, a change of mind, and a turning away from your old life. Turning to God comes after repentance as you put faith and trust in God for a new and changed life. As a result, your sins are forgiven: they are wiped out.

offspring/seed (v 25): The Greek word is singular. It ultimately signifies Christ (see Gal 3:16).

Text questions

1. Peter starts his speech by stating what were not the reasons for the miracle. What does he say?
2. What explanation does Peter give for the healing of the crippled beggar?
3. What does Peter tell his listeners to do?

Think and discuss

1. What is the structure of Peter’s speech in Solomon's portico?
2. In v 14 Jesus is described as “the Holy and Righteous One.” How do you understand this expression?
3. How do you understand the role that faith played in the healing of the crippled beggar?
4. Peter mentions three consequences as people repent and turn to God. Which are they?
5. How do you understand the expression “restoration of all things” in v 21?

Sharing and application

Peter’s sermon was very Christ-centered. He directed the crowd’s attention away both from the crippled beggar that had been healed and from the apostles who had been used by Christ in this healing miracle. Do you follow Peter’s example in this – lifting up Christ, pointing at Christ? Or are you tempted to focus more on the miracle itself, on the person that has been healed or on the servant of God through whose prayers the healing has taken place?

Teach and preach

In his speech to the onlookers (Acts 3:12–26) Peter teaches about the Name of Jesus:

1. This is how Peter describes Jesus:
   1. He is Jesus Christ of Nazareth (v 6): Jesus was a historical person who lived in the town of Nazareth in the land of Palestine and whose life could be verified by many witnesses
   2. He is God’s servant (v 13): Jesus first suffered and then was glorified in fulfilment of the prophecies of the suffering Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12
   3. He is the Holy and Righteous One (v 14): Jesus is holy and perfect in the eyes of God. He is righteous and blameless in the eyes of man.
   4. He is the author [or “master, ruler”] of life (v 15): Jesus himself said in John 10:10 “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”.
   5. He is the prophet foretold by Moses (v 22): And the new covenant in his blood is a better covenant than that of Moses (Matt 26:28, Luk 22:20, Heb 7:22)

In a later speech Peter also says that Jesus is the cornerstone (other translations have capstone) who was rejected by the builders (Acts 4:11, referring to the people of Israel). But those who put their trust in him will never be put to shame, as they are being built into a spiritual house. They are a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people belonging to God (1 Pet 2:4–10).

1. These titles speak of the uniqueness of Jesus. In his Name all these things are summarized (and that is why there is saving power in the Name of Jesus!):
   * + His sufferings and his glory
     + His character and his mission
     + His revelation and his redemption
2. Then Peter challenges his listeners with
   1. The necessity
      * of repentance
      * of turning to God
   2. The blessings of experiencing the forgiveness of sins

([Go to Answers 7](#Answers7))

### Study 8. Peter and John face the Sanhedrin, 4:1–22

The passage

Peter and John were arrested for speaking to the people about Jesus. They were kept in jail overnight and interrogated by the Sanhedrin the following day. During the interrogation Peter once again preached the gospel about Jesus. Because of the reaction from the people, the Sanhedrin did not punish the apostles but let them off with a strict warning.

This passage contains one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. Peter says like this about the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that is given to men by which we must be saved” (v 12).

Comments

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees (v 1): The priests were those who served in the temple during that week. The captain of the temple guard was a member of one of the leading priestly families. He was next in rank to the high priest. The Sadducees were the ruling class of wealthy aristocratic Jews. They collaborated with the Roman rulers and were afraid that the teaching of the apostles would cause political problems. They were the priests in control of the temple in Jerusalem. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They also claimed that the messianic age had already come, so they were not looking for a Messiah.

rulers, elders and scribes (v 5): These three groups made up the Sanhedrin, which was Israel’s supreme court.

Annas the high priest ... Caiaphas, John, Alexander (v 6): The high priest belonged to the Sadducee party and was the chairman of the Sanhedrin. Annas was high priest AD 6–15, but the Jews continued to regard him as high priest even after that. Caiaphas, his son-in-law was high priest AD 18–36. It is not clear who John and Alexander were.

cornerstone/capstone (v 11): The literal translation is “head of the corner.” This is a Hebrew type of expression (see Ps 118:22) and refers to either a capstone over a door (a large stone used as a lintel), or a large stone used to anchor and align the corner of a wall, or the keystone of an arch. In the New Testament it always refers to Jesus. In Mark 12:10 Jesus calls himself the rejected stone which has become the cornerstone/capstone.

unschooled and ordinary (v 13): “Unschooled” does not mean that the apostles were illiterate, but that they had not received proper training in rabbinic theology. “Ordinary” means that they were non-professionals – laymen, not Rabbis.

Text questions

1. Look at v 1–4 and answer these questions:
   * Who were upset about the apostles’ teaching to the crowd in chapter 3?
   * Why were they upset?
   * What was the result of the apostles’ teaching?
2. In what context is the Holy Spirit mentioned in this story?
3. Why were the members of the Sanhedrin astonished?
4. What was the warning that the Sanhedrin gave to the apostles?

Think and discuss

1. How would you structure this passage?
2. What could be the reason behind the question from the Sanhedrin: “By what power or what name did you do this?” How did Peter answer the question?
3. What made the Sanhedrin release the apostles with only a warning?
4. Peter and John show remarkable boldness in this story. How should we understand this boldness? Note: The Sanhedrin was behind the killing of Jesus (Mark 14:55, 15:1). Annas and Caiaphas were key actors at that time as well (John 18:12–14).
5. In this passage (as in the two passages in chapter 3) the “name of Jesus” is in focus. How should we understand this expression?

Sharing and application

In the whole story about the healing of the crippled beggar and what happened afterwards (Acts 3:1 – 4:22) the “name of Jesus” plays a key role. How is the “name of Jesus” used by you (or your pastor, or in your church)? Are there “correct” and “wrong” ways of using the “name of Jesus” in the ministry?

Teach and preach

The story about Peter and John face the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:1–22 can be the basis for a good sermon. You can use this outline:

1. The background: the healing of the crippled beggar, the preaching of the gospel to the onlookers
2. The opposition from people in power:
   * They felt their position of power threatened.
   * They felt their beliefs and faith threatened.
   * They were afraid of the general public: opposition, law and order issues etc.
3. Peter’s response to the questions from the Sanhedrin:
   * The apostles were accused for an act of kindness, the healing of a crippled beggar!
   * The apostles were not ashamed of what they had done: not of the miracle, nor of the preaching of the gospel.
4. Peter quickly moved from the topic of the miracle to the proclaiming of the gospel to the Jewish leaders.
5. The boldness and courage of the apostles:
   * In spite of their humble and “unschooled” background
   * In spite of the dangerous situation of having to face powerful authorities
   * They had been with Jesus and they had witnessed the resurrection.
   * They had been filled with the Holy Spirit!
   * They had a calling to proclaim the gospel.
   * They knew that Jesus had used them in the healing miracle of the crippled beggar.
   * They knew that it is more important to obey God than to obey human authorities.
6. So what about you?

([Go to Answers 8](#Answers8))

### Study 9. The believers pray, 4:23–31

The passage

As soon as the Sanhedrin let Peter and John free, they went to the believers and reported what had happened. Then the church turned to God in prayer. God manifested his presence, and the believers were again filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaimed God’s word boldly.

Comments

Sovereign Lord (v 24): This Greek word is used by a slave about his owner and by a citizen about his undisputed ruler.

our father David (v 25): This refers to king David who wrote Psalm 2. The first two verses of this psalm are quoted as a prophecy about Jesus.

Herod and Pontius Pilate (v 27): At the time of Jesus’ crucifixion Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee and Perea, and Pontius Pilate the Roman governor of Judea. See also the chapters King Herod's Family and Palestine in the unit More Facts.

servants (v 29): The Greek word actually means “slaves.”

Text questions

1. How did the believers address God in their prayer?
2. Four conspirators against Christ are mentioned by the believers in this prayer. Who are they?
3. What was the result of the believer’s prayer in this story?

Think and discuss

1. The believers describe three aspects of God’s activities in this prayer? Which are they?
2. What do the believers request from God in this prayer?

Sharing and application

1. In Acts chapters 3 and 4 we find the account of a spectacular healing miracle and the story ends with the church praying for more such miracles. What is your own experience of spectacular and instantaneous healing miracles? Do they always take place when the church prays for them? Or, why don’t they always take place when the church prays for them?
2. Historically, among Bible believing churches there have been two opposing standpoints to spectacular healing miracles:
   * Some churches have taught that this kind of spectacular healing miracles only happened during the New Testament church period. When that period was over and the canon of the New Testament books had been formed, God discontinued these manifestations. So we cannot expect spectacular healing miracles today.
   * Others (for example John Wimber of the Vinyard Fellowship in USA) have taught that spectacular healing miracles were everyday occurrences in the New Testament church and that these miracles were the main reason for dramatic church growth in those days. So this kind of spectacular healing miracles must characterize the normal Christian life in the church today – or else we will not expect any significant church growth.

Which of these two opposing standpoints do you agree with? Give your reasons!

1. Do you think that there perhaps is a third standpoint on spectacular healing miracles – and on the main reason for church growth? Please explain!

Teach and preach

The story about the prayer of the Jerusalem church in Acts 4:23–31 is a good lesson for us about prayer. This is the outline for a Bible study called How to Pray.

1. Background: The crippled beggar healed. Peter and John before the Sanhedrin and ordered not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus (v 18). The apostles’ reply: “Is it right in God’s eyes to listen to you rather than to God?”
2. What happened as soon as Peter and John were released from the Sanhedrin?
   * They went to the believers and gave a report of what had happened (v 23).
   * The church reacted by having a prayer meeting (v 24). Here we can see the fellowship of the early church in action!
3. How did the believers pray and what did they pray about?
   * First they addressed God as “sovereign Lord” (v 24). The Sanhedrin had threatened the apostles and prohibited them to preach the gospel. But they knew that God’s authority was so much higher than the Sanhedrin’s.
   * Then they praised God for his divine sovereignty. This is how the early church understood the “Sovereign Lord”:
     + He is the God of creation (v 24)
     + He is the God of revelation (who spoke by the Holy Spirit through king David in Psalm 2 and foretold that the world would oppose his Christ), v 25–26.
     + He is the God of history (who had decided beforehand what would happen to Jesus), v 27–28.
   * Only after they had expressed and clarified their picture of God, did the believers put their petitions to God. They had three requests:
     + That God would consider the threats of the Sanhedrin (v 29). They didn’t ask God to remove the threats, or that God would punish their enemy. They only asked God to remember the threats.
     + That God would enable his servants (or “slaves”) to speak his “word with great boldness” (v 29). They asked God that the apostles wouldn’t be afraid or intimidated by the threats.
     + That God would heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders (v 30). They didn’t ask God for miracles of vengeance or destruction. They asked God for miracles of mercy!
4. How did God answer their prayers (v 31)?
   * He revealed his powerful presence by shaking the place.
   * He filled the believers once again with the Holy Spirit.
   * He gave them the boldness they needed to proclaim the gospel fearlessly.
   * He answered their request for healing miracles (this can be seen from 5:12–16).
5. What about us? What can we learn from this story about prayer?

([Go to Answers 9](#Answers9))

### Study 10. The believers have everything in common, 4:32–37

The passage

Luke presents another “snapshot” of the life of the early church in Jerusalem: There were no needy persons among the believers. God’s grace was upon the church, and the apostles continued to testify about the resurrection of Jesus. Barnabas, who was later to become Paul’s co-worker, is introduced.

Comments

at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed (v 35): The money from the sold property was given to the apostles, who in their turn passed it on to those in need.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (v 36): The name Barnabas, not Joseph, is subsequently used in the New Testament. He later became Paul’s spiritual mentor (9:27) and a leader of the church in Antioch in Syria, where he and Paul worked together as pastors (11:22–26). They also travelled together on the first missionary journey (13:2). Barnabas was a Jew and also a native and “landowner” of the Roman island of Cyprus in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. He belonged to the tribe of the Levites who during Old Testament times had religious duties and thus not given any land of their own in Palestine.

Text questions

1. How is the general attitude of the believers described in the beginning of this passage?
2. What did the apostles do in this passage?
3. What did Barnabas do with his land?

Think and discuss

1. Luke writes that the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit both in 2:4 and in 4:31. It is interesting to note that the effects of the filling with the Holy Spirit are similar in the two stories. Make a comparison!
2. Compare the two descriptions that Luke gives of the Spirit-filled church in Jerusalem in 2:42–47 and 4:32–36.

Sharing and application

1. One aspect of Luke’s description of the Spirit-filled church in Jerusalem in 2:42–47 and 4:32–36 became a difficulty for the church later: the sharing of material resources among the believers (some kind of “Christian communism”). What does your church teach about this? What do you think yourself about believers having “everything in common” (2:44)?
2. A young pastor in your fellowship claims to have been told by the Holy Spirit that the Bible teaches that his church has to follow the word of God as recorded in 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”) and Acts 4:32 (“No one claimed that any of what he owned was his own, but they all thongs in common”). This young pastor aggressively propagates his ideas among his colleagues, accusing them of “disobedience to God’s word” and of “unholy and worldly life” if they do not follow his model. How would you deal with this situation?

Teach and preach

Prepare a Bible study called There Were No Needy Persons Among Them (Acts 2:34). Base your study on what you have learned in this lesson! Here are some general suggestions:

1. You can start by describing the early church in Jerusalem.
2. You can continue by presenting some biblical principles about “fellowship,” “bearing one another’s burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2), “loving one another,” “helping one another” and so on.
3. You can use some interesting and thought-provoking points from this lesson.
4. Your study should lead up to some suggestions how we can address the issue of “needy persons” in our churches today.

([Go to Answers 10](#Answers10))

### Study 11. Ananias and Sapphira, 5:1–11

The passage

Ananias and Sapphiras belonged to the early church in Jerusalem. God struck them dead for their sin. They had sold a piece of property but did not hand over the whole amount to the apostles as promised. When the believers heard about the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira they were filled with fear.

Comments

Ananias... Sapphira (v 1): This story is given as a bad example in contrast to the preceding story about Barnabas (4:36–37) who is the good example. Ananias and Sapphira are not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament.

kept back (v 2): The Greek word means “to misappropriate, to embezzle.” The same word is used about Achan’s theft in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Joshua chapter 7.

church (v 11): This is the first time the word “church” is used in Acts. The word can refer either to a local congregation (see 8:1; 11:22; 13:1) or to the universal church (see 20:28). The same word is also used for social and political gatherings (see 19:32, 41).

Text questions

1. What did Ananias and Sapphira do with the money from the sale of their property?
2. Compare Barnabas’s behaviour (4:36–37) with the behaviour of Ananias and Sapphira. Similarities – differences?
3. How is Satan’s activity described in this passage?
4. How did the church react to these events?

Think and discuss

1. God is mentioned three times and with three different expressions in this story. What are the three expressions? What is the theological significance of the different expressions?
2. Why did God punish Ananias and Sapphira? What was their sin?
3. Ananias and Sapphira were severely judged by God for their sin. What can we as believers and churches today learn about divine judgment from this story?
4. How do you feel about this story? Is it good that it is included in the Bible? Why – why not?

Sharing and application

In this story God strikes Ananias and Sapphira with sudden and dramatic death as a consequence of their sin.

* 1. Have you ever experienced anything similar in your church? Please share!
  2. Do you think that we should expect this kind of sudden and dramatic divine punishment of sinner in our churches on a regular basis? Why – why not?

Teach and preach

Use your answers to the questions above for a Bible study called Satan’s First Attack on the New Testament Church.

([Go to Answers 11](#Answers11))

### Study 12. Many signs and wonders, 5:12–16

The passage

The apostles performed many miracles and signs. The sick and demon-possessed were healed. Many people – both men and women – joined the church.

Comments

together/with one accord (v 12): The Greek word has two shades of meaning. Some translations choose “together”, other translations choose “with one accord.”

Text questions

1. What kind of signs and miracles by the apostles are recorded in this story?
2. Where did the believers gather?

Think and discuss

1. People reacted in different ways to the miraculous signs and wonders in the early church. How did they react?
2. In the Greek text, verse 15 starts with the expression “As a result.” What does this refer to in the immediate context of this verse?
3. How should we understand the information about Peter’s shadow? Can you recall similar cases in the ministries of Jesus and Paul?

Sharing and application

1. In this passage we find that people reacted in two opposite ways to the miraculous signs in the Jerusalem church. Have you experienced similar reactions as a result of the ministry of your pastor or your church?
2. The information about Peter’s shadow is amazing. Do you have similar practices in your church? Why – why not?

([Go to Answers 12](#Answers12))

### Study 13. The apostles and the Sanhedrin, 5:17–42

The passage

The Jewish leaders were upset with the successful ministry of the apostles, so they arrested them and put them in jail over night. During the night the apostles were miraculously delivered by an angel who told them to return to the temple courts and preach the gospel there. The following day the apostles were questioned before the Sanhedrin. When the apostles proclaimed Jesus to the high priest and the other members of the Sanhedrin, they were furious and wanted to have the apostles executed. But on the advice of Gamaliel, a respected Pharisee member of the Sanhedrin, the apostles were released. But first they were flogged and told not to speak any more in the name of Jesus. The apostles were happy that “they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for Jesus’ name”, and they did not stop teaching and preaching in the temple area and in the homes.

Comments

the high priest and all those who were with him (v 17): The official high priest was Caiaphas, but the Jews considered his father-in-law Annas still to be the true high priest. “All those who were with him” refers to his family members. They belonged to the Sadducee party and were in support of the Roman occupation of Palestine.

the council/Sanhedrin (v 21): The Sanhedrin (the Jewish council) was the supreme Jewish court. It consisted of 70–100 men (71 being the proper number), who sat in a semicircle, backed by three rows of disciples, with the court clerks standing in front of them.

intend to bring this man’s blood on us (v 28): The high priest here refers to the accusation that the apostles had against the Jewish leaders: they had been responsible for killing Jesus.

tree (v 30): This word refers to the cross.

a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law (v 34): Gamaliel was the most famous Jewish teacher of his time. He was a Pharisee and more tolerant than the members of the high priestly family, who belonged to the rival party of the Sadducees. Gamaliel had a reputation for scholarship, wisdom and moderation and was loved by the people. Paul (Saul of Tarsus) had been one of his students.

Theudas (v 36): He is not known from any other historical source.

Judas of Galilee (v 37): The Jewish historian Josephus writes that Judas started a revolt in Galilee against the Roman taxes propagating that tribute should only be paid to God.

at the time of the census (v 37): This census took place in AD 6. It is not the census of Quirinius that caused Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem at the time of the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:2).

flogged (v 40): The apostles were probably given the terrible Jewish punishment of “forty lashes minus one.”.

Text questions

1. Who arrested the apostles?
2. How were the apostles released from jail?
3. Why were the captain of the temple and the chief priests perplexed (v 24)?
4. Where did the captain and his officers find the apostles?
5. Where did the officers take the apostles to be questioned?
6. What did the Sanhedrin want to do with the apostles?
7. What advice did Gamaliel give to the Sanhedrin?
8. How were the apostles punished?
9. Why were the apostles happy after their case was over?

Think and discuss

1. How would you structure this passage?
2. What could have been the reason for the Jewish authorities to be filled with jealousy so that they renewed their attack on the apostles?
3. In v 21 the apostles did something “illegal.” What did they do? Why did they do it?
4. How did the apostles defend themselves before the Sanhedrin?
5. How did Gamaliel argue his case?

Sharing and application

The apostles were flogged by the Sanhedrin before they were released. They rejoiced because “they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for Jesus’ name” (v 41).

1. How do you understand the expression “suffer dishonor” as it is used in this passage?
2. What could it imply to “suffer dishonor” in the South Indian context today?
3. Do church leaders in South India today react with joy when they “suffer dishonor”? Why – why not? What about yourself?

Teach and preach

The apostles’ defence speech before the Sanhedrin took the form of a mini-sermon (Acts 5:29–32) called Three Truths about God. You can use this outline for a sermon of your own:

1. Background: The disobedient apostles before the Sanhedrin: “We must obey God rather than men!” What about us?
   * + Whom do we obey? The rulers of this world? Or God?
     + Do we put God and his kingdom first in our lives?
2. Three truths about God:
   1. God raised Jesus from the dead. But the Jewish leaders rejected him and had him killed. What about us? Do we also reject Jesus? Or do we accept him?
   2. God exalted Jesus to his own right hand as Prince and Savior.
      * Because of his supreme position of honor and power, Jesus is able to give repentance and forgiveness of sins. What about you? Have you repented from your old life of sin and death and turned to Jesus and asked him to forgive you your sins?
      * The apostles were witnesses of Jesus’ death and resurrection. They also witnessed about this through their life and ministry – proclaiming the gospel wherever they went and to whomever they met. What about us?
        + Do we witness to what Jesus has done in our lives?
        + Do we proclaim the gospel wherever we go?
        + Do we proclaim the gospel to rich and poor, to high and low?
   3. God has given the Holy Spirit to those who obey him.
      * The Holy Spirit witnesses to Christ: his death and resurrection.
      * The Holy Spirit reminds us of Christ: the example of his life and his teaching (John 14:26).
      * The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles (2:4; 4:31).
3. What about you?
   * Have you received the Holy Spirit in your life?
   * Do you speak the word of God boldly in the power of the Holy Spirit?
   * Do you live a holy and sanctified life in the strength of the Holy Spirit?
4. The consequences: the Sanhedrin was furious and punished the apostles severely. In spite of this:
   * The apostles were happy and rejoiced (5:41).
   * The apostles continued to teach the people and to proclaim the gospel (5:42).
5. What about us?
   * Will there be punishment and disgrace for us if we follow Jesus in the same way as the apostles did?
   * Are we willing to “suffer disgrace” because of the name of Jesus?
   * Are we willing to continue to teach and preach even if we encounter dangerous opposition?

([Go to Answers 13](#Answers13))

### Study 14. The choosing of seven men, 6:1–7

The passage

This is a story about an internal problem in the early Jerusalem church and how it was solved. One group of believers felt that they were treated unfairly at the daily distribution. The church solved the problem by choosing and appointing seven men for this work. Then the apostles were able to spend more time with prayer and preaching. The last verse of this passage concludes the first unit of the book of Acts: the word of God kept on spreading!

Comments

in those days (v 1): Luke says nothing about the length of time that had passed between the previous story about the persecution of the apostles and this story about the choosing of the seven.

the number of the disciples was multiplying (v 1): The church continued to grow. This led to administrative problems. This story is about how these problems were solved.

the Grecian Jews .. the Hebrews or the Greek-speaking Jews ... the Hebrew-speaking Jews (v 1): The Grecian Jews were the Hellenists who had been born outside of Palestine and had Greek as their first language. Their culture was more Greek than Jewish. The Hebraic Jews had Aramaic or Hebrew as their first language and had preserved much more of their Jewish culture and customs. The cultural difference was probably even more important than the language difference.

distribution of food (v 1): The Greek word has a more general meaning of “assistance, ministry, service” and recurs in the expression “the ministry of the word” in v 4. The corresponding verb “wait on” is found in v 2.

the twelve called all the disciples together (v 2): This means that the apostles gathered all the believers. In Acts the word “disciple” means “believer.” “The twelve” is used in this text for the twelve apostles in Jerusalem.

the word of God (v 2): This expression refers to the teaching and the preaching of the word of God. Note that the word “ministry” is not found in the Greek text.

wait on (v 2): This Greek verb is the origin of the English noun “deacon,” which means “minister” or “servant”. Paul writes about “deacons” in Phil 1:1 and 1 Tim 3:8–13. Some Bible scholars think that the seven were the first “deacons.” Other Bible Scholars think that the seven were later replaced by “deacons.” Philip is referred to as “one of the seven” in 21:8.

brothers (v 3): In ancient times writers did not bother to write “brothers and sisters.” So the word “brothers” includes both the men and the women in the Jerusalem church.

They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus from Antioch, a proselyte from Antioch (v 5): All these names are Greek. Stephen became the first Christian martyr, and he is the main character of the three following stories in Acts. Philip is later mentioned in Acts 8:5–40 and 21:8–9 (where he is called “the evangelist”). The other five are only mentioned here.

Text questions

1. One group of people in the Jerusalem church was not happy. Who were they? What did they complain about?
2. What was the decision that the twelve had to make?
3. What were the qualifications of the seven men?
4. What did the apostles do with the seven men?
5. A special group of people came to faith as the word of God spread. Who were they?

Think and discuss

1. How can this passage be structured?
2. In v 1 Luke writes that “the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected.” If we consider the two background stories about the believers and the sharing of their possessions (4:32–37) and about Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11), we find the complaint on a deeper level really was against another group in the church. Which group?
3. This passage reveals that there were different kinds of ministries in the early church in Jerusalem. Which were they?
4. Who made the decision about the expanded leadership in the Jerusalem church? And how was it done?
5. What is the significance of the names of the seven men that were chosen?

Sharing and application

1. The leaders of the early Jerusalem church (the twelve) ran into administrative problems as the church grew in numbers. What kind of administrative problems do growing churches in South India run into? Are they the same as the ones in Jerusalem, or are they different? How are they different? And why are they different?
2. As the leaders of the early Jerusalem church (the twelve) faced more work in the ministry, they had to prioritize. They decided to focus on prayer and the ministry of the word rather than on food distribution. What about pastors in the South Indian context:
   * Do they need to prioritize? Please explain!
   * Do they make the right priorities? Please explain!
3. It can be said that the apostles “ordained” the seven men for their distribution ministry by praying and laying their hands on them.

What about your own church? Does it have any “ordination” for people who are appointed to various kinds of church ministries? If so,

* + Who are “ordained”?
  + Why are not other helpers in the church “ordained”?
  + How are they “ordained”?
  + Who “ordains” them?

1. There were two qualifications for the choosing of the seven men in the Jerusalem church: they should be known to be Spirit-filled and wise.

What about your own church?

* + Do you give top priority to these two qualifications? Why – why not?
  + Do you also have other important qualifications? Which are they?

1. This passage presents a detailed description of how a group of church leaders were appointed during New Testament times. Do you think that the churches in South India today must follow this pattern in every detail? Why – why not?
2. Luke seems to teach a lesson when he uses the same Greek word for the two areas of church work discussed in this passage. This word, which can be translated “ministry” or “distribution” or “service”, is used about both
   * + the ministry, distribution or service of the tables (v 2) and
     + the ministry, distribution or service of the word (v 4).

In the context of the South Indian church the word “ministry” is often used.

* + Which of the two above-mentioned areas of church work does the word “ministry” almost always refer to – the tables or the word?
  + Why do we hesitate to use the word “ministry” about Christian social or practical work?

1. The point in Luke’s story is not that the ministry of the word is superior to the ministry of the table. Both ministries were needed in the church. Both ministries required people that were full of the Spirit and wisdom (v 3). The point is that some people are appointed or ordained to the ministry of the word (the apostles), and other people are appointed or ordained to the ministry of the table (the seven). The Bible scholar John Stott has said about the church today, “What is needed is the basic, biblical recognition that God calls different men and women to different ministries.” Do you agree? Why – why not?

Teach and preach

You have been asked to have a Bible study based on a theme from the book of Acts at a pastors’ fellowship meeting. You decide to base your study on chapters 5 and 6 and to call it Satan Attacks the Jerusalem Church! This could be your outline:

1. Introduction: The Jerusalem church – a Spirit-filled church – a church that withstood repeated attacks from Satan
2. Satan’s three attacks:
   1. Satan attacked by persecuting the church (The story about Sanhedrin persecuting the apostles, 5:17–42). But he failed:
      * The apostles rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Jesus (5:41)
      * The apostles never stopped teaching and proclaiming the gospel (5:42)
      * What about the church in India today in the area of “persecution”? Does Satan have success? Or can the church withstand his attack?
   2. Satan attacked by trying to corrupt the church (The story about Ananias and Sapphira, 5:1–11). But he failed:
      * Ananias and Sapphira are exposed and the church is cleansed from corruption
      * People, both believers and others, realized that God was in control and not Satan, 5:11
      * What about the church in India today in the area of “corrupt, lying and hypocritical believers”? Does Satan have success? Or can the church withstand his attack?
   3. Satan attacked by trying to distract the leaders of the church (The story about the choosing of the seven, 6:1–7). This was Satan’s cleverest attack against the Jerusalem church. Satan’s main strategy
      * + was not to create tension by making one group of believers complain about the affairs of the church
        + but to use that tension to tempt the apostles to spend more time and energy with the social work of the church and neglect their main calling – which was to pray and to teach and preach the word of God.

But Satan failed:

* + - The apostles solved the complaint problem by asking the church to choose a new leadership for the social work, 6:3.
    - The apostles avoided the temptation and made the right decision: they decided to give their attention to prayer and the ministry of the word, 6:4.
    - The result of this right decision: The word of God spread. Even many priests believed, 6:7.
    - What about the church in India today in the area of a distracted leadership? Does Satan have success? Or can the church withstand his attack?

1. Conclusion: The Indian church today:
   * Are our churches Spirit-filled like the Jerusalem church?
   * Are our churches able to withstand attacks from Satan in the three areas of
     + Persecution from outside enemies?
     + Corruption from within the church itself?
     + A leadership that is distracted and neglects to focus on their main ministries of prayer and the word of God?

([Go to Answers 14](#Answers14))

Unit 2: Stephen, Philip and Paul (Acts 6:8 – 9:3)

### Introduction to unit 2

Luke’s second picture of the early church starts with the martyrdom of Stephen, followed by the persecution of the church and the scattering of the believers. This leads to the first geographical expansion of the church into Judea and Samaria, where Philip is used by God in a spectacular way. The gospel is spread by Greek-speaking Jewish believers. Luke concludes with an account of Paul’s conversion.

So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up. It grew in numbers. Comforted by the Holy Spirit, it walked in the fear of the Lord (9:31).

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### Study 15. Stephen is seized, 6:8–15

The passage

Stephen, one of the seven who had been ordained to minister at the tables (6:5), also had a powerful gospel ministry in Jerusalem. But opposition arose from Jews belonging to the Synagogue of the Freedmen, who brought him before the Sanhedrin accusing him of blasphemy.

Comments

synagogue of the freedmen (v 9): Freedmen were persons who had been freed from slavery. The freedmen in this case were probably Jewish captives who had been deported from Israel by the Romans but had been released and granted their citizenship. This may have been how Paul had obtained his Roman citizenship through his father (see Acts 22:3, 27–28). The Synagogue of the Freedmen seems to have consisted of Greek-speaking Jews from various areas of the Roman empire (two cities, Cyrene in north Africa and Alexandria in Egypt, and two provinces, Cilicia and Asia, are mentioned in the text), who had returned to Jerusalem out of devotion to God in order to observe the law and the temple sacrifices. Paul was probably a member of this synagogue (he came from Cilicia), which would explain why Paul was present at the stoning of Stephen (7:57; 8:1) and why he was breathing murderous threats against the believers before his conversion (9:1).

Text questions

1. Who opposed Stephen?
2. Where was Stephen taken?
3. How did Stephen’s face look?

Think and discuss

1. How is Stephen described in this passage and in the previous passage (6:1–7)?
2. Make a list of what happened between the members of the synagogue of the freedmen and Stephen!
3. What was Stephen accused of? Who else in the New Testament had to face similar accusations?

Sharing and application

Stephen was a person with wisdom, faith, grace and power. His wisdom was evident as his enemies argued with him and accused him. His faith had passed the test as he faced false accusations and death. His grace was seen in his Christlike behaviour and shone through his angelic face. His power was manifested in the great signs and miraculous wonders he did among the people.

1. Have you ever met a Christian brother or sister like Stephen? Describe him/her.
2. Would you like to be like Stephen? Why? How can you become like him?

Teach and preach

Use your answers above for a Bible study called: Stephen – A Role Model for Believers Today.

([Go to Answers 15](#Answers15))

### Study 16. Stephen speaks to the Sanhedrin, 7:1–53

The passage

Stephen was asked before the Sanhedrin if the accusations against him were true. Stephen did not answer the question directly. Instead he presented a brief historical account of the history of Israel to show that his preaching had been in accordance with the Old Testament. He ended his speech by accusing the Sanhedrin of resisting God and disobeying God's law.

Comments

the high priest (v 1): probably Caiaphas (see also the comment to 4:6)

Are these things so (v 1): see 6:13–14

Mesopotamia ... Haran ... the Chaldeans (v 3–4): Mesopotamia means “the country between the rivers (Euphrates and Tigris).” It was situated east of Palestine. Abraham was born in Ur and later his family settled in Haran. Both these towns were in Mesopotamia. The Chaldean people lived in the southern part of Mesopotamia.

the land of Midian (v 29): Midian was the land east and south of the Dead Sea. In the time of Moses it included the southern and eastern parts of the Sinai peninsula.

in the book of the prophets (v 42–43): Stephen is referring to the collection of prophetic books, which we now call the “Minor Prophets.” The quotation is from the Greek translation (the Septuagint) of the Amos 5:25–27.

Moloch/Molech … Rephan (v 43): Moloch was a heathen god, worshiped by the Ammonites with orgies in which children were sacrificed. Rephan (probably a name for the planet Saturn) was a pagan deity worshiped by the Israelites in the wilderness.

the tent of the testimony (v 44): Stephen is referring to the desert tabernacle where the ark of the covenant and the two covenant tablets of stone were kept.

Text questions

1. What did the high priest ask Stephen?
2. Which well-known Old Testament persons did Stephen talk about in his speech?
3. What five things did Stephen accuse the Sanhedrin of (v 51–53)?

Think and discuss

1. Try to understand Stephen’s speech in the light of what he was accused of: “This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and he change the customs that Moses handed on to us” (6:13–14).
2. Stephen accused the Sanhedrin of having uncircumcised hearts (v 51). What did he mean by that?
3. This passage reveals at least three things about Stephen. What are they?

Sharing and application

1. Do you think that it was wise of Stephen to accuse the members of the Sanhedrin the way he did in v 51–53. Why? Why not?
2. What would you yourself have done if you had been in Stephen’s shoes?
3. Do you know of any believer who has been in a situation similar to Stephen’s? What did that person do? Do you think he did the right thing?

([Go to Answers 16](#Answers16))

### Study 17. Stephen is stoned, 7:54–8:1

The passage

The Sanhedrin got furious at Stephen’s accusations. Then Stephen looked up into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. When the Sanhedrin heard this, they dragged Stephen out of the city of Jerusalem and stoned him to death. Stephen died handing over his spirit to his Lord Jesus and asking Jesus to have mercy on his killers.

Comments

the Son of Man (v 56): Jesus used this title of himself to emphasize his relationship to the Messianic prophecy in Daniel 7:13–14. This is the only time in the New Testament that it is used outside of the gospels (but see also Rev 1:13; 14:14).

a young man named Saul (v 58): Here Luke introduces the main character in the seconed part of his book, the apostle who was later called Paul.

And Saul consented to their killing of him (v 1): Paul is referring to this in his testimony to the crowd in Jerusalem in Acts 22:20.

Text questions

1. What did Stephen see as he looked up?
2. How did the Sanhedrin express their anger at Stephen and his words?
3. How many times does Stephen speak in this passage? Who does he speak to?
4. How can we see God as a Triune God (the Trinity) in v 55–56?

Think and discuss

1. What parallels do you find between the death of Stephen and the death of Jesus?
2. This passage mentions that Stephen prayed two times while he was being stoned. Both these prayers remind us strongly about the two prayers Jesus prayed on the cross, see Luke 23. What are the differences between Stephen’s prayers and Jesus’ prayers?
3. What is the significance of the story about Stephen for the flow of events in the book of Acts? Base your answer to this question on the [Table of contents](#bookmark5) of this textbook and on Acts 7:58 and 8:1.

Sharing and application

Do you think that you would be willing to (or be able to) give your life for your faith in a way similar to what Stephen did? Why – why not?

Teach and preach

Use the material from this and the two previous chapters to prepare a Bible study called Stephen and His Message. This could be your outline:

1. Who was Stephen?
   * A brief summary of his background and his ministry
   * A brief account of his “trial” and execution
2. What was his message?
   * About God
   * About Jesus and the temple
   * About Jesus and the law
3. What can we learn from Stephen?
   * About our lives
   * About our message

([Go to Answers 17](#Answers17))

### Study 18. Persecution in Jerusalem, 8:1–3

The passage

A terrible persecution against the church in Jerusalem broke out as a result of Stephen’s death. Saul, who later became the apostle Paul, was one of the persecutors.

Comment

That day a severe persecution arose …(v1): It is more logical to start this passage with this sentence.

Text questions

1. What was the immediate consequence of Stephen’s stoning?
2. Where did the persecuted believers go?
3. What do we learn about Saul in this passage?

Think and discuss

1. In what connection has Luke mentioned “Judea and Samaria” earlier in Acts? How should we understand this fact?
2. Why do you think the apostles stayed in Jerusalem when the rest of the believers were scattered?
3. What could have been the background of the people who buried Stephen?

Sharing and application

1. Why didn’t the believers in Jerusalem remember Jesus’ words about witnessing in Judea and Samaria? Instead they had to be forced to leave Jerusalem through a persecution. Reflect on this sad fact.

Then think about your own situation. Do you (and your church) remember to act on Jesus’ great commission in Matt 28:19–20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you”? If you do – then share with the others how you do it! If you don’t – then give reasons why you don’t do it!

1. Do you think that the same kind of persecution and scattering of the church could happen in South India today – in order for God’s kingdom to expand and reach new people groups? Why – why not?

([Go to Answers 18](#Answers18))

### Study 19. Philip in Samaria, 8:4–8

The passage

Philip was among those who had been scattered when persecution broke out in Jerusalem. He came to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the gospel there. Miraculous signs followed his ministry, and many people listened to him.

Comments

preaching the word (v 4): The Greek word translated “preach” is the same as the English word “evangelize” meaning “bringing the good news.” So the scattered believers “brought the good news of the word (about Jesus)” to the people of Judea and Samaria. In the New Testament this good news always refers to the death, burial, resurrection, and the witness about Jesus Christ, and its conse-quences for man’s relationship to God.

proclaimed to them the Christ (v 5): Here Luke uses another Greek word “to proclaim or tell about.” This word suggests that the message is important and urgent and that the listeners must accept it or else they will have to face the consequences.

Text questions

1. Where did Philip proclaim Christ? Find this place on the map Philip’s and Peter's journeys. ([Go to this map](#Map3PhilipsAndPetersMissionaryJourneys))
2. How was Philip’s ministry?
3. What was the result of Philip’s ministry?

Think and discuss

1. What was the connection between Philip and Stephen in the early church?
2. In this second unit of the book of Acts Philip and Stephen are two of the three main characters (the third one is Saul). Luke seems to have looked on Stephen and Philip as a pair. Make a list of the similarities between them.
3. How do you think Luke received his information about the life and ministry of Philip? Clues to the answer can be found in Luke 1:3, Acts 21:8 and 27:1.

Sharing and application

When the believers in Jerusalem were persecuted and scattered, they did not hide or keep their mouths shut. No, wherever they went they evangelized, which means that they spread the gospel about Jesus and his salvation.

How would you react in a situation like this? Would you hide and keep quiet? Or would you still be bold and proclaim the message about Jesus wherever you went? What do you think? Please share!

Teach and preach

A. Use your answers to the questions in this chapter for a Bible study called Stephen and Philip. You can make use of this outline:

1. Their background:
   * Their character (6:3, 5)
   * Their role in the Jerusalem church (6:2, 6)
2. Their ministries:
   * Stephen’s ministry (6:8)
   * Philip’s ministry in Samaria (8:4–8)
   * Their boldness in ministry
3. Their fate:
   * Stephen’s fate (7:54–60)
   * Philip’s fate (21:8–9)
4. Their contribution to Christianity, the church and its outreach:
   * Stephen’s contribution: his understanding of Jesus and his teaching about the temple, the law and the Messiah (see the chapter “Stephen’s speech to the Sanhedrin” and the answer to question 1 in Think and discuss)
   * Philip’s contribution: his bold evangelization of the despised Samaritan people
5. What can we learn from Stephen and Philip?
   * For our life and testimony
   * For our ministry

B. Prepare a Bible study based on Acts 8:1–8. You can call it Satan’s Failure. You can make use of this outline:

1. Spectacular church growth in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:41)
2. Satan must have become really upset about this. So what did he do?
   * He had Stephen killed and brought a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem (7:57–60; 8:1). This seemed to be a victory for Satan: Now the church would be crushed and the proclamation of the gospel silenced! But did that really happen?
   * He recruited Saul to work for him (8:3). This seemed to be a victory for Satan: Now he would have a “super-agent” who could do his evil work – persecuting the believers everywhere, dragging them out of their houses, putting them in prison and killing them. But did this really happen the way Satan planned?
   * He forced the believers to leave Jerusalem. The church was scattered (8:1). This seemed to be a victory for Satan: Now the structure of the huge church in Jerusalem would be crushed and the believers isolated from each other and lose their confidence in proclaiming the gospel! But did that really happen?
3. So what did happen?
   * The believers were not discouraged or silenced! As they left Jerusalem, God went with them. The power of the Holy Spirit was with them.
   * The believers proclaimed the gospel wherever they went! New churches where established everywhere.
   * Saul met Christ on the road to Damascus (chapter 9) and became God’s “super-agent.” As Paul, he evangelized the Roman empire and planted churches in the various provinces. As Paul, he became the great theologian who wrote 13 of the letters that we have in the New Testament.
   * The believers became a “new diaspora” – God’s new people among the nations of this world. The persecution in Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jerusalem church was the beginning of the worldwide church.
4. Conclusion: Satan will never prevail against God and his people. Even when Satan seems to be winning, even when the church in India seems to face impossible situations – even then, we know that Satan will ultimately fail. God and his eternal kingdom will be victorious in the end!

([Go to Answers 19](#Answers19))

### Study 20. Simon the sorcerer, 8:9–25

The passage

As Philip was ministering in a city in Samaria, a sorcerer called Simon believed the good news of the kingdom of God and was baptized. He became a great admirer of Philip’s. When the apostles Peter and John came from Jerusalem to Samaria, they laid their hands on the new converts, who thereby received the Holy Spirit. Simon the sorcerer was impressed by this, so he offered money to the apostles and asked them to give him this same ability. Peter rebuked Simon with strong words. After a time of ministry in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem.

Comments

Simon (v 9): This Simon is called “Simon the Sorcerer” in early Christian literature, where he is described as a heretic and the “father” of Gnostic teaching.

the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen on any of them (v 16): The Samaritan believers had believed the gospel message that Philip preached and they had also been baptized by Philip. That means that they had been “born by the Spirit” (John 3:5–8) and that they belonged to Christ. So they had already “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9). But before Peter and John came, they had only been baptized in water, not “with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5; 11:16). In other words: they had not yet been “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4, 9:17).

The two expressions used in this passage – “the Holy Spirit falls (or comes) on a person”, v 16 (see also Acts 1:8; 10:44; 11:15; and 19:6) and “a person receives the Holy Spirit”, v 15 and 17 (see also 10:47 and John 7:39, where both “receive” and “given” are used) – are synonymous with three other expressions used in Acts: “a person is baptized with the Holy Spirit”, Acts 1:5; “a person is filled with the Holy Spirit”, Acts 9:17; and “the Holy Spirit is poured out on a person”, Acts 10:45 (see also 2:33). Finally, we must note that the expression “to be filled with the Spirit” is also used in a more general way in Acts: Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit,” when he addressed the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:8. As the believers in Jerusalem had finished their prayer, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (4:31). Paul was “filled with the Holy Spirit” as he rebuked a sorcerer called Elymas in Cyprus (13:9). In Pisidian Antioch “the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (13:52).

Text questions

1. Why did Simon boast about being someone great?
2. Why did Simon follow Philip everywhere?
3. What happened when Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritan believers?
4. Why did Simon offer money to the apostles?
5. What was Simon’s final request to the apostles in this story?
6. What did Peter and John do before they left Samaria and on their way back to Jerusalem?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria?
2. Luke says nothing about what Simon actually saw happen when the Spirit was given to the Samaritan believers (v 18). What do you think Simon saw? Explain your answer!
3. Go through together the five expressions that Luke uses in Acts for “Spirit baptism” (see the comments above)!
4. Was Simon’s faith genuine? What speaks for it in this passage? What speaks against it?

Sharing and application

Some Pentecostal believers are in the habit of saying something like this about Baptist and Brethren believers: “They don’t believe in the Holy Spirit! Only we Pentecostals believe in the Holy Spirit!”

1. Do you yourself – or people in your church – think or say like this?
2. In the light of our study of the word of God in this passage, do you think that it is right to speak like that? Why – why not?

Teach and preach

Prepare a sermon or a Bible study based on Acts 8:1–25 called Philip in Samaria. You can use this outline:

1. Philip’s backgound (Acts 6:1–6) and why he left Jerusalem (8:1)
2. Philip’s ministry in a city in Samaria:
   * He proclaimed Christ (v 5)
   * He did miraculous signs (v 6–7)
3. The result of Philip’s ministry: People experienced joy (v 8). Why?
   * They were delivered from evil spirits (v 7)
   * They were healed (v 7)
   * They accepted the gospel message about the kingdom of God (v 12)
   * They believed in the name of Jesus (v 12) and were saved. As a result:
     + People were baptized (v 12)
     + Simon the Sorcerer, a famous person, also believed, was baptized and followed Philip (v 9–13)
4. Weaknesses in Philip’s ministry:
   * The believers were not baptized in the Holy Spirit (v 15–16)
   * Simon the Sorcerer’s life was not transformed. He still had a worldly mind (v 13, 18–23)
5. The solution to the weaknesses in Philip’s ministry: Experienced apostles (Peter and John) were sent to help him:
   * They prayed for the believers to be baptized with the Holy Spirit (v 15–18)
   * They dealt with Simon the Sorcerer (v 18–24)
   * They expanded Philip’s ministry by preaching and teaching (v 25)
   * They evangelized new places in that same area (v 25)
6. What we can learn from Philip’s ministry for our own ministry.

([Go to Answers 20](#Answers20))

### Study 21. Philip and the Ethiopian, 8:26–40

The passage

An angel told Philip to go to the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza. There he met an Ethiopian eunuch, a high official from the royal court who was travelling home in his chariot from Jerusalem, where he had worshipped God in the temple. As he was travelling, the Ethiopian was reading from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The Ethiopian then invited Philip to sit up in the chariot and explain the passage from Isaiah chapter 53 to him. Starting with that passage, Philip shared the gospel about Jesus with the Ethiopian. When they came to a place with water, the Ethiopian asked if he could be baptized. Philip baptized him, and the Ethiopian continued his journey rejoicing. Philip preached the gospel in many places and then went to Caesarea.

Comments

Then (v 26): This story must have taken place shortly after the previous story about the revival among the Samaritans.

an angel (v 26): This is the second time an angel appears to a person in Acts. The first time was in 5:19 when an angel delivered the apostles from prison in Jerusalem.

the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza (v 26): Gaza was the most southerly of the five Philistine cites. The distance from Jerusalem to Gaza was about 100 km. The road was well used, for it continued south to Egypt and the rest of the African continent.

an Ethiopian eunuch (v 27): Ethiopia in those days was the name of the region south of Egypt and it included modern Sudan and probably parts of modern Ethiopia. Castration was common in many Near Eastern countries and eunuchs were overseers of harems and close friends of rulers. They often had important government positions. The Old Testament forbids the castration of men or animals (Deut 23:1). But Isaiah prophesied that in the future kingdom of God also the eunuchs would be included (Is 56:3–5). This story in Acts chapter 8 is the fulfilment of that prophecy, as the Ethiopian eunuch believes and is baptized.

Candace, queen of the Ethiopians (v 27): Candace was not a personal name but the traditional title of the queen mother in Ethiopia. She was responsible for the secular duties of the reigning kings, who devoted themselves to religious matters.

had come to Jerusalem to worship (v 27): Bible scholars do not agree on the religious status of the Ethiopian eunuch. John Stott says that it ”seems unlikely that he was a Gentile, since Luke does not present him as the first Gentile convert; that distinction he reserves for Cornelius.” Other Bible scholars say that the Ethiopian was a Gentile God-fearer, which means that he was not a convert to Judaism.

heard him reading (v 30): In those days people always read aloud.

Verses 32–33: The quotation is from Isaiah 53:7–8. The Ethiopian was reading from the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.

Who is the prophet talking about, him or someone else? (v 34): Jewish scholars had already answered this question in three ways. Some claimed that the Servant was the nation of Israel. Others said that the Servant was Isaiah himself. Others again maintained that he was the Messiah, but their interpretation avoided any suggestion that the Messiah would suffer. It was only in the teaching of Jesus that these ideas – suffering and messiahship – were first brought together and Isaiah 53 interpreted as a prophecy about a suffering Messiah (see Luke 22:37). From Jesus the disciples learned to use this passage as the key to finding his death and resurrection elsewhere in the Scriptures.

they came to some water (v 36): There were several water sources along this desert road.

Verse 37 is found as a footnote in many Bible editions. These two sentences , which seem to be part of an early baptismal formula, are not found in the oldest and best Greek manuscripts. So most Bible scholars think that they have been added later.

Azotus (v 40): This city was called Ashdod in the Old Testament and was one of the five Philistine cities. It was 30 km from Gaza and 100 km from Caesarea.

Caesarea (v 40): This was a city built by Herod the Great (he who ruled Palestine when Jesus was born) at a huge cost and named in honor of Caesar Augustus. It lay on the coast of the Mediterranean about 40 km northwest of the town of Samaria. Herod also constructed a splendid harbor there. It was the military headquarters for the Roman forces and the residence of the procurators. It was also the home of Cornelius (Acts 10) and the place of residence of Philip the evangelist (see also 21:8-9). Paul was a prisoner there for two years and this was where he preached before king Agrippa (23:31–26:32). For more information about the kings of Palestine see the reference article called King Herod's Family ([Go to this article](#KingHerodsFamily)).

Text questions

1. Find Jerusalem and Gaza on the map Philip’s and Peter's journeys. ([Go to this map](#Map3PhilipsAndPetersMissionaryJourneys))
2. Why did Philip go to the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza?
3. What do we learn about the Ethiopian in v 27–28?
4. Who told Philip to approach the chariot?
5. What text was the Ethiopian reading?
6. How is the “baptism service” described in v 36 and v 38–39?

Think and discuss

1. Philip had a successful ministry in Samaria, and suddenly an angel tells him to leave that country and go to a desert road far away from towns and people. How do you think he felt? How would you have felt?
2. In what way is this story different from all the previous stories about people accepting the gospel message in the book of Acts?
3. Bible scholars do not agree on the religious status of the Ethiopian eunuch (see the comment to v 27 above). What do you think? Give reasons for your opinion.
4. One Bible scholar has said that God gave two gifts to the Ethiopian in this story, and that God has given the same gift to his people throughout church history. What could these two gifts be?
5. Compare the two stories about Philip and his ministry in Acts chapter 8 – his ministry in Samaria (v 4–25) and his ministry to the Ethiopian (v 26–40). What are the similarities? What are the differences?

Sharing and application

In Acts chapter 8 we find that Philip involved himself in “mass evangelism” in Samaria and in “personal evangelism” on the desert road. Today many people claim that “mass evangelism” through crusades, radio and television is the most efficient method of spreading the gospel, while others say that “personal evangelism” is much more effective. What is your experience? What does your church prioritize – mass evangelism or personal evangelism? Why?

Teach and preach

Prepare two sermons or two Bible studies based on Acts 8:26–40. In the first one you focus on Philip. In the second one you focus on the Ethiopian eunuch.

A. This can be your outline for the Bible study called Philip – A Man Led by the Holy Spirit

1. Philip’s background:
   1. He had been one of the Seven in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1–6). This means that Philip was “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (6:3), a person trusted with responsibility for the social work of the church (6:3), ordained by the apostles (6:6), probably of Hellenistic background (at least his name was Greek).
   2. He had ministry experience from Samaria (Acts 8:4–25):
      * He was a bold evangelist (8:4–5).
      * He was involved in “power ministry” (8:6–7: miraculous signs, evil spirits cast out, sick people healed).
      * He was a successful and popular evangelist (8:8–13: people were happy, people were baptized, Simon the Sorcerer admired him).
   3. The apostles Peter and John had taught him:
      * The importance of new believers receiving the baptism with the Holy Spirit (8:14–17),
      * The importance of sincere and transformed converts (8:18–24)
      * The importance of solid teaching (8:25)
2. How Philip was led by the Holy Spirit in this passage:
   1. The Holy Spirit – through an angel of the Lord – told him where to go (8:26): To go south (probably from Jerusalem, he might have arrived there together with the apostles Peter and John after their preaching ministry in many Samaritan villages, 8:25) along the desert road to Gaza.
   2. The Holy Spirit told him what to do (8:29): To approach the Ethiopian eunuch who was travelling in his chariot.
   3. The Holy Spirit – through the words of the prophet Isaiah – gave him wisdom to present the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch (8:30–35).
   4. The Holy Spirit gave him courage – in spite of the physical condition of the Ethiopian eunuch and the prohibition in Law of Moses (Deut 23:1) – to baptize him (8:36–39a).
   5. The Holy Spirit led him on to new places of gospel ministry (8:39–40).
3. What can we learn from Philip and the way he was guided and used by the Holy Spirit?
   * Where to go
   * What to do
   * To understand the message of the Bible
   * To use the message of the Bible in a correct way
   * To have courage to be different, to take new steps in faith

B. This can be your outline for the Bible study called The Ethiopian and the Gospel

1. The background of the Ethiopian (you can use information from this lesson, if you need to remind yourself)
2. How did the gospel reach the Ethiopian?
   1. God had prepared him in advance:
      * He was already a God-fearer, which means that he believed in the God of Old Testament and wanted to follow the moral laws of Moses.
      * He already had a central portion of the Old Testament message, the book of Isaiah, in his possession.
      * He had a longing heart, he wanted to know more, and he was reading his “Bible.”
   2. God had prepared a helper for him in Philip:
      * Philip was prepared for this new task by his earlier experience.
      * Philip had been sent to the Ethiopian by the Holy Spirit.
      * Philip had the heart of an evangelist and was willing to minister to the Ethiopian in the chariot.
      * Philip was used by the Holy Spirit as the Ethiopian’s Bible teacher: he opened up the Bible to him, he explained God’s word to him and he applied the teachings of the Bible in a totally new situation.
3. What happened to the Ethiopian as he heard the gospel?
   1. He understood who Jesus really is.
   2. He accepted Jesus as his personal savior.
   3. He asked to be baptized, and Philip was willing to baptize him.
   4. He “went on his way rejoicing” (v 39). Why?
      * Because he had the joy of salvation in his heart
      * Because he was now accepted as a citizen in God’s kingdom – in spite of his physical condition
4. What can we learn from this story for our own lives?
   1. Do we recognize the preparation work of the Holy Spirit in the lives and situations of the people we are ministering to?
   2. Do we allow the Holy Spirit to prepare us for the ministry?
   3. Are we faithful servants to the gospel in a way similar to Philip’s?
      * Do we ourselves understand the gospel clearly enough?
      * Do we ourselves have sound Bible knowledge so that we can teach and guide people to a deeper understanding of God’s will for their lives?
      * Do we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us to make the right decisions in new situations?
      * Do we see “rejoicing” in the lives of the people we minister to? Are people liberated into the kingdom of God – or do people experience that they are oppressed by the kingdom of God as a result of our ministry?

([Go to Answers 21](#Answers21))

### Study 22. Jesus reveals himself to Saul, 9:1–19

The passage

Saul wanted to stop the spreading of the Christian faith, even outside of Judea. So he asked the high priest for letters of introduction to the synagogues in Damascus. He would bring any believers he could find there back to Jerusalem for trial and punishment. But as he was approaching Damascus, Jesus revealed himself to him in a very dramatic way. His travel companions led him into Damascus where he spent three days praying and fasting. In a vision Jesus called a believer by the name of Ananias to go to Saul and minister to him. Saul’s eyesight was restored and he was baptized. Through Ananias’s prophetic message God called him to become a missionary, both to Jews and to Gentiles.

Comments

Paul’s conversion is recorded three times in the book of Acts. This shows the importance that Luke gives to it. In chapter 9 Luke describes what happened in his own words. In 22:3–16 Paul gives his testimony to the crowd at his arrest in Jerusalem, and in 26:9–18 Paul witnesses to king Agrippa in Caesarea at the end of his imprisonment there. The three stories are not identical, and together they give a fuller description of Paul’s conversion.

disciples (v 1): Luke uses the word disciples about believers in general. See also v 10, where Ananias is called a disciple.

Damascus (v 2): Damascus was an important city in the Roman province of Syria and it had a large Jewish population. It was situated 240 km north of Jerusalem, and it must have taken Saul almost a week’s journey to get there. The high priest and the Sanhedrin did not have any legal authority outside of Judea, but they had some moral authority over the Jews in the dispersion.

Who are you, Lord? (v 5): Saul, who was a Pharisee and a Jewish rabbi, would have interpreted such a voice from heaven as the voice of God himself. The solemn repetition of Saul’s name in its Aramaic form and the bright light suggested to him that he was in the presence of God.

Ananias (v 10): Ananias was a common Jewish name. There are two other men with that name mentioned in Acts (5:1; 23:2). This Ananias is only found in the story about Paul’s conversion.

a man of Tarsus named Saul (v 11): Saul, who later called himself Paul, was born in the city of Tarsus, the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia. He had come to Jerusalem probably at the age of 13 to be trained by the famous rabbi Gamaliel (see 22:3).

the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you (v 17): The experience that Saul had on the road to Damascus was not only a vision. It was the resurrected Jesus who appeared to him. See also 1 Cor 9:1 and 15:8, where Paul’s claim to be an apostle of Christ is based on the fact that Jesus actually showed himself to him.

be filled with the Holy Spirit (v 17): Luke does not include any details about the way in which Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit. But we know from 1 Cor 14:18 that Paul spoke in tongues more than any of the believers in Corinth.

Text questions

1. Find Jerusalem and Damascus on the map The Roman province of Judaea ([Go to this map](#Map1TheRomanProvinceOfJudaea)).
2. How did Saul obtain permission to persecute the believers in Damascus?
3. How did Saul enter the city of Damascus?
4. How did Ananias know where to find Saul?
5. How did Ananias address Saul when he had found him?
6. Saul was praying and fasting for three days after his experience on the road to Damascus. What did he do before he took food again?

Think and discuss

1. In what way was Saul persecuting Jesus (v 4)?
2. If we read this story carefully, we will find that Saul had more than one experience of the Lord. Make a list of his experiences.
3. In this passage Luke uses four different expressions for “believers”. Which are they? Do you think that there is any difference in meaning between these expressions?
4. What did the Lord reveal to Ananias about Saul’s future? Did these things really happen to him?

Sharing and application

1. Paul’s conversion story is very dramatic. Do you think that Luke wants us to read it as a model story for us? Or should we consider some aspects of the story exceptional and unique for Paul – and other aspects of the story as typical and applicable to conversions in general? Explain!
2. Ananias is used by God in a fantastic way in this story. But he is a low-profile man who is not mentioned in any other context in the New Testament. Do you know people like that in your churches – people who are really used by God, but not always recognized or even remembered by people? Please share! How can this kind of people – people like Ananias – be an example to us?

Teach and preach

Prepare a sermon or a Bible study about Ananias. You can use Acts 22:1–16 in addition to this passage. You can call your study Ananias – a Forgotten New Testament Hero and use this outline:

1. Who was Ananias?
   * He was a devout observer of the law – so all the Jews in Damascus respected him (22:13)
   * He was a man in close contact with the Lord – so Jesus spoke to him in a vision (9:10)
   * He was a disciple – so he was obedient to Lord (9:10, 17)
   * He was a man with common sense – so he did not want to obey the Lord’s orders without more clarifications (9:13–14)
   * He trusted the Lord’s words – so he went to Saul in spite of his bad reputation (9:17)
2. How was Ananias used by the Lord?
   * He carried the Lord’s message to Saul (9:15; 22:14–16)
   * He laid his hands on Saul and healed him from his blindness (9:17–18; 22:13)
   * He baptized Saul (9:18; 22:16)
   * Perhaps he even cooked food for Saul (9:19)
   * He spoke words of encouragement to Saul (22:16)
3. But what is the most amazing thing about Ananias?
   * + He was willing to accept Saul, a well-known persecutor of the church (9:1–2; 22:4–5), as a brother in Christ (9:17) and introduce him to the believers in Damascus.
4. So what can we learn from the example of Ananias?
   1. To live respectful lives that bring honor to the church – even in the eyes of unbelievers
   2. To walk close to the Lord so that he can reveal his will to us and make use of us
   3. To use our God-given common sense so that we are even willing to question God in order to be absolutely clear about his will for us
   4. To allow God to use us in different ways and in different ministries: speaking God’s word, prophesying, healing the sick, baptizing, arranging for food and other practical things, involving ourselves in Christian social work
   5. To believe that God has the power to transform the lives even of persecutors, murderers and enemies to the church
   6. To accept those whom God has accepted whatever their background:
      * The be willing to call them “brothers and sisters” and introduce them to the believers in our city, town or village
      * To allow them to get involved in the church and its ministries

([Go to Answers 22](#Answers22))

### Study 23. Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem, 9:19–31

The passage

Saul involved himself in a powerful preaching ministry among the surprised Jews in Damascus. Some time later the Jews were planning to kill him. But Saul’s followers saved him. They lowered him down in a basket through an opening in the city wall during the night. Saul went to Jerusalem, but at first he was not accepted by the believers there. They did not think that his life had really changed. But Barnabas introduced him to the apostles. Then Saul started a ministry among the Greek speaking Jews in Jerusalem. But when they tried to kill him, the believers took him to Caesarea, and Saul continued his journey to Tarsus, his hometown. The last verse of this passage concludes the second unit of the book of Acts: the church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria was strengthened and comforted by the Holy Spirit as it grew in numbers and in the fear of the Lord.

Comments

Barnabas (v 27): Luke first mentions Barnabas in 4:36. Later he and Paul become close co-workers, both as pastors in Antioch and on the first missionary journey.

Caesarea (v 30): For more information about this city see the comment on 8:40.

Text questions

1. How was Saul saved from the plot to kill him in Damascus?
2. Why were the believers in Jerusalem afraid of Saul in the beginning?
3. How did Barnabas help Saul in Jerusalem?
4. What five things does Luke tell us about the church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria in v 31?

Think and discuss

1. What was Saul’s message to the Jews in Damascus and to the Greek speaking Jews in Jerusalem? Explain why this message was so astonishing?
2. Compare this passage with 2 Cor 11:32–33 and Gal 1:15–21. What additional information do we get there about Saul’s stay in Damascus and Jerusalem?

Sharing and application

1. Without Barnabas’ help Saul’s first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion could have been a disaster – and his life could have taken a very different direction. How?
2. Do you know of any believer who has done what Barnabas did for Saul in Jerusalem? Please share!

Teach and preach

A. Prepare a sermon or a Bible study about Saul called Truly Converted! This could be your outline:

1. Saul before his conversion:
   * He did not acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah.
   * He became an enemy of the gospel, persecuting the believers.
2. Saul’s conversion:
   * Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus.
   * Saul realized that Jesus is the Lord and the Messiah foretold by the Old Testament prophets.
   * Saul was healed from his blindness.
   * Saul was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit
   * Jesus called him to preach the gospel among both Jews and Gentiles.
3. Saul after his conversion: His life was totally changed!
   1. He became a believer and and joined the fellowship of believers both in Damascus and in Jerusalem.
   2. He who had been a persecutor of the believers became a propagator of the gospel.
   3. What did he propagate?
      * That Jesus is the Son of God (9:20): He is God who became man to bring salvation to sinful man
      * That Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah (9:22)
      * That the name of Jesus must be proclaimed (9:27): There is salvation in no other name!
4. What about you? Are you truly converted?
   * Have you accepted Christ as your personal savior?
   * Has your life been changed?
   * Do you now identify with the people of God, the fellowship of the believers?
   * Do you truly understand who Jesus is?
   * Do you witness to the name of Jesus, sharing the gospel with people around you in the power of the Holy Spirit?

B. Base a short Bible study called The Church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria on 9:31. Your outline can be like this:

1. Luke’s description of the church in five points (see your answer to text question 4 above)
   * A time of peace
   * The comfort of the Holy Spirit in three areas:
     + The believers grew stronger in their faith and in their ministry.
     + The church grew in numbers as more and more people were saved.
     + The spiritual life of the church developed, as the believers lived in the fear of the Lord.
2. Apply this description to your own church situation. Do you experience the encouragement of the Holy Spirit in these three areas?
   * Stronger faith and ministry
   * Growing numbers, more people saved
   * Improved spiritual life, as you live in the fear of the Lord

([Go to Answers 23](#Answers23))

Unit 3: Judea and Syria (Acts 9:32 – 12:24)

### Introduction to unit 3

Luke’s third picture of the early church describes its first expansion to the Gentiles. Peter’s dramatic visit to Cornelius’ house opens the eyes of the apostles to the universality of the gospel – God’s salvation is even for the Gentiles! This becomes more evident as the gospel is carried to the Greeks of Antioch, the largest city in the Roman province of Syria. A great number of them believe and turn to the Lord. In Judea, king Herod Agrippa has James, one of the Twelve, put to death by the sword. Peter is, however, miraculously released from prison and goes into hiding.

But the word of God continued to spread and grow (Acts 12:24).

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### Study 24. Aeneas and Tabitha, 9:32–43

The passage

Now Luke returns to Peter in his account of events from the early church. In Lydda Peter healed a paralytic man called Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years. All the people who saw this healing turned to the Lord. Then Peter was called to Joppa where a saintly woman called Tabitha had recently died. Peter called her back to life. Many people believed in the Lord when they heard about this miracle.

Comments

Lydda (v 32): This was a town a few kilometers north of the road between Jerusalem and Joppa.

Sharon (v 35): This probably refers to a village near Lydda. Sharon was also the name of the fertile region along the coast of the Mediterranean between Joppa and Mount Carmel.

Joppa (v 36): Joppa was the main seaport of Judea, situated 60 km from Jerusalem. The distance between Joppa and Lydda was 20 km.

Tabitha (v 36): Tabitha is Aramaic and Dorcas is Greek. Both words mean “gazelle”.

When they had washed her body, they laid it in an upstairs room (v 37): In preparation for burial both Jews and Greeks washed the body of the dead person. In Jerusalem the Jews had to bury a person the same day he died, but in the countryside the burial could be delayed up to three days. In such cases the body was placed in an upstairs room.

a man called Simon, a tanner (v 43): A tanner treated the skins of dead animals, which meant that he was unclean according to the Jewish law. That was probably the reason why Simon’s house was situated at the sea away from the town itself (see 10:6). Peter’s decision to stay with him shows that he was willing to disregard Jewish ceremonial laws. So God was now preparing him for his next assignment – to preach the gospel to Cornelius and his household, who were Gentiles.

Text questions

1. Find Lydda and Joppa on the map The Roman province of Judaea ([Go to this map](#Map1TheRomanProvinceOfJudaea)). Also find these places on the map Philip’s and Peter's journeys. ([Go to this map](#Map3PhilipsAndPetersMissionaryJourneys))
2. Why did Peter travel to Lydda?
3. How can we say that Tabitha was a saintly woman?
4. What happened as a result of the healing of Aeneas and the raising of Tabitha from the dead?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think the believers in Joppa sent for Peter and asked him to come at once?
2. In his introduction to Acts, Luke states that in his gospel he wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach. This implies that Acts is about what Jesus continued to do and teach through his apostles by the power of the Holy Spirit. The two miracle stories in this passage remind us of two miracles that Jesus performed in Luke’s gospel. In Luk 5:17–26 Jesus heals a paralytic man, and in Luk 8:40–42, 49–56 Jesus raises Jairus’ daughter from the dead.

Compare these stories. Do you find any striking similarities between them that show that the apostle Peter continued to do what Jesus had begun to do?

Teach and preach

Prepare a sermon or a Bible study using material from your answer to the previous question. Then add some more points. It could be called Jesus Began – Peter Continued! This could be your outline:

1. Introduction:
   1. Luke’s declaration in Acts 1:1-2: His gospel was about what Jesus did and taught – Acts is about what Jesus continues to do and teach through the church
   2. So how did Jesus “continue”?
      * He chose 12 apostles to be with him (Luk 6:13) to observe him and to learn from him (much of what Jesus did and taught is recorded in the gospels)
      * He foretold that those who had faith in him would do what he did, yes even greater things (John 14:14)
      * He promised them the power of the Holy Spirit (Luk 24:45–49; Acts 1:8): On the first day of Pentecost this promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled (Acts 2:1–4; 2:33)
2. Two of Jesus’ miracles that are recorded in Luke’s gospel:
   * The healing of a paralytic man (Luk 5:17–26)
   * The raising up of Jairus’ daughter (Luk 8:40–42, 49–56)
3. Peter performed similar miracles recorded in Acts:
   * The healing of the paralytic man Aeneas in Lydda (Acts 9:23–35)
   * The raising of Tabitha in Joppa (Acts 9:36–42)
4. Let’s look at how Jesus is in the centre of the stories about Aeneas and Tabitha:
   1. These miracles followed the example of Jesus: What Jesus had done, Peter also did.
   2. These miracles were performed by the power of Jesus and in the name of Jesus; not by Peter or in the name of Peter
      * To Aeneas Peter said, “Jesus Christ heals you!”
      * In the case of Tabitha, Peter got down on his knees and prayed (to Jesus).
   3. These miracles gave glory to Jesus, not to Peter
   4. These miracles caused people to be followers of Jesus, not of Peter
      * In the story about Aeneas all those who lived in the area turned to the Lord.
      * In the story about Tabitha many people believed in the Lord.
5. What about our church today?
   1. Have we received the promise – the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and ministry?
   2. Do we continue the work that Jesus started?
   3. Do we focus on Jesus in our preaching and teaching?
   4. Do we give glory to Jesus when miracles happen through our ministry?
   5. Do we experience that more and more people become followers of Jesus (turn to him and believe in him) through our ministry?

([Go to Answers 24](#Answers24))

### Study 25. Cornelius sends for Peter, 10:1–8

The passage

In Caesarea there was a Roman officer named Cornelius. He was a God-fearing and devout Gentile. One afternoon as he was praying, an angel appeared to him and told him to send for Simon Peter, who was staying with Simon the tanner in Joppa. Immediately Cornelius sent two of his servants and a soldier to Joppa.

Comments

The story about the conversion of Cornelius is a key story in Acts. It is told twice: the first time in Luke’s own narrative in chapter 10; the second time by Peter in chapter 11, as he defends his actions before the Jerusalem church. It is also referred to by both Peter and James at the Jerusalem council some years later (15:7–9, 13–18).

Caesarea (v 1): See comment to 8:40. The distance from Caesarea to Joppa was 50 km, about one day’s journey.

Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Regiment (v 1): Cornelius (the name is Latin) was a centurion, a Roman officer commanding a unit of at least 100 men, at the regiment called Italian and stationed in Caesarea, the capital of the Roman province of Judea. Centurions were carefully selected, and they played an important role in the military set-up of the Roman empire.

devout/God-fearing (v 2): This term was used of a person who had not fully converted to the Jewish faith, but who believed in the God of Israel and respected the moral teachings of the Jews.

about three o’clock in the afternoon (v 3): This was a Jewish hour of prayer and it shows that Cornelius followed Jewish practices.

memorial (v 4): This was a portion of the Old Testament grain offering, see Lev 2:1–2. The metaphorical meaning here is that God was pleased with Cornelius’ concern for the poor and wanted to lead him to salvation.

Text questions

1. Find Caesarea and Joppa on the map The Roman province of Judaea ([Go to this map](#Map1TheRomanProvinceOfJudaea)).
2. What do we learn about Cornelius in this text?
3. What did the angel tell Cornelius to do?

Think and discuss

Why do you think that the story about Cornelius’ conversion is considered a key story in the book of Acts?

([Go to Answers 25](#Answers25))

### Study 26. Peter’s vision, 10:9–23

The passage

Luke shifts the scene from Cornelius’ house in Caesarea to Simon the tanner’s house in Joppa. There, Peter went up to roof to pray. And while he was waiting for his lunch to be prepared he had a vision of something that looked like a sheet being lowered down from heaven. Is contained all kinds of animals. A voice told Peter to kill and eat. Peter refused, as the sheet contained animals that were unclean according to the Jewish ceremonial laws. The voice repeated the command. This happened three times. Peter was wondering about the meaning of this vision, when the messengers from Cornelius arrived. The Holy Spirit told him to go with them. The messengers explained their business, and Peter invited them to stay overnight as his guests. The following day Peter left Joppa with the messengers and some of the believers.

Comments

all kinds of four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, as well as birds of the air (v 12): The sheet contained animals that the law declared were clean as well as animals that were unclean (see Leviticus chapter 11). This explains Peter’s reaction in v 14.

without hesitation (v 20): The Greek expression has more than one meaning. One of them is “make no distinction.” So perhaps the Holy Spirit told Peter, “Go with them without making any distinction between Jew and Gentile.” In the vision on the roof the voice had told Peter not to make any distinction between clean and unclean food. Now the Holy Spirit tells Peter not to follow the Jewish distinction between Jews (clean people) and Gentiles (unclean people).

Peter asked the men to enter the house and gave them lodging (v 23): This shows that Peter had already understood the message of the vision. Jews were not allowed to receive Gentiles as guests in this way. But he invited the Gentile visitors (ceremonially unclean people according to Jewish tradition) to stay overnight with him (a ceremonially clean person).

some of the brothers (v 23): From the larger context we know that they were six in number (11:12), and they had Jewish background (10:45).

Text questions

1. Why did Peter go up on the roof?
2. What did Peter do after he had seen the vision?
3. The Holy Spirit told Peter about the three visitors. Who had sent them?

Think and discuss

1. What was the lesson that God had for Peter through the vision on the roof?
2. In this passage we can see how God timed the various events that took place between Cornelius and Peter in a perfect way. How was God's timing of the events?

Sharing and application

This passage can be used as an example of the dangers of interpreting Bible verses out of context. Read only v 11–15. Then answer the following questions:

1. What did the large sheet contain (v 11)?
2. What did the voice from heaven tell Peter to do (v 13)?
3. Why did Peter refuse to obey the voice from heaven (v 14)?
4. What was the rebuke that Peter received (v 15)?
5. So what lesson did Peter learn from God through this vision?

If you have done this exercise correctly your answer to the last question will be something like this: God told Peter through this vision that he must eat every kind of animal, including reptiles and birds.

But the larger context of the passage shows that the lesson God taught Peter through this vision was not about food, but about people.

Do you have other similar examples from your own life or your own church, when interpreting Bible verses out of context leads to a wrong understanding of God’s message? Think, share and discuss!

([Go to Answers 26](#Answers26))

### Study 27. Peter visits Cornelius, 10:24–48

The passage

In Caesarea many people had gathered in Cornelius’ house, waiting for Peter to arrive. Cornelius greeted Peter reverently, and Peter pointed out how strange it was for him to visit the house of a Gentile. After Cornelius had explained to Peter why he had been sent for and that they were now in the presence of God, Peter began to speak. While he was still delivering his gospel message, the Holy Spirit fell on the listeners, who spoke in tongues and praised God. When Peter saw and heard this, he ordered them to be baptized.

Comments

God has shown me (v 28): Peter had understood the message that God gave him through the vision: The old barrier between Jews and Gentiles had been removed in Christ. Paul writes about this in Ephesians 2:11–16.

a man in bright clothing (v 30): This was a common way of describing an angel who appeared in the form of a man.

the good news of peace (v 36): This refers to peace and reconciliation between God and man.

hanging him on a tree (v 39): This is the second time Peter uses this expression in a sermon (see 5:30) about Jesus and the crucifixion (see also 1 Peter 2:24). By doing so, Peter is reminding his listeners of Deut 21:23, where it is written, “anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.” Jesus bore our curse on the cross. He died for our curse so that we might have forgiveness and eternal life.

who ate and drank with him (v 41): That Jesus ate and drank with his disciples was evidence of his bodily resurrection.

Text questions

1. How did Cornelius welcome Peter?
2. At what time of day did this gathering take place?
3. Peter said, “We are witnesses.” What was he a witness of?
4. What happened to Cornelius and his household, while Peter was still delivering his sermon?
5. What made Peter decide to order Cornelius and his family and friends to be baptized?
6. What did Peter do after the meetings was over?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think Peter introduced himself the way he did?
2. Cornelius said, “Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour.” Remind yourselves what happened on each of these four days!
3. Peter said, “I now realize the truth that God does not show favoritism. He accepts people from every nation who fear him and do what is right.” What did Peter mean by that? And what did he not mean by that?
4. Why were Peter’s companions astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out?

Sharing and application

I have often experienced in Indian villages that after the gospel meeting some people will come up to me and greet me by falling down on the floor and touching my feet. Have you also had this kind of experience? Please share! Then discuss these questions:

1. Why do you think people do like this?
2. Is it right of them to do so? Why – why not?
3. How do you feel, when people do something like this to you?
4. How should we behave in this kind of situations?

Teach and preach

In this passage Luke records a summary of a sermon that Peter delivered to a Gentile audience in Cornelius’ house. Probably most of the listeners were “God-fearers”, people who believed in and prayed to the God of Israel, and who tried to follow Jewish moral standards. This explains why Peter’s sermon contained references to the Old Testament.

You can use Peter’s “sermon outline” and adapt it to your own situation by focusing less on the Old Testament prophecies and more on Jesus’ ministry and the universality of the gospel. You can call your sermon Salvation for everyone and use the following outline:

1. The gospel in three points:
   1. Jesus’ life and ministry (see 36–39)
   2. Jesus’ death on the cross (see v 39)
   3. Jesus’ resurrection (see v 40–41)
2. The command that Jesus gave to Peter and his other disciples: Preach the gospel!
   * + We are Jesus’ disciples today, so we want to follow his command and preach the gospel to everyone.
3. This gospel is universal, because Jesus will come back one day to judge everyone, both the living and the dead (see v 42).
4. So what must we do so that we can face that judgment day with confidence?
   1. The Bible says (in the Old Testament, see v 43, as well as in the New Testament) that salvation can be found only in Jesus (Acts 4:12). We must believe in Jesus and accept his forgiveness (v 43), only then can we experience salvation and face the judgment day with confidence.
   2. We are all sinners and cannot live up to the standards of a holy God (Rom 3:23–25a). But through Jesus and his death on the cross we are justified and redeemed from the bondage of sin and death.
      * Give your personal testimony: I have experienced this myself, so I know that it is true!
5. The really good news is that this gospel is not for certain kinds of people only. It is not a foreign gospel. This is a universal gospel for everyone – whatever our financial, social, cultural, religious or geographical background.
6. Invitation!

([Go to Answers 27](#Answers27))

### Study 28. Peter is questioned, 11:1–18

The passage

When Peter returned to his home church in Jerusalem, he was questioned about his actions in Cornelius’ house in Caesarea. Peter told them everything that had happened. When the Jerusalem believers had heard his story, they were happy and convinced that God’s salvation included even the Gentiles.

Comments

those who were of the circumcision (v 2): Luke is referring to circumcised male believers. In the Jerusalem church all male believers were circumcised, as they all had Jewish background. So the whole church criticised Peter.

uncircumcised men (v 3): The reason why it was forbidden for Jews to enter a Gentile home and to have food with Gentiles was that the Gentiles did not observe the Jewish laws of clean and unclean food. They also prepared food in a way that would violate Jewish regulations.

God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life (v 18): Compare Paul’s words in Romans 10:12–13: “For there is no distincion between Jew and Greek. For the same Lord is Lord of all and generous to all who call on him, for, ‘Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

Text questions

1. What did the believers in Jerusalem accuse Peter of?
2. There is one piece of information in v 14, which was not included as the angel’s visit to Cornelius was recorded in chapter 10 (see 10:4–6 and 10:30–32). What is that?
3. List the order of events in Peter’s speech in v 5–17!

Think and discuss

1. In the question above you listed the order of events in Peter’s speech in v 5–17. In what way is it different from Luke’s account in chapter 10?
2. There is something that Peter must have told the Jerusalem church, but Luke does not mention it in v 17. What is that?
3. Compare v 16–17 (Peter’s report in his own words) with 10:47–48 (Luke’s account of what Peter said. What is the main difference? What could be the reason for the difference?
4. How did the church in Jerusalem come to the conclusion recorded in v 18, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life”?

Sharing and application

1. Palestine at the time of the early church had deep religious and social divides between Jews and Gentiles. It was not possible for them to have close contact with one another: they could not visit each other’s home; they could not eat and drink together.

This reminds me of South India. Even today most strict Brahmins would refuse to visit the home of a believer for a meal. How can we as believers communicate the gospel to people like this without offending them or scaring them away?

1. In the story about Peter and Cornelius we see how God had to intervene four times in order for Peter (and the Jerusalem church) to understand that God’s salvation also included the Gentiles.

Do you have any examples from your own life (or from the life of our church), where God had to intervene in a special way (through a vision, a prophetic message or a dream) in order to make you understand his will for the expansion of the gospel (to a new people’s group, to a new area, to a family that was socially or culturally to an “untouchable”, to a “persecutor of the church”)? Please share!

Teach and preach

A. Prepare a sermon based on your answers to some of the questions above. It is good if you also include some true stories from South India. You can call your sermon We Must Understand God’s Great Salvation Plan!

B. Luke’s story in Acts 10 and 11 about Peter and Cornelius took place in a religious and cultural context that was very different from ours today: We don’t have any Jews in South India. In our churches circumcision is a non-issue. We don’t have any problems with allowing Gentiles to be baptized.

So what can we learn from this story? Prepare a Bible study based on Acts 10 and 11 called Two Lessons from the Cornelius Story. You can use this outline:

1. Background: Summary of the Cornelius story (Acts 10 and 11)
2. Lesson One: The church is one!
   1. God did not make any distinction between Jews and Gentiles
   2. What about us in the churches in South India?
      * Languages distinctions
      * Social distinctions: rich – poor, influential – powerless, high caste – poor caste, men – women, old – young
3. Lesson Two: There is only one way to salvation!
   1. Cornelius was a good man: a devout, God-fearing and generous Roman who believed in the Only True God of Israel. But he still needed to hear the Gospel and receive Jesus as his personal savior.
   2. What about the churches in South India today?
      * Many of them believe that God will accept persons from any religion as long as they are good, God-fearing, generous, live “holy” lives and believe in the One Supreme God.
      * Has our church (or have we personally) fallen into that heresy?
   3. The Bible is clear: Jesus is the only way to God. There is salvation in no other name.
4. Conclusion: What can we learn from these two lessons?
   * For our personal life and ministry
   * For our church life and ministry

([Go to Answers 28](#Answers28))

### Study 29. The church in Antioch, 11:19–30

The passage

The gospel reached the big and important city of Antioch in Syria. God blessed the ministry and large numbers of people – both Jews and Gentiles – believed and were added to the church. Barnabas came from Jerusalem – and later Saul from Tarsus – to work as pastors and teachers in the church, where the believers were called Christians for the first time. The believers provided help for the needy brothers in Judea in response to a prophecy that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world.

Comments

Phoenicia (v 19): This country was situated along the Mediterranean coast north of Palestine.

Cyprus (v 19): See comment on 4:36

Antioch (v 19): Antioch in Syria, the capital of the Roman province of Syria, was the third largest city in the Roman empire with a population of around 3 lakh. It had a very international population with Greeks, Romans, Jews and people from the East (Persia, India and China). It was situated 25 km from the Mediterranean Sea and was an important commercial centre.

Cyrene (v 20): The coastal capital of a Roman province in northern Africa

the hand of the Lord was with them (v 21): This metaphorical expression means that God approved of what they were doing and blessed them.

Barnabas (v 22): See comment on 4:36

Tarsus (v 25): See comment on 9:11

Agabus (v 28): This prophet is also mentioned in 21:10–11, where he foretells Paul’s imprisonment.

Claudius (v 28): Claudius was Roman emperor AD 41–54.

elders (v 30): This is the first time church elders are mentioned in Acts. Luke says nothing about who they were.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the maps: Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch (in Syria) and Cyrene. ([Go to Reference: Maps](#ReferenceMapsAndArticles))
2. What was the historical background to the arrival of the first believers at Antioch?
3. How is Barnabas described in this passage?
4. Why did Barnabas travel to Tarsus?
5. What kind of work did Barnabas and Saul do together in Antioch?
6. In Antioch the believers were called by a new name? What name was that?
7. Why did the believers in Antioch provide help to the believers in Judea?

Think and discuss

1. Pick a key phrase in this passage. Why did you choose this one?
2. Why do you think Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to Antioch?
3. When Barnabas came to Antioch, he saw that the grace of God was at work there (v 23). What did he actually see?
4. Why do you think Luke included the story about Agabus’ prophecy in his narrative?

Sharing and application

The evidence of the grace of God in the church in Antioch was that a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. What do we see as evidence of the grace of God in the ministry of our South Indian churches?

1. Do we think that it is most important that many people turn to the Lord?
2. Or do we think that is most important to focus on the spiritual development of the believers that we already have?
3. Or do we think that both these things are equally important. In that case: How do we find the balance between “fantastic church growth” and “fantastic spiritual maturity”?

Teach and preach

A. Use your answers to question about Barnabas for a Bible study for gospel workers about him in Antioch called A Great Pastor in Antioch. You can use the following outline:

1. Introduction:
   * The church in Antioch (v 19–21)
   * Barnabas comes to Antioch (v 22)
2. Barnabas in Antioch:
   * Happy for the on-going ministry there (v 23)
   * An encouraging and teaching pastor (v 23) who must have spent several years as one of the pastors in the church
   * A good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith (v 24)
   * A man used by God: Many people were added to the church (v 24) during his ministry there
   * A realistic and unselfish pastor: He knew that Saul would be needed as a co-pastor in order for the ministry to progress further. So he went to Tarsus to bring Saul to Antioch (v 25–26). Note: Saul had more than 10 years of ministry experience from serving God first in Damascus and Arabia, then in his home country of Cilicia.
   * A good and faithful teamworker as he and Saul taught in the church together for a whole year (v 26)
   * God blessed the ministry as even more people were added to the church (v 26)
   * A pastor who also led the church into social action (v 29–30)
3. Barnabas – a role model for us as gospel workers:
   1. A good person: liked and appreciated by those around him
   2. Full of the Holy Spirit and faith: equipped by God for the ministry
   3. Positive, encouraging: happy when co-workers do well and are successful in the ministry
   4. Realistic and unselfish:
      * realize the need for co-workers
      * be willing to look for the right co-worker
      * not hesitating to go the extra mile (Barnabas travelled to Tarsus!) to find a suitable and experienced co-worker
   5. A team-worker – not the big boss
   6. A gospel worker ministering in God’s blessings:
      * seeing more people continuously added to the church
      * seeing the believers grow and mature
        + in their knowledge of the Lord,
        + in their spiritual lives
        + in their concern for brothers in need

B. Here follows an outline for a Bible study based on Acts 11:19–30 called The Church in Antioch:

1. Introduction:
   * Up to this point in Acts, Luke has presented how the church began in Jerusalem (all Jewish background believers), the spreading of the church to Samaria (“half-Jewish” background believers) and Judea (Jewish-background believers and the first Gentile family of believers, Cornelius’ household). Now the gospel spreads in wider circles, even up north to Antioch in Syria, where something new happens.
   * A little about Antioch as a city (see comment on v 19)
2. The church in Antioch:
   * Started by unnamed evangelists who had travelled north to Syria as the believers spread from Jerusalem after Stephen’s death
   * But these evangelists had international background. They were Jewish believers from Cyprus and Cyrene, whose mother tongue was Greek and who were comfortable with the Greek-Roman culture.
   * A new understanding of ministry: Trying to reach the Greek-speaking Gentiles, in addition to the Greek-speaking diaspora Jews
   * Team leadership: The first evangelists, Barnabas the pastor, Saul the co-worker and pastor brought in later, other “prophets and teachers” (13:1)
3. The results of the ministry in Antioch:
   * A great number of people believed and turned to the Lord (v 21, 24)
   * The believers were encouraged to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts (v 23)
   * The believers were systematically taught by Barnabas and Saul. They must have been taught about Christ: the facts and significance of his life, death, resurrection, exaltation, outpouring of the Spirit, present reign and future return. So here the believers were called “Christians” for the first time!
   * The believers were taught to shoulder social responsibilities: They provided help for the famine-stricken church in Judea – each believer “according to his ability” (v 29).
4. What can our South Indian churches learn from this description of the church in Antioch?
   1. We must reach out with the gospel into new geographical areas!
   2. We must reach out with the gospel into new cultural areas (socially, culturally, linguistically)!
   3. We must encourage our believers to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts!
   4. We must have leaders/pastors who can cater to the various ministry need!
   5. We must teach our believers systematically about Christ!
   6. We must teach our believers to reach spiritual maturity, including sacrificing for the material needs of our suffering brother!

([Go to Answers 29](#Answers29))

### Study 30. Peter saved from execution, 12:1–19

The passage

In chapter 12 Luke leaves the church in Antioch in order to relate two stories about king Herod in Judea. The first story is about Herod persecuting the church in Jerusalem. He executed James, the disciple of Jesus. Then he put Peter in prison in order to have him too executed after the Passover week. But Peter was rescued by an angel during the night. Before going into hiding, he saw some believers who had gathered in a home to pray and told them that he was free and alive.

Comments

About that time (v 1): Bible scholars do not agree on the chronology of chapter 11 and 12. In this textbook we have settled on dating the two stories (we know that Herod died AD 44) of chapter 12 at about th time of the establishing of the church in Antioch (AD 43), and of Barnabas coming to Antioch and Agabus prophesying about the famine (perhaps the following year). Consequently, Saul’s ministry in Antioch (11:25–25, we suggest AD 47–48), the famine (AD 46–48), and Barnabas and Saul taking the gift from Antioch to Judea and then bringing John Mark with them back from Jerusalem to Antioch (11:28–30 and 12:25, we suggest AD 47 or 48) took place after the events of 12:1–23.

King Herod (v 1): Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great (who ruled when Jesus was born) and the nephew of Herod Antipas (who beheaded John the Baptist and who tried Jesus). At this time he was king over Judea, Samaria, Galilee and some neighbouring areas. He died in AD 44 (see 12:21–23). For more information about the kings of Palestine see the reference article called King Herod's Family.

killed James, the brother of John, with the sword (v 2): James, one of Jesus’ twelve disciples (and the brother of John the writer of the gospel), was beheaded.

the days of the unleavened bread (v 3): This was another name for the Passover week (see v 4), when no leavened bread was allowed in a Jewish household. Jewish law did not permit any trials during this week. So Herod put Peter in prison (probably in the Tower of Antonia at the northwest corner of the temple area) waiting for the Passover to finish.

Mary (v 12): There are many women called Mary in the New Testament. This Mary was the mother of John Mark (see v 24; 15:37, 39) and Barnabas’ aunt (see Col 4:10).

Rhoda (v 13): This is the only time Rhoda is mentioned in the New Testament. She must have been a servant, or a slave, of Mary, John Mark’s mother.

It is his angel (v 15): They thought it was Peter’s guardian angel, who had assumed his form and voice.

James (v 17): James, the brother of Jesus, seems by this time to have become the main leader of the Jerusalem church.

Text questions

1. Why did king Herod arrest Peter?
2. What was the church doing, while Peter was in prison?
3. What did Peter first think was happening, when the angel came and led him out of the prison?
4. When did Peter finally realize that he was a free man?
5. Why did Rhoda not open the door at first?
6. What happened to Peter and to the guards who had been on watch?

Think and discuss

1. Why did Peter go to Mary’s house? How did he know that he should go there?
2. Why did the believers think that it was Peter’s angel who had come to the door, and not Peter himself?
3. What do you think the believers were praying about, as they evidently did not believe that Peter could be released from prison?
4. Why do you think Peter told the believers to report what had happened to James and the brothers?

Sharing and application

1. In this story the church seems to have been praying for Peter, without actually believing that God would save his life. Does that happen in your churches also sometimes – that you pray for things that you don’t really believe will happen? Share some examples, if you have any.
2. Do you think that it is wrong to bring serious matters before God in prayer, even if you have doubts about the answer? Why – why not?

Teach and preach

A. The story about Peter’s miraculous rescue from execution is one of the most amazing stories in Acts. You have been asked to have a Bible study for a group of young people based on this passage. What aspects of the story would you focus on?

B. I think that I myself would focus on the aspect of The Lord in Control of Hopeless Situations! Here are some of the things that I would mention. Perhaps they can even be used as a Bible study outline:

1. Peter’s situation was really hopeless:
   * James had just been executed.
   * King Herod had clearly planned to execute Peter as well. This would please the Jewish leaders even more.
   * Peter’s prison was heavily guarded. He was watched by 16 soldiers. During the night he was sleeping chained to two soldiers. The prison gates were securely locked.
   * King Herod represented the mighty Roman empire. What could Peter and the church do against him?
2. What did Peter do in this hopeless situation?
   * He trusted the Lord. So he went to sleep between the soldiers.
   * But he doubted that the Lord would deliver him. So he thought he saw a vision the whole time the angel was in fact delivering him from his imprisonment.
3. What did the church do in this hopeless situation?
   * They prayed earnestly to the Lord.
   * But they doubted that the Lord would answer their prayer by actually delivering Peter from prison. And they doubted that Peter would survive king Herod’s sword.
4. What did the Lord do in this hopeless situation?
   * He sent his angel to deliver a doubting Peter from prison.
   * He answered the prayers of a doubting church by delivering Peter from prison and saving his life from the sword.
   * He gave Peter the wisdom to “leave for another place” so that nobody knew where to find him, not even the mighty king Herod.
5. Conclusion:
   1. The Lord really took care of a hopeless situation. He delivered Peter and saved his life.
   2. What about our own “hopeless situations”? What should we do about them?
      * We should pray about them!
      * We should trust the Lord with them! We should allow his will to be done:
        + In the case of James: He was executed, and so he became the first of Jesus’ disciples to die the death of a martyr.
        + In the case of Peter: He was released, and so the Lord granted him twenty more years of fruitful ministry.

([Go to Answers 30](#Answers30))

### Study 31. King Herod dies, 12:19–24

The passage

Luke’s second story about king Herod in Judea takes place in Caesarea, his capital city. At a festival there, the people praised king Herod as a god. As he did not deny it, God punished him with a terrible death. The last verse of this passage concludes the third unit of the book of Acts: The word of God continued to spread and grow.

Comments

Tyre and Sidon (v 20): These were the most important cities in Phoenicia on the Mediterranean coast north of Palestine. They depended on the grain from Galilee for their food supplies.

Blastus (v 20): He is not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament.

On the appointed day (v 21): Historical sources mention that this was a festival in honor of the Roman emperor.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map: Caesarea, Tyre and Sidon. ([Go to Reference: Maps](#ReferenceMapsAndArticles))
2. Why did the people of Tyre and Sidon ask king Herod for peace?
3. How did king Herod die?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think the people of Tyre and Sidon needed the help of Blastus?
2. What was the reason for king Herod’s terrible death?
3. In chapter 12:1–24 we see that Luke is a talented writer. He has contrasted two powers: the worldly power represented by king Herod and the kingdom of God represented by the church. Compare the situation of these two powers in the beginning of the chapter with their situation at the end of the chapter.

([Go to Answers 31](#Answers31))

Unit 4: Paul’s first journey (Acts 12:25 – 14:28)  
and the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1 – 16:5)

### Introduction to unit 4

Luke’s fourth picture of the early church describes the first geographical expansion of the gospel to the Gentile world. The church in Antioch becomes the base for a missionary enterprise, as Barnabas and Paul are sent off on a missionary journey to Cyprus, Pamphylia and Pisidia. New churches are established. A council in Jerusalem resolves the issue about Gentiles and circumcision: there is no need for the Gentiles to be circumcised in order to be saved. The Gentile churches are glad for this decision.

So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily (16:5).

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark7))

### Study 32. Barnabas and Saul sent off, 12:25–13:3

The passage

Saul and Barnabas returned from Jerusalem, where they had handed over a gift to the famine-stricken Christian brothers in Judea. They brought John Mark with them back to Antioch. The church there had a team of five pastors (Luke calls them prophets and teachers). As the church were worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit told them to set apart two of these pastors, Barnabas and Saul, for the work that he had called them to. After fasting and praying they laid hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them off.

Comments

John, whose other name was Mark (v 25): He was Barnabas’ cousin (Col 4:10). According to church tradition, he later wrote Mark’s gospel.

Paul/Saul (v 1, 2): The Greek text has Saul.

Barnabas (v 1): See 4:36–37 and 11:22–26

Simeon who was called Niger (v 1): Simeon is a Hebrew name, and Niger means black in Latin. So he was probably an African, who had been converted to Judaism before he became a believer.

Lucius of Cyrene (v 1): Lucius is a Latin name. Cyrene was the capital of a Roman province in northern Africa along the Mediterranean coast.

Manaen (v 1): Manaen is a Hebrew name. He must have been very close to the royal family of the Herods in Palestine.

Text questions

1. How many prophets and teachers were there in the church in Antioch?
2. Fasting is mentioned two times in this text. What other church activities are connected with fasting?

Think and discuss

1. In what way did the leadership of the church in Antioch reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the city and the church of Antioch?
2. Who commissioned Barnabas and Saul as missionaries? Was it the Holy Spirit – or was it the church? See also verse 4.

Sharing and application

1. In this text the Holy Spirit revealed his will to the church, as they were worshiping-fasting and praying-fasting. But Luke does not state exactly how it was done. Was it through a prophetic message by one of the prophets? Or was it through a Bible study by one of the teachers? Or was through some kind of inner conviction while they (the whole church body, not only the five leaders) were worshiping, praying and fasting? What do you think?
2. How does the Holy Spirit reveal his will to your church? Share some of the experiences of your church of how the Holy Spirit has led you into new ministries, to new people, and into new geographical areas!

Teach and preach

Prepare a Bible study based on what you know about the church in Antioch. You can call it Antioch – An International Church, and make use of the following outline:

1. Introduction: A few words about the book of Acts and the expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem, via Judea and Samaria, to Antioch in Syria.
2. Antioch – an international city (see comments on 11:19–30)
3. The church in Antioch – an international church:
   * International Jews brought the gospel there
   * The first church in the New Testament that also had non-Jewish members
4. The church in Antioch – an international leadership:
   * Barnabas and Saul were Hellenistic Jews from the diaspora. Both of them had been living in Jerusalem for several years.
   * Simeon Niger was a black African who probably was a convert to Judaism before he became a Christian
   * Lucius of Cyrene was a Roman Gentile from North Africa before he became a Christian
   * Manaen was Jew from Palestine and very close to the Herod royal family.
5. The church in Antioch – an international ministry:
   * The Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a special work.
   * The church prayed and fasted in order to get more divine guidance.
   * The church was willing to release Barnabas and Saul for this new ministry.
   * The church ordained and sent Barnabas and Saul off on a ministry that finally took the gospel to the emperor in Rome, the capital of the Roman empire (and of the Gentile world).
6. What can we learn from the church in Antioch?
   1. We must be an open church that accepts all kinds of people!
   2. We must have a leadership that reflects the membership of the church!
   3. We must allow the Holy Spirit to give us new visions for the ministry, to guide us in the ministry, and to lead us into new kinds of ministry!
   4. We must send people from our church to spread the gospel to new people groups and to new geographical areas!

([Go to Answers 32](#Answers32))

### Study 33. Cyprus, 13:4-12

The passage

Paul and Barnabas set out on the first missionary journey. They took Barnabas’ cousin John Mark with them as their helper. From Antioch in Syria they travelled 25 km to Seleucia, where they took a ship to the island of Cyprus. Three things happened there. They preached the gospel in the Jewish synagogues. They had an encounter with a Jewish sorcerer called Bar-Jesus and Elymas. And their ministry led to the salvation of Sergius Paulus, who was the Roman proconsul of Cyprus. Luke also informs us that Paul now starts using his Roman name Paul instead of his Hebrew name Saul.

Comments

Saul–Paul: It was common for Jewish people in those days to have both a Hebrew name and a Greek or Roman name. Note that their helper also had two names, John (which is Hebrew) and Mark (which is a Roman name). Paul means small or little.

Cyprus: We do not know why they chose to go to Cyprus first. Perhaps the reason was that Barnabas was a native of that island (4:36). The journey from Salamis to the capital city Paphos was 150 km.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map Paul’s first missionary journey: Antioch in Syria, Seleucia, Cyprus, Salamis and Paphos. ([Go to the map](#Map4PaulsFirstMissionaryJourney))
2. What was the relationship between Bar-Jesus and Sergius Paulus?
3. Why does Paul rebuke Bar-Jesus?
4. Luke gives two reasons why the proconsul came to faith. Which are they?

Think and discuss

1. Many preachers have said something like this: “On the road to Damascus Saul became Paul. He met Jesus and his life was changed.” What do you think about this statement?
2. Earlier in Acts the apostle Peter also had an encounter with a sorcerer. In what connection did that encounter take place, and what happened?
3. Sergius Paulus is probably the first totally Gentile convert. But earlier in Acts we have been told about two other Gentile converts (the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius). So what is the difference? And what is new about Paul’s ministry in this story?

Sharing and application

1. Have you ever come across a sorcerer like Bar-Jesus? What happened?
2. What do you do when you encounter demonic forces in your life and ministry?
3. In this story we find that there are two factors that contribute to the salvation of the proconsul – the miracle and the teaching about Jesus. Is this something that you have experienced in your life and ministry? Please share! Is this combination (the performing of a miracle and the preaching of a clear gospel message) something that we should apply in our ministry? Why – Why not?

Teach and preach

You have been asked to use this passage for a short Bible study based on Acts 13:4-12 in a house group. This could be your outline:

1. Ask one of the participants in the meeting to read the whole passage.
2. Give a short introduction to the passage: “This story takes place in the beginning of Paul’s first missionary journey. It is an important story as it tells us how the gospel spread in the early church.”
3. Your study: “I would like to emphasize three points in this story”
   1. The role of the Holy Spirit
      * Barnabas and Paul were sent on their way by the Holy Spirit (v 4).
      * Paul confronted the demonic in the power of the Holy Spirit (v 9)
      * The Holy Spirit worked in the life of the proconsul (even if it is not mentioned explicitly): He wanted to hear the word of God (v 7); he believed (v 12)
   2. Paul and Barnabas ministered in different kinds of situations.
      * They proclaimed the word of God in the synagogue (v 5), where there were people who knew the teachings of the Old Testament. These people were prepared.
      * They were not afraid of opposing the demonic forces that were hindering the spreading of the gospel (v 8–11): The rebuking of the sorcerer.
      * They proclaimed the word of God to the most powerful person in that province (v 12). The proconsul ruled Cyprus on behalf of the emperor in Rome.
      * They spoke to groups of people (in the synagogue), but also to individual persons (the proconsul).
   3. How do preaching and miracles relate to each other in the ministry?
      * In this story we find that the proconsul believed when he saw the miracle and accepted the teaching about Jesus.
      * Do we find any story in Acts when people believed only as the result of a miracle? I cannot think of any!
      * Do we find any story in Acts when people believed only as the result of the teaching about Jesus? Yes, remember the Ethiopian eunuch!
      * Conclusion: Preaching the gospel is most important. Miracles are not enough by themselves. But the message about Jesus confirmed through miraculous signs and wonders – that is great! (14:3)
4. Application: “So what about you?
   * Can you really say that your life is controlled by the Holy Spirit? In your daily life? In your ministry? As you are confronted with the demonic powers of this world?
   * Do you realize the power of the message about Jesus? That this message can transform your own life and the life of your family?”

([Go to Answers 33](#Answers33))

### Study 34. Pisidian Antioch, 13:13–52

The passage

From Cyprus the apostles sailed northwest to the mainland. First they came to Perga in Pamphylia and then they continued 180 km north to the important city of Pisidian Antioch. To get there they had to cross the high Taurus Mountains. In Pisidian Antioch they went to the synagogue. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, Paul was asked to speak. His sermon started with an historical account of the people of Israel up to king David. From the line of David, God gave to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he had promised. Paul then told about how the people of Jerusalem had arranged for Jesus to be executed. He was crucified and buried, but God raised him from the dead, as he had promised in the Old Testament. Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is now proclaimed, and through him everyone who believes is justified. The people who listened to Paul, both Jews and Gentiles, were interested in his message and asked him to come back next sabbath. That day lots of people came to listen to him. But the Jews became jealous and opposed Paul. Then the apostles turned to the Gentiles, who were happy, and many of them believed. But the Jews started a persecution and the apostles were sent away from that region. The passage ends saying that the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Comments

It was necessary that God’s word should be spoken to you first (v 46): The gospel came from the Jews, so they had the right to listen to it first (compare Rom 1:16). Paul, who himself was a Jew, also had a special burden for his own people (compare Rom 10:1). That was one reason why he first went to the synagogue to present the gospel there (v 14).

As many as were appointed to eternal life believed (v 48): There are two aspects of how a person receives or does not receive eternal life – “divine appointment” and “human faith”. In this verse “divine appointment” or God’s role is stressed. In verse 46 “human faith” or the role of peoples’ acceptance is stressed: Since you reject the word of God …

The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (v 52): The Holy Spirit plays a very important role in Acts, compare 4:8; 4:31; 13:9. In Gal 5:22 Paul mentions “joy” as a fruit of the Spirit.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map Paul’s first missionary journey: Perga and Pisidan Antioch. ([Go to the map](#Map4PaulsFirstMissionaryJourney))
2. What happened in Perga?
3. Which Old Testament texts does Paul quote in his sermon?
4. In verse 46 we find an expression, which symbolizes a turning point in the history of Christianity. What is the expression?
5. What was the result of the apostles’ ministry in Pisidian Antioch?

Think and discuss

1. Why was Paul asked to speak in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch?
2. In this passage Luke records one of Paul’s sermons. It was an effective sermon, which made people respond positively to the gospel (v 42-44). Would it be a good idea for you to copy it and use it in your ministry? Why – why not?
3. What do you think is the meaning of the expression “The Gentiles glorified the word of God” (v 48)?
4. This passage ends “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit”. Who were these disciples? Some commentators think “Paul and Barnabas”, other commentators say “the believers in Pisidian Antioch”. What do you think? And why?

Sharing and application

1. In South India today, many people respond positively to the gospel message. Do you have any experience of this from your place or area? What could be the reasons for this positive response?
2. In this passage jealousy is given as the main reason why the Jews opposed Paul’s ministry and initiated persecution against the apostles. Could jealousy be a reason in South India today why fundamentalist groups oppose pastors and gospel workers? Or are there other reasons as well? Discuss and share your experiences and ideas!

Teach and preach

Compare Paul’s sermon in this passage to his summary of the gospel in 1 Cor 15:3-5! You should be able to find these four main points:

1. Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
2. Jesus was buried,
3. Jesus was raised and
4. Jesus was seen.

Prepare a sermon based on these four points.

([Go to Answers 34](#Answers34))

### Study 35. Iconium, 14:1-7

The passage

Paul’s and Barnabas’ ministry in Iconium, situated 180 km from Pisidian Antioch, was successful, but also full of difficulties. As usual, they first preached in the Jewish synagogue, and many people believed. But later there was a plot against their lives and they decided to flee from Iconium.

Comments

apostles (v 4): This is the first time that Barnabas is called an apostle (see also v 14). The word apostle is used in two different meanings in the New Testament. First, it refers to the “apostles of Christ,” the Twelve who were personally appointed by Jesus to be witnesses of the resurrection. Paul was later included in this group. Second, it refers to “the apostles of the churches” or what we would call missionaries today;. In this group we find Barnabas and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25).

stone them (v 5): Stoning was a Jewish method of executing a person for blasphemy. So perhaps the unbelieving Jews thought that the apostles’ teaching amounted to blasphemy. But it could also be that they just wanted the mob to kill the apostles during a riot.

Lystra and Derbe, cities in Lycaonia (v 6): Lycaonia was a district east of Pisidia, north of the Taurus Mountains. It was part of the Roman province of Galatia. Lystra was a Roman colony and probably the home of Timothy (16:1–3). It was 30 km from Iconium. Derbe was 100 km from Lystra and the home of Gaius (20:4). Both were small and relatively unimportant towns in those days.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map Paul’s first missionary journey: Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. ([Go to the map](#Map4PaulsFirstMissionaryJourney))
2. What kind of people believed when Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue in Iconium?
3. Why did some of the Jews not believe?
4. What did the apostles do after they had fled from Iconium?

Think and discuss

1. Why did Paul and Barnabas have to spend a long time in Iconium (v 3)?
2. What was the role of signs and wonders in the apostles’ ministry in Iconium (v 3)?
3. Why did the apostles flee from Iconium? Did they do the right thing? Wouldn’t it have been better if they had stayed? Why – why not?

Sharing and application

There was a mixed response to the gospel in Iconium. In the beginning a great multitude of Jews and Gentiles believed. But some of the Jews refused to believe, and they poisoned the minds of the Gentiles. Then we find a situation where there are two groups: those who didn’t believe and took the side of the Jews, and those who believed and took the side of the apostles. Have you experienced this kind of mixed response in your own life and ministry? Share! What could be the reasons for this kind of mixed response to the gospel in South India today?

Teach and preach

This passage can be used for a sermon or a Bible study called Response to the gospel. Here are some of the points that could be included:

1. The gospel message is for everybody:
   * In Iconium both Jews and Gentiles believed.
   * Today the gospel message is appropriate for all kinds of people: whatever their social, religious, economic or family background
2. Why is the message about Jesus good news for all kinds of people?
   * We are all sinners and in need of salvation. Only through Jesus we can find this salvation
   * We are created by God, and he has a special purpose for our lives. This purpose we can only find in a life together with Jesus.
3. In Iconium people responded to the gospel in different ways:
   * Many Jews and Gentiles believed
   * Some Jews were rebellious to the gospel. They refused to believe in the message about Jesus. This was their own choice! And a wrong choice!
   * These rebellious Jews even poisoned the minds of some of the Gentiles who had already become believers. And then they created a group who were against the apostles and who wanted to hurt them and kill them.
   * So we can see that there were two main responses to the gospel in Iconium:
     + Those who believed. They were on the side of the apostles and they supported the ministry in that area
     + Those who did not believe. They were rebellious to the gospel. They were on the side of the troublemakers. They were against the apostles and tried to hurt and kill them. They tried to stop the ministry in that area. In the beginning they seemed to have success: the apostles fled. But, of course, they could not succeed in the long run. The church was established and the gospel spread to many other places in that area. To work against God is futile!
4. So what about you? How do you respond to the gospel, to the message about Jesus Christ?
   * Are you rebellious? Do you say “No, thank you!” to the fantastic offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? Well, then you have made a bad choice!
   * Are you a troublemaker, and enemy to the gospel and to God’s servants? Do you try to instigate your family, neighbours and friends to oppose God’s work in your area? Well, then you have made a dangerous choice! To oppose God can be very dangerous!
   * Or, are you obedient to the gospel? Do you say “yes” to the message of the gospel? Do you want to become a believer and accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? Well, then you are making a very wise choice! And God will surely bless you – both now and in eternity!

([Go to Answers 35](#Answers35))

### Study 36.Lystra and Derbe, 14:8–21

The passage

In Lystra Paul healed a man who had been crippled from birth. When the people saw this miracle, they thought that Barnabas and Paul where two of their gods – Zeus and Hermes – who had come to them in human form. So local priests started to prepare a sacrifice to them. But when the apostles understood what was going on, they got very upset. Paul preached to the people and was finally able to stop the sacrifice. Then some Jews came from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium and persuaded the people to stone Paul. He was dragged outside the town and left for dead. When the believers came to see him, Paul stood up and went back into Lystra. The next day the apostles left Lystra and travelled to Derbe (a journey of 100 km), where they preached the gospel and many people accepted Christ.

Comments

Zeus ... Hermes (v 12): These were two very well known gods in the Greek pantheon. Zeus, the god of the sky and weather, was the ruler and protector of all. Hermes was his son, the patron of travelers, merchants and messengers, and the god of rhetoric. One reason why the people of Lystra were so eager to worship the apostles was the famous legend about when Zeus and Hermes came disguised as mortal men to visit the people of that area. They went to a thousand houses but nobody recognized them and was willing to receive them. Only one old and very poor couple opened their house to them and gave them food. So the gods rewarded this old couple but destroyed all the other houses by flood.

tore their clothes (v 14): This was a Jewish way of showing that you were really upset.

worthless things (v 15): In the Old Testament the word worthless is often used about the gods of the nations.

They stoned Paul (v 19): Paul is probably referring to this incident in his testimony in 2 Cor 11:25.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map Paul’s first missionary journey: Lystra and Derbe. ([Go to the map](#Map4PaulsFirstMissionaryJourney))
2. Why did the apostles not understand what that people in Lystra shouted?
3. In which verses do we find a summary of part of a sermon that the people of Lystra listened to?
4. What happened in Derbe?

Think and discuss

1. In Lystra Paul healed a crippled man. This miracle seems to be an isolated incident – not directly linked to the preaching of the gospel. Is that correct?
2. Why do you think that the people of Lystra thought Barnabas was Zeus and Paul was Hermes? Why not the other way around?
3. Why is the summary of a part of Paul’s sermon in verses 15–17 so interesting – and so important – for us?
4. Paul and Barnabas faced difficulties and persecution in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, see 13:50, 14:2 and 14:19. What is the common factor in these three cases?

Sharing and application

1. Have you ever experienced that servants of God are worshipped by village people? Tell the others in your group what happened? What do you think about this kind of practice? What can we do to give God the glory and not receive glory for ourselves, when signs and wonders happen in our ministry?
2. Behind the problems that the apostles faced in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium and Lystra there were instigators, who made other people do the dirty work for them. Do you find this kind of instigators behind the persecutions in South India today? Explain! How can you deal with this kind of instigators?

Teach and preach

The sermon in Lystra in this passage must have been very different from the sermon that Paul preached in Pisidian Antioch. In Lystra he didn’t quote any Old Testament passages or refer to the history of the people of Israel. In Pisidian Antioch his point of contact with his audience is a summary of the history of the people of Israel and he supports his teaching about Jesus with quotations from the Old Testament about the Messiah.

In Lystra Paul’s point of contact with his audience was the natural world around them, which they knew and could see. He begged them to turn from the worthless idols to the living and true God. He spoke of the living God as the creator of heaven, earth and sea, and of everything in them. In the past he allowed all the nations walk in their own ways (v 16), but he never left himself without a witness (v 17). He has always born witness to himself by his gooness, giving them rains from the sky and fuitful seasons, providing them with food for their bodies and filling their hearts with gladness.

So we understand that Paul was very flexible as he preached to the people. But, of course, one thing did not change in his sermons. He always included the good news about Jesus Christ. Luke uses different expressions for this in the book of Acts: “the word of God”, “the message of salvation”, “the message of his grace” and “the good news” (or “the gospel”).

Prepare a gospel sermon for illiterate village people in South India, who have no previous knowledge about the Bible or Jesus. Make use of this sermon in your ministry!

This could be your outline:

1. It must begin with some point of contact that the people can understand and relate to, for instance (it is enough with one of these options!),
   * + God as the Creator and Provider, or
     + God as the Almighty, who is in control of everything – including our lives, or
     + Man’s longing for satisfaction, healing, deliverance, peace, purpose in life
2. Then it must explain the good news about Jesus in a clear and understandable way: who he is, his death and resurrection, his supremacy, and so on.
3. Finally it must invite those who listen to accept Jesus as their personal Savior.

([Go to Answers 36](#Answers36))

### Study 37. Back in Antioch in Syria, 14:21–28

The passage

Derbe was the end point of Paul’s and Barnabas’ first missionary journey, but it was not the end of the journey. On their way back they visited again the churches that they had established in Lycaonia and Pisidia: Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch. They strengthened and encouraged the believers and appointed elders in each church. Then they crossed the Tauros Mountains again and preached the gospel in Perga in Pamphylia, before they boarded a ship back to Syria. There they gave a report to their home church in Antioch about what had happened during the almost two years that they had been away.

Comments

We must go through many difficulties to enter the kingdom of God (v 22): Paul’s first missionary journey had really included a lot of hardships of different kinds. Many years later he writes like this to Timothy: “Indeed, all who want to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim 3:12).

Perga (v 25) was the capital of Pamphylia. The apostles had been in Perga before, but then they had just passed through. This time they stopped and ministered.

all the things that God had done through them (v 27): The Greek text has the word “with/together with” (instead of “through”).

he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles (v 27): This means that God had brought the Gentiles to faith. The historical significance of Paul’s first missionary journey was that the Gentiles heard the gospel in a systematic way for the first time. They also came to faith in large numbers. This was something new and it revolutionalized the early church! And as we will see in chapter 15, it also caused problems in the early church.

a long time (v 28): Paul and Barnabas probably stayed in Antioch more than a year.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map Paul’s first missionary journey: Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, Perga, Attalia and Antioch in Syria. ([Go to the map](#Map4PaulsFirstMissionaryJourney))
2. Make a list of the things that the apostles did in Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch on their way back.
3. Make a list of the things that the apostles did when they returned to the home church Antioch in Syria.
4. Look at reference article The chronology of Acts: Which years did Paul’s first missionary journey take place? ([Go to this article](#TheChronologyOfActs))

Think and discuss

1. Luke summarizes the apostles’ strengthening and encouraging of the newly converted believers with these words: We must go through many difficulties to enter the kingdom of God (v 22). Do you agree with this way of strengthening and encouraging believers? Why – why not? Discuss and write down your best arguments for and against.
2. How do you explain the statement “We must go through many difficulties to enter the kingdom of God”? Don’t we enter the kingdom of God when we accept Jesus as our personal savior (see John 3:5)?
3. The apostles appointed elders in each church (v 23). Why did they not appoint pastors? Who taught and preached in these churches after the apostles had left?

Sharing and application

1. Look again at your notes under Think and discuss 1. How do your pastors (and you yourselves) strengthen and encourage new believers? What can you learn from Paul and Barnabas in this area of pastoral work?
2. Establishing a new church:
   1. How long does it take for a church to be established? Compare your own experiences from South India with the way Paul and Barnabas worked during their missionary journeys.
   2. How is the situation in the Roman Gentile world different from the situation in South India today?
   3. How is the situation in the Roman Gentile world similar to the situation in South India today?
3. It is very clear from verse 23 that there was a collective leadership in in the New Testament churches (see also 15:35 about the church in Antioch in Syria).
   1. Do you know of any church in South India with a collective leadership? If you do, explain how it is set up and how it works.
   2. Why don’t we find more examples of collective leadership in the South Indian churches?
   3. What could be the reasons why the pattern “one pastor who rules the church” is so dominant in South India?
   4. Do you think that it would be possible to have collective leadership in a newly established church in South India? Why – why not?
   5. Would you be willing to try to have collective leadership in your church? Why – why not?

Teach and preach

A. You can use your notes from your answer to text question 2 above for a Bible study about the work of a servant of God. See also sharing and application 3.

B. You can use your notes from your answer to text question 3 above for a Bible study about how to be accountable as a missionary (or pioneer worker, or evangelist) to your sending/supporting church.

C. Prepare a Bible study for evangelists and church planters based on 14:21-25. You can call your study Glimpses of Paul’s Missionary Strategy. If you want, you can use the following points as an outline:

* 1. Preaching the gospel
  2. Making believers
  3. Appointing leaders
  4. Trusting the Lord
  5. Moving on

([Go to Answers 37](#Answers37))

### Study 38. The Jerusalem council, 15:1–21

The passage

As a result of the ministry in Antioch in Syria and of Paul’s and Barnabas’ missionary efforts, many Gentiles had received the gospel, accepted Jesus as their personal Savior, been baptized and become members of the church. They were not circumcised and they did not follow Jewish laws and customs. But some Jewish background believers claimed that this was wrong: a Gentile must first become a Jew through circumcision, only then could he be saved through faith in Christ. This caused a big controversy in the church. This passage is about that controversy and how it was resolved.

Comments

Some men came down from Judea (v 1): These men must have been from the same group of people as those who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees (v 5). They were Judaizers who insisted that a person could not be saved unless he first became a Jew, which meant that he had to be circumcized and keep the Law of Moses.

a yoke (v 10): This is a metaphor for the Law of Moses.

James (v 13): The brother of Jesus. He was later called James the Just in the early church. At this time, James was a leader, perhaps even the foremost leader, of the Jerusalem church. He was the one who made the decision in this case.

we should not add difficulties for the Gentiles (v 19): The Gentiles were not required to be circumcised. But four stipulations were laid down for them to keep (v 20) in order not to offend the Jews (v 21).

Text questions

1. This text can be divided into subdivisions. How would you do it?
2. What was the position of the Judaizers (v 1 and 5)?
3. What was the Peter’s position? How had he reached that standpoint?
4. What did James base his decision on, and what was his conclusion?

Think and discuss

1. What was Paul’s and Barnabas’ position on the issue of circumcision of Gentile believers?
2. How did Paul and Barnabas present their case in Jerusalem?
3. Why do you think the church in Antioch took this issue to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem? Why didn’t they just solve the issue themselves?
4. The main issue was clearly resolved (the Gentile believers to not need to be circumcised). But how to we understand the four stipulations (to abstain from that which has been polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from whatever that has been strangled ,and from blood)? Are these not Jewish laws that the believers are required to keep? And if that is the case, what happens then to the fundamental Christian doctrine of “salvation is through faith in Jesus alone” – and not through any kind of works?

Sharing and application

1. How do we solve controversies about doctrine and ethics in our churches in South India today? What can we learn from Acts 15 about solving conflicts in the church?
2. Have you ever heard a sermon or a Bible study about James’ judgment in Acts 15:19-22? What was the message? Did you agree to what was said? Why – why not?
3. What is the position in your church on
   * + circumcision
     + food regulations – what to eat or what not to eat
     + marriage relationships – between cousins, with uncles or aunts etc (cf Lev 18:11-13)

Teach and preach

You have been asked to have a Bible study for church leaders based on Acts 15:1–21. You don’t want to bring up any controversial issues or offend any senior pastor. So what could you talk about?

I would have a Bible study on one of the following topics:

Study 1: The importance of unity in the church

* 1. The importance of Christian unity (Jesus in John 17:20–21)
  2. The early church was about to split over the issue of circumcision of the Gentiles.
  3. This issue caused a conflict in a local church (Antioch).
  4. The leaders of the Antioch church decided to solve this conflict by consulting more experienced leaders in another church (Jerusalem).
  5. They chose trusted and doctrinally sound leaders (Paul, Barnabas and others) to represent the Antioch church.
  6. At the council in Jerusalem both sides were represented and allowed to explain their positions.
  7. The decision arrived at was based on God’s acts and the word of God. Extreme views (the Judaizers) were not allowed to dominate or decide the outcome.
  8. Nobody objected to the decision. Unity was maintained.
  9. Application: What can we learn from this story, which we can apply in South India today?

Study 2: Experience and the word of God

* 1. James made a judgment based on the experience of servants of God (Paul, Barnabas, Peter) and the word of God.
  2. Present other examples of this in the Bible and in church history.
  3. This is a valid procedure for us today!

Study 3: Salvation by faith or by works

* 1. Start with Peter’s speech in verses 7–11.
  2. Take examples from Paul’s letters (and, if you want, other New Testament texts) that we are saved through grace and not through our works.
  3. Take examples from our South Indian context why there is always a temptation for believers to focus more on works than on grace.
  4. Conclude with stating the truth: Salvation is through faith in Jesus alone. We are not saved through any kind of works.

([Go to Answers 38](#Answers38))

### Study 39. The reply of the council, 15:22–35

The passage

The apostles and elders, and the whole church, agreed with James. He had based his judgment on a combination of the experience of the apostles (Peter, Paul and Barnabas) and the prophetic word from the Old Testament, and they were convinced: There was no need for the Gentile believers to be circumcised. “And James’ proposal of Gentile Christian abstinence in four cultural areas seemed a wise policy to promote mutual tolerance and fellowship” (John Stott). A letter was sent with the two trusted leaders Judas and Silas to the Gentile brothers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. Paul and Barnabas travelled with them. The letter was read to the church in Antioch, and it was well received. Juda and Silas stayed some time in Antioch and strengthened the church there.

Comments

Judas, called Barsabbas (v 22): He is only mentioned in this story.

Silas (v 22): This is the first time Silas is mentioned in the New Testament. He was a leader in the Jerusalem church (v 22) and a prophet (v 32). He later accompanied Paul on his second and third missionary journeys. Together with Paul and Timothy he wrote First and Second Thessalonians. Peter called him a faithful brother (1 Pet 5:12). He also had a Latin form of his name, Silvanus, and he was a Roman citizen (16:37-38).

The apostles and the elders, with the whole church (v 22): Apparently there was unanimous agreement with the choice of messengers (v 23) and the contents of the letter (v 23-29).

to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (v 23): Later we find that the decisions in this letter were also delivered to the churches at Lystra, Iconium and other places (16:4).

being prophets themselves (v 32): The context shows that one of the functions of prophets in the early church was to encourage and strengthen the brothers.

Verse 34 is not found in the best manuscripts. It contradicts the statement in verse 33.

Text questions

1. What did the letter say about the Judaizers who had come to Antioch?
2. The decision made by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem was communicated to the Gentile churches in two different ways, which?
3. How did the church in Antioch react to the letter?

Think and discuss

1. What could be the meaning of the expression “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us” (v 28)?
2. What was the main difference between the judgment made by James in Jerusalem and the message in the letter that was sent to the Gentile churches? Do you think that there was any reason for this difference?
3. Why were Judas and Silas able to encourage and strengthen the church in Antioch?

Sharing and application

1. How do you make decisions in your church? How – and to what extent – is the Holy Spirit involved in your decisions?
2. Do you have people like Judas and Silas who can encourage and strengthen your church? What can be done to get more people like them in our churches?

Teach and preach

You can use parts of this passage (v 22, 27, 30-33) for a Bible study about Judas and Silas and how they were able to encourage and strengthen the church in Antioch. The four points of the answer to Text question 3 will give you a structure. You can conclude with applications to your own church context.

([Go to Answers 39](#Answers39))

### Study 40. Paul and Barnabas part ways, 15:35–40

The passage

Paul and Barnabas planned to revisit the churches they had planted during their previous missionary journey. But they could not agree on taking John Mark with them. Finally Paul and Barnabas went separate ways: Barnabas took John Mark with him, and Paul chose Silas as his travel companion.

Comments

in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord (v 36): The cities of the first missionary journey

they parted company (v 39): Barnabas and Mark are not mentioned again in Acts. The story line follows Paul and his companions.

Text questions

1. What did Paul and Barnabas do in Antioch before they set out on their next missionary journey?
2. Who took the initiative to the second missionary journey, and what was the reason for it?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think Barnabas chose John Mark as his travel companion?
2. Why do you think Paul chose Silas as his travel companion?

Sharing and application

It is very important for a servant of God to choose the right co-workers. From the answer to the previous question you can see that there were several good reasons why Paul chose Silas as his travel companion for the second missionary journey. How does the pastor of your church choose his co-workers? What are some important criteria for choosing a co-worker?

Teach and preach

Prepare a Bible study about John Mark. You can call your study A Second Chance. John Mark is mentioned in the following NT verses: Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 3; 15:37, 39; Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11; Philem 24; 1 Pet 5:13. It is also possible that he is the author of Mark’s gospel. Try to include answers to the following questions in your Bible study:

1. Why did Barnabas and Paul disagree over taking John Mark with them on the second missionary journey?
2. What would have happened if Barnabas had allowed Paul to have his way?
3. How was the relationship between Paul and John Mark ten years later?
4. How did probably John Mark and Peter get to know each other?
5. What did the friendship between Peter and John Mark possibly lead to?
6. Was it right of Barnabas to give John Mark a second chance?
7. How should we do? When should we give people second chances? Should we always give people second chances?

([Go to Answers 40](#Answers40))

### Study 41. Timothy joins Paul and Silas, 15:40–16:5

The passage

Paul and Silas travelled by land north from Antioch in Syria. Then they turned west to visit churches that Paul had planted during his first missionary journey: Derbe, Lystra and Iconium are mentioned. In Lystra Paul added a new person to his team, Timothy. The decisions reached by the leaders in Jerusalem about the requirements on the behaviour of Gentile believers were delivered to the growing churches.

Comments

Timothy (v 1): This is the first time Timothy is mentioned in the New Testament. He must have been a very young man at this point, probably still a teenager. How do we know that? In 1 Tim 4:12 (which was written about 15 years later) Paul still calls him young. Timothy became Paul’s closest co-worker, who accompanied him on his second and third missionary journeys. Paul mentions him in his letters written during this period (1 Thess 1:1; 3:2, 6; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor 1:1, 19; Rom 16:21). Later Paul refers to him in his prison letters (Phil 1:1; 2:19, 22; Col 1:1; Philemon 1). Finally Paul addresses two of his pastoral letters to him. Timothy is also mentioned in Hebrews (13:23).

circumcised him (v 3): Paul circumcised Timothy before he included him as a teammate on his journeys. See further the discussions below (Text question 4 and Think and discuss 2).

the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem (v 4): This refers to the decisions of the Council in Jerusalem about the requirements on the behaviour of Gentile believers (see Acts 15). This is the last time that there is any reference to these requirements in connection with Paul’s ministry (but James and the Jerusalem elders bring them up in 21:25). Paul never mentions them in his letters.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map Paul’ second missionary journey: Antioch in Syria, Derbe, Lystra and Iconium. ([Go to the map](#Map5PaulsSecondMissionaryJourney))
2. How are the newly established churches described?
3. What information do we get about Timothy from this passage?
4. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy, according to this text?

Think and discuss

1. What could Luke mean by the phrase that as Paul left, the brothers commended him to the grace of the Lord (v 40)?
2. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy? Bible scholars do not agree on the answer to this question. How would you answer the question?
3. Compare Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy with the decisions of the Council in Jerusalem about the four requirements on Gentile believers (Acts 15). Do you think that these two cases illustrate the same evangelistic principle? Or are they totally different? Give your reasons.

Sharing and application

Go back to the answer to question 3 above. Can you think of any examples where the church in South India could remove similar obstacles today? Give several examples. Would it really be possible for our churches to remove these obstacles? Why? Why not?

Teach and preach

You have been asked to prepare a short talk on Cultural obstacles to the preaching of the gospel in the South Indian context at a seminar for church leaders.

This is a very difficult (and a very sensitive!) topic. So what you take up (and how you take it up!) must depend on the participants of the seminar – their background and their willingness to reflect on a topic like this. I suggest that you base your talk on the following five points:

1. Five important aspects of culture:
   * + Language
     + Food
     + Dress
     + Music, art and literature
     + Interaction with other people, behaviour
2. Give one example from each of these areas, which could be an obstacle as you communicate the gospel to non-believers, for example:
   * + Language: Many “Christian expressions” may be totally misunderstood by the local people.
     + Food: Believers eating non-vegetarian food could be highly offensive to some people groups.
     + Dress: Believers wearing modern western dress in a village (women with jeans and a tight-fitting top) could offend many people. People may say that Christians are immoral.
     + Music, art and literature: Showing a good Christian film in a village may confuse people if the film uses western or “big city” cultural expressions.
     + Interaction with other people, behavior: Men trying to shake hands with women may be misunderstood.
3. Identify one cultural expression from each of these areas, through which our churches today clearly cause non-believers to be confused or offended as listen to us proclaiming the gospel.
4. Discuss with the participants in the seminar if it is possible for us to remove these cultural obstacles. Why? Why not? How can they be removed?
5. You can end your talk with a brief reflection on Paul’s word in 1 Cor 9:22 “I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some.”

([Go to Answers 41](#Answers41))

Unit 5: Paul’s second journey (Acts 16:6 – 18:22)  
and Paul’s third journey part 1 (Acts 18:23 – 19:20)

### Introduction to unit 5

Luke’s fifth picture of the early church is an account of the geographical expansion of the gospel further west into the Gentile world. During his second missionary journey, Paul has a vision of a man of Macedonia who begs him to come over and help them. So Paul, Silas and their companions set sail for the continent which today is called Europe. Churches are established in Macedonia and Achaia. During his third missionary journey, Paul runs a “Bible school” for two years in Ephesus, the capital city of the Roman province of Asia.

So the word of the Lord spread widely and grew mightily (Acts 19:20).

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### Study 42. Paul’s vision of a Macedonian man, 16:6–10

The passage

This is very much a story about guidance. In the previous passage Paul and his companions had been involved in ministry in very active ways. Now the Holy Spirit guides them not to preach in the province of Asia and not to enter the province of Bithynia. Finally Paul is called through a vision of a Macedonian man to cross over to Macedonia and preach the gospel there.

Comments

They (v 6): Paul was accompanied by Silas and Timothy.

the region of Phrygia and Galatia (v 6): It is not clear what Luke refers to by these names. The old country and territory of Phrygia was at this time divided between two Roman provinces, Asia and Galatia. The territory of Galatia was at this time included in the much larger Roman province of Galatia (a good Bible atlas will show this). John Stott understands this expression as meaning “the Phrygian region of the province of Galatia,” which makes good geographical sense.

Asia (v 6): In New Testament times the province of Asia included the old territories of Mysia, Lydia and the western part of Phrygia.

Mysia (v 7): The territory of the northwestern part of the Roman province of Asia. Troas was situated in Mysia.

Bithynia (v 7): Bithynia-Pontus was the name of the Roman province along the south coast of the Black Sea.

the Spirit of Jesus (v 7): This expression has the same meaning as “the Holy Spirit” in v 6.

Troas (v 8): This was a Roman colony and an important seaport, from where many ships went west to Macedonia and south along the coast of Asia Minor. Paul returned to Troas twice during his third missionary journey. The first time was after his long ministry in Ephesus (2 Cor 2:12). Later he preached in the church that had been established there (Acts 20:5–12).

Macedonia (v 9): It was a Roman province and constituted the northern part of the Greek peninsula. Today this area is part of Europe.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map Paul’s second missionary journey: Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Bithynia, Troas and Macedonia. ([Go to the map](#Map5PaulsSecondMissionaryJourney))
2. What is the work of the Holy Spirit in verse 6?
3. What is the work of the Holy Spirit in verse 7?

Think and discuss

1. In verses 6-7 we read what the Holy Spirit did. But nothing is said about how the Holy Spirit worked. Discuss how you think the Holy Spirit could have worked in these situations.
2. How did Paul react to the vision of the man of Macedonia?
3. The language in verse 10 is surprising: “God had called us”. What is the significance of this?

Sharing and application

In this story we can see how Paul and his companions are guided by God in both negative and positive ways: Where they should not preach. Where they should not go. Where they should go and preach the gospel. Share how God has guided you and your church or ministry – negatively as well as positively – in the past.

Teach and preach

Prepare a Bible study based on Acts 16:6-10. Call your study Double guidance in the ministry. Explain how divine guidance can be both in a negative way and in a positive way.

Use answers to these questions as points for your study. Below, I have also suggested some answers that you may find useful.

1. Background: How did Paul and his friends experience divine guidance earlier (during the first missionary journey and in the beginning of the second missionary journey)?
2. What happened now as Paul and his companions planned to preach the gospel in Asia and to proceed to Bithynia with the gospel?
3. In what ways could God have spoken to them about what not to do and where not to go?
4. How did they respond to this “negative” guidance?
5. How did God speak to Paul in Troas?
6. What did Paul do about the divine guidance that he received in Troas?
7. Historical examples: Do you know of any great men of God who have experienced and been obedient to this kind of “double guidance”?
8. Indian examples: Do you know of any examples from God’s work in India of this kind of “double guidance” and what have been the consequences? Or do you have any personal experience to share?
9. Application: Why is it important for us to be obedient to divine guidance, whether it is “positive” or “negative”?

Here are some points that you can use in your Bible study:

1. Background: Paul and his friends could look back on a successful ministry during the first missionary journey (the gospel had been preached in spite of opposition and persecution; churches had been established, organized and strengthened). Doors had been open. The Holy Spirit had been with them through signs and wonders. The gospel had borne fruit. The Gentiles had responded to the gospel in a fantastic way.
2. But in this story the situation suddenly changes. Now the Holy Spirit tells them not to preach the gospel in Asia and not to start ministry in Bithynia.
3. See answer to Think and discuss 1.
4. When these negative things happen, Paul and his companions do not react negatively. They do not question God. They are not disobedient to the prohibitive and constraining guidance of the Holy Spirit. They may be wondering why these things have happened, and they may experience frustration. But still they obey God’s guidance, even if it is negative.
5. In Troas, God speaks to Paul in a vision during the night. Finally Paul experiences “positive” divine guidance!
6. See answer to Think and discuss 2.
7. Two historical examples of “double guidance”: William Carey planned to go to some islands in the Pacific Ocean, but God guided him to India where he was used mightily in the kingdom of God. David Livingstone tried to go to China, but God sent him to Africa instead. These two men had their own plans, but God had other plans for their lives – and they were obedient to God’s call. You can read more about Carey and Livingstone and share some more details about “double guidance” in their lives and what later happened through their ministries.
8. You have to come up with your own Indian examples!
9. Only when we are obedient to God’s guidance – whether it is “positive” or “negative” guidance – can God’s plan for for our lives and ministries be fulfilled. Because Paul and his companions did not preach in Asia or enter into Bithynia, they were available when God called them to go to Macedonia. Because they were available to go to Macedonia, the gospel got a foothold in Europe, and history shows how, as a result of that, the gospel spread in a fantastic way all over Europe. History also shows how Europe became the base for the modern missionary movement through which the gospel has been carried to the uttermost corners of the world.

([Go to Answers 42](#Answers42))

### Study 43. Lydia baptized in Philippi, 16:11–15

The passage

Paul and his companions bring the gospel to what is present-day Europe as they minister in Philippi in Macedonia. The firsts converts are Lydia, a cloth merchant from the province of Asia, and her household.

Comments

we (v 11): Luke is now travelling with Paul, Silas and Timothy.

Philippi (v 12): Philippi was a city in eastern Macedonia, a Roman colony with its own government, and situated 15 km from its seaport Neapolis. Many retired Roman soldiers lived there.

a place of prayer (v 13): There was no synagogue in Philippi, as there were not many Jews there. To establish a synagogue there had to be at least 10 Jewish men. Instead the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles met for their weekly meetings at a place away from the city. It was common for these prayer places to be situated close to the running water of a local river. According to this story the participants in the Sabbath day prayer meeting were all women.

Lydia ... the city of Thyatira (v 14): Thyatira was a city famous for cloth dyeing, especially with dark red and purple colours. It was situated in the territory of Lydia in the Roman province of Asia. Lydia was perhaps this woman’s “business name,” or else she was named after her home territory.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map Paul’s second missionary journey: Troas, Samothrace, Neapolis, Philippi and Macedonia. ([Go to the map](#Map5PaulsSecondMissionaryJourney))

2. Why did Paul and his friends go to the river?

3. What does Luke tell us about Lydia and her background?

Think and discuss

1. How does Luke describe Lydia’s conversion in verse 14? Discuss the implications of this description!
2. What can we learn from this text about baptism in the New Testament period?

Sharing and application

Compare what happens in this story to your own situation in South India. Cover aspects such as:

* + - Are there enough people like Paul who speak to people and share the gospel with them?
    - Where are our meeting places?
    - Is our message clear so that people can understand it and respond to it positively?
    - Do we experience the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we share the gospel message? How?
    - Do we experience that the Holy Spirit illuminates the hearts and minds of people so that they understand and accept the gospel message that we preach? How?
    - How do we deal with the issue of baptism? To what extent do we follow the New Testament model? In what ways is our situation different from that of Paul’s, and how do these differences affect our practices?
    - Do we see changed lives as a result of people accepting the gospel and being baptized? Give examples of changed lives!

Teach and preach

This is a good text for a Bible study or a sermon about salvation and baptism. You can use your answers to the Think and discuss questions for this. But you need to add a final section, where you apply one or two points (for example something from Sharing and application above) to your own South Indian context.

([Go to Answers 43](#Answers43))

### Study 44. In prison in Philippi, 16:16–40

The passage

In Philippi a slave girl who had a spirit of prediction of the future was delivered through Paul’s ministry. This upset her owners as they lost the good income they had had through the girl. So they dragged Paul and Silas to the city magistrates and accused them of causing a riot in the city and of propagating illegal practices. Paul and Silas were stripped of their clothes and beaten and put into jail. As they were praying and singing during the night, an earthquake shook the prison. The prison doors flew open and the prisoners’ chains came loose. The jailer woke up and thought that the prisoners had escaped. Paul stopped him from killing himself and explained the gospel to him. That night the jailer and his family were saved and baptized. In the morning the magistrates sent message that Paul and Silas should be released. Paul told the messengers that he and Silas were Roman citizens and that they had been treated wrongly. This made the magistrates nervous. They themselves came to the prison, released Paul and Silas and asked them to leave the city in peace. The apostles said goodbye to the believers in Philippi before they left the city.

Comments

owners (v 16): The Greek is in the plural.

us (v 17): Luke was present on these occasions (and Timothy, compare 17:14). But only Paul and Silas were dragged to to the marketplace (v 19). Then Luke must have stayed in Philippi, as Paul and Silas left the city (v 40). Only at the end of Paul’s third missionary journey several years later does Luke reappear. That is when Paul and his companions (including Luke) are travelling from Philippi to Troas on their way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:6). It is possible that Philippi was Luke’s hometown, where he had his medical practice.

the Most High God (v 17): This expression was used at that time by the Jews about their God, but also by the gentile Greeks about their god Zeus.

the way of salvation (v 17). Salvation was a very popular topic in those days, also among Gentiles. In this story the evil spirit must have recognized Paul and Silas as messengers of the true God. Luke records in his gospel how the same thing happened to Jesus during his ministry (Luk 8:27-28). There the same expression about God is used.

marketplace (v 19): In a Greek city the agora was not only the marketplace but the centre for public life and where public trials were held.

These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They are advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or observe. (v 20–21). The accusations that the owners of the slave girl had against Paul and Silas (causing a riot and introducing a foreign religion) were very serious.

without a trial (v 37): It was illegal to have a Roman citizen flogged in public. It was even worse to have him flogged without a trial.

Text questions

1. Why did Paul command the evil spirit to leave the slave girl?
2. Why were the owners of the slave girl upset about Paul and Silas? But what did they accuse the apostles of before the city magistrates?
3. How did the city magistrates treat Paul and Silas?
4. Why did the jailer try to kill himself?
5. Why did the jailer give Paul and Silas a meal in the middle of the night?
6. What did Paul accuse the city magistrates of having done?

Think and discuss

1. During the apostles’ ministry in Philippi three people were touched by the gospel in a special way. Who were they and what happened to them?
2. Why do you think that the crowd joined in attacking Paul and Silas?
3. Why do you think that the other prisoners were listening to the apostles?
4. Why were the jailer and his whole family baptized that very night?
5. Why do you think Paul demanded that the magistrates themselves should come to the prison and release the apostles?
6. In verse 40 it says that Paul and Silas went to Lydia’s house, where they met and encouraged the brothers. Why did the apostles not meet and encourage the sisters?

Sharing and application

1. The slave girl’s life was changed as the spirit of predicting the future was cast out. Think of her life before and after her meeting with the apostles. How was her life before, and how was her life afterwards? Have you come across any person from your own church or your ministry with a life story similar to this girl’s?
2. It was a very dramatic night for the jailer. First he had to deal with some strange prisoners. Then he almost committed suicide. Afterwards the he heard the gospel message, was baptized and his whole life was changed, including that of his family. Have you come across people in your church or in your ministry who had dramatic salvation experiences like this? How was your own salvation experience?
3. The jailer and his family must have been Gentiles with hardly any previous exposure to the Christian gospel. Still Paul and Silas did not hesitate to baptize them the very night of their salvation experience. Would you or your pastor have done like this? Why – why not?
4. Paul and Silas had been flogged and put in the inner cell of the prison with their feet fastened in the stocks. Still they were singing hymns to God during the night. How was this possible? Have you (or your pastor or friend) ever been in a similar situation? Did you sing praises to God at such a time?
5. Compare the membership composition of your own church with the picture Luke gives us of some of the first believers in Philippi. The head of a Jewish family thanked God every day that God had not made him a Gentile, a woman or a slave. Still, three of the first members or the “firstfruit” of the church in Philippi were a Gentile woman, a Gentile slave girl and a Gentile jailer. This illustrates what Paul wrote to the Galatians: “In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith in him. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is no longer slave nor free, male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26–28). What about your own church? Does it illustrate this New Testament principle? Explain how!

Teach and preach

Prepare a gospel sermon about the jailer in Philippi. Your heading could be One night and four miracles in Philippi. You can use this outline, if you wish:

1. Introduction: Paul and Silas in Philippi: Briefly about Lydia, the slave girl and how the apostles were brought to the prison.
2. The first miracle of the night: The miracle of the servants of God: The jailer makes sure that all the prisoners are kept safely before he goes to bed. Worship service in the prison!
3. The second miracle of the night: The miracle of the earthquake, the opened doors and the freed prisoners. The jailer wakes up, thinks the prisoners have escaped, and draws his sword to kill himself.
4. The third miracle of the night: The salvation of the jailer and his family: Paul interferes in the jailer’s suicide attempt. The jailer asks one of life’s most important questions: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved”. Paul first gives the short answer: “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved”. Then the apostles explain the gospel to the jailer and his family.
5. The gospel message: You make your presentation of the main points of the gospel about salvation through Jesus Christ. Use a language that can easily be understood by your non-Christian audience.
6. The fourth miracle of the night: Changed lives. The jailer and his family accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Two things come as direct results of this:
   * They are baptized that same night. This means that the gospel message (“the word of the Lord”, v 32) must have included something about baptism.
   * Their attitudes are changed. They wash the wounds of the apostles and they served them food.
7. Conclusion: Invitation to accept Jesus and have your life changed – for now and for eternity!

([Go to Answers 44](#Answers44))

### Study 45. Thessalonica, 17:1–10

The passage

The next stop on Paul’s and Silas’ journey was Thessalonica, the capital city of Macedonia. First the apostles spoke in the synagogue and many people responded to the gospel. Soon some of the Jews got jealous and started a riot. The apostles were accused of treason against the Roman emperor, and they had to leave the city during the night.

Comments

Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica (v 1): These three cities were on the Egnatian Highway which went from east to west across what is today the northern part of Greece. The distance from Philippi to Thessalonica was 160 km, which could be covered in 3-4 days. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and an important seaport with a population of more than 2 hundred thousand. It had a Jewish colony and a synagogue.

Jason’s house (v 5): The reason why the mob attacked Jason’s house was that Paul and Silas stayed there.

contrary to the decrees of Caesar, they say that there is another king called Jesus (v 7): To support a rival king above Caesar was treason, the worst accusation for the Romans. Paul and Silas could have been sentenced to death if they had been found guilty. For Jews blasphemy was the greatest accusation.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map Paul’s second missionary journey: Troas, Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica and Macedonia. ([Go to the map](#Map5PaulsSecondMissionaryJourney))
2. What were the three main points in Paul’s sermons to the Jews in Thessalonica?
3. What was the result of Paul’s ministry during the first weeks?
4. Why was there a riot in the city?
5. What were the accusations against the apostles?
6. How did the city officials react to the accusations?
7. What happened to Paul and Silas immediately after the turmoil?

Think and discuss

1. When Paul first came to Thessalonica he spoke in the synagogue three Sabbath days in a row. What did he base his sermons on – and why?
2. How long do you think Paul and Silas stayed in Thessalonica? Give reasons for your answer!
3. Who were the first converts in Thessalonica? What do you think was their background?
4. Jason and the others had to post bail before they were allowed to go (v 9). What could have been the reasons for this? And what could have been the future consequences of this?

Sharing and application

1. In Thessalonica the authorities got a grip over the church and its activities (and perhaps even prevented Paul from coming back there) by making Jason and the others post bond/bail. Have you and your church ever experienced a situation when the authorities in a similar way got a grip over you? Explain what happened, and in what way the church activities were affected! What did you do about it?
2. The story about the church in Thessalonica illustrates a situation, which is quite common. When the gospel is preached people respond to it by leaving their old lives. In Thessalonica some people left the synagogue to join the church. Others discontinued worshipping their Greek gods and idols to worship the only true God. They all honored Jesus as the King of Kings and put him before the Roman emperor. So the leaders and the general public became jealous and angry and said that the Christians had caused trouble all over the world and that they were breaking the laws of the country. Then they started a riot and blamed the Christians!

* Do similar things happen in the South Indian context? Share you own experiences!
* How do you think believers in South India should react when political and religious leaders get jealous and angry, start riots and blame the Christians for so called illegal activities?

([Go to Answers 45](#Answers45))

### Study 46. Berea, 17:10–15

The passage

Paul and Silas had to leave Thessalonica in a hurry. When they came to Berea they went to the Jewish synagogue to proclaim the gospel. The people there were eager to listen and to study God’s word to see if Paul spoke the truth. Many people believed. But Jews from Thessalonica heard this and came to Berea to stir up the crowds against the apostles. So again Paul had to leave the ministry in a hurry.

Comments

Berea (v 10): The distance from Thessalonica to Berea was 80 km. Under the Romans it became the headquarters of the confederation of Macedonia and the seat of the imperial cult. In New Testament times it was a prosperous city with a large population.

the coast (14): Berea was situated 30 km from the coast. From there Paul could have travelled to Athens either by ship or by land on the main highway going south, a distance of 550 km.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map Paul's second missionary journey: Berea and Athens. ([Go to the map](#Map5PaulsSecondMissionaryJourney))
2. Where did Paul and Silas go first when they arrived in Berea?
3. Describe the way in which the Bereans received Paul’s teaching!
4. What was the result of Paul’s ministry in Berea?
5. Why did Paul have to leave Berea so suddenly?
6. What happened to Silas and Timothy?

Think and discuss

1. What are the similarities and differences between Paul’s ministries in Thessalonica and Berea?
2. When there was a riot in Thessalonica, both Paul and Silas had to leave. But when there was trouble in Berea, only Paul had to leave. What could be the reason for this difference?

Sharing and application

It is a sad fact that in many countries Pentecostals and other believers have spoken against Bible schools and Bible colleges. They have used three types of arguments:

* + - Some have argued like this: “It is a waste of time to send people to Bible schools. Instead they should go out and preach the gospel. Jesus is coming back soon, and we have to win as many souls as possible before that day. People will die in their sins, while our young people study at Bible colleges.”
    - Others have argued like this: “There is no need for Bible schools and Bible colleges. Textbooks and course materials are unnecessary. It is enough just to read the Bible. That you can do on your own. The Bible itself is clear enough. There is no need for anything else.”
    - Yet others have argued like this: “Bible schools and Bible colleges are dangerous. If we send our young people there, they will only get confused and perhaps even lose their faith. Bible college teachers are often liberal and they may twist the mind of our young people.”

What is the attitude of your pastor, your church and your denomination to sending young people to Bible schools and Bible colleges? Are they in favor of it? Or are they against it? Do they use any of the above arguments?

Teach and preach

Use Acts 17:10-12 for a short Bible study for the elders and other leaders of your church. The purpose of the study is to motivate them to send young people – men and women – to Bible schools and Bible colleges. In the past they have been very reluctant to do so.

You can call your study The example of the Bereans – Acts 17:10–12”. Your study can include the following points:

1. Background: Why don’t we send young people from our church to Bible schools and Bible colleges? What could be our reasons?
   * + Waste of time
     + No need
     + Dangerous
     + The pastor (and other leaders) will feel threatened by the Bible knowledge of returning students.
     + We don’t have any suitable young persons to send.
     + We don’t have the money for fees and other expenses, as we want to prioritize other activities in our church.
     + Any other reason
2. The Bereans: They had noble character. How did this character reveal itself?
   * + They received Paul’s message with eagerness.
     + They examined the Scriptures to see if Paul spoke the truth.
     + They studied the scriptures every day.
     + They responded to the word of God and believed.
3. Conclusion: The Bereans understood the need to study the word of God deeply, eagerly, systematically and regularly.
4. Are we in our church like the Bereans? To test ourselves we need to give honest answers to these three important questions:
   * + Do we in our church take the word of God as seriously as the Bereans did?
     + Do we in our church offer enough opportunities for young people (both men and women) to study the word of God deeply, eagerly, systematically and regularly?
     + Do the members of our church have enough Bible knowledge to handle the issues of our time, and to handle all the strange and sometimes false teachings that attack us through glossy Christian books and magazines, and through Christian cassettes, DVDs and TV programs?
5. If we answer “no” to any of these questions, we need to to do something about it!
   * + We need to send young men and women from our church to Bible school and Bible college!
     + We need to identify the right people – both men and women – to send!
     + We need to pay their fees, encourage and support and pray for them as they study the word of God!

([Go to Answers 46](#Answers46))

### Study 47. Athens, 17:16–34

The passage

Paul had come to Athens, a city full of philosophers and idol worshipers, without his co-workers Silas and Timothy. He spent his time there talking to Jews and God-fearing Greeks in the synagogue and to philosophers in the marketplace. The philosophers did not understand him when he mentioned Jesus and the resurrection. So they took him to a meeting of the council of the Areopagus, who considered themselves to be the guardians of religious and philosophical teachings. Paul was questioned, and he answered by giving a sermon. But as soon as he mentioned Jesus and his resurrection, the council interrupted him. As a result of Paul’s ministry in Athens some people believed.

Comments

Athens (v 16): A few hundred years before Paul’s visit, Athens had become the famous capital of Attica, one of the Greek states. It was named after its patron goddess Athene. It centered around a rocky hill called Acropolis. It had a population of at least 2 ½ lakhs and was situated 8 km from the sea. In New Testament times the period of Athens’ greatest glory had passed. But it was still a city of great cultural importance with beautiful temples and public buildings. It was the seat of Greek art, science, and philosophy, and was the most important university city. Although politically conquered by the Romans, it conquered its conquerors with its learning and culture.

Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (v 18): The Epicureans belonged to a philosophical school founded by Epicurus about 300 years before Paul’s time. This philosophy was a system of atheism, and it taught men to seek as their highest aim a pleasant and smooth life. The Stoics were a philosophical school founded by the Greek philosopher Zeno a few hundred years before Paul’s time. Zenon taught that a man’s happiness consisted in bringing himself into harmony with the course of the universe. They were trained to bear evils with indifference, and so to be independent of external things. Materialism, pantheism, fatalism, and pride were the leading features of this philosophy.

Areopagus (v 19): This was the name of a rocky height to the west of the Acropolis and south of the marketplace. Before Paul’s time a court of justice convened there. By New Testament times the Areopagus was the name for a council, which only handled religious and philosophical matters. It met in the northwest corner of the marketplace.

some of your own poets (v 28): This verse contains two quotations. The first one (“In him we live and move and have our being”) is from the Cretan poet Epimenides (around 600 B.C.). The second quotation (“We too are his offspring”) can be found both in a poem by Aratus from Cilicia and in a poem by Cleanthes (they both lived around 300 B.C.). “In him” and “his” in these poems refer to the Greek god Zeus. Paul also quotes Greek poets in 1 Cor 15:33 and Tit 1:12.

resurrection of the dead (v 32): Most Greeks believed in the immortality of the human soul, but not in the resurrection of the human body.

Dionysius ... Damaris (v 34): These two persons are not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament.

Text questions

1. Find Athens on the map Paul's second missionary journey. ([Go to the map](#Map5PaulsSecondMissionaryJourney))
2. Who was Paul waiting for to come to Athens?
3. Why was Paul distressed as the spent time in Athens?
4. How did Paul minister in Athens?
5. How does Luke describe the Athenians?
6. Why was Paul taken to a meeting of the Areopagus?
7. Paul does not refer to Jesus by name in his sermon. What expressions does he use instead?
8. At what point did the listeners interrupt Paul’s sermon?
9. People reacted to Paul’s sermon in different ways. How?

Think and discuss

1. How did Paul begin his sermon to the council of the Areopagus? In your opinion, was this a good or a bad beginning? Why?
2. Paul quotes Greek non-Christian poets in his sermon. What does that tell us about Paul? Do you approve of what he did? Why – why not?
3. In what way does Paul attack the pagan faith of the Athenians? Do you ever do the equivalent in your South Indian context? Why – why not?
4. How would you evaluate Paul’s ministry in Athens? Was it successful or not? Give your reasons.

Sharing and application

1. Paul had come to Athens for the first time. It was a world-famous city, well known for its monuments, temples, statues and other works of art, colleges, philosophers and poets. How did he react to all this?
   * + What did he see? He saw a city full of idols!
     + What did he feel? He felt distress and pain, perhaps even anger!
     + What did he do? He shared the gospel, even in the marketplace, even every day!

What can you learn from Paul in these respects for your ministry – or as you visit one of the famous Indian cities?

1. In his sermon to the Athenians Paul does not quote the Old Testament. Instead he has two quotations from non-Christian Greek poets. Do you ever use non-Christian literature as part of your argumentation as you teach and preach? What kind of material do you use, if any? What about pastors and Bible teachers in your denomination or fellowship – do they refer to non-Christian material? What would you and the people in your church think, if a guest preacher did so?
2. It is interesting to note that the people of Athens (the philosophers as well as the council of the Areopagus) had problems understanding or accepting one of the key concepts in the Christian faith – the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Have you had similar experiences in your own South Indian context? Are there key concepts in the Christian faith that the non-Christians absolutely do not understand – or that they strongly object to? What concepts? And how do you manage to explain them to your audience without being interrupted?

Teach and preach

In this passage Luke summarizes a third sermon by Paul. The first sermon we find in chapter 13, when Paul speaks to Jews and God-fearers in Pisidian Antioch. The second sermon we find in chapter 14, when Paul speaks to illiterate Gentiles in Lystra. Here in chapter 17 of Acts, Paul’s audience consists of Greeks (Gentiles) who are highly educated philosophers. A comparison between the three sermons shows that they are quite different in approach and content. From this we can learn that we also should adapt our sermons and our Bible studies to the background of our listeners.

Paul’s sermon in Athens was a sermon about God leading up to the gospel about Jesus Christ. It has the following structure:

1. Point of contact with the audience

They are very religious people. Paul even found an altar to an unknown God (this becomes the “text” for Paul’s sermon!). This is the God that Paul is going to present to the Athenians, the God of whom they are ignorant.

1. God – the creator of the universe

He is a personal God. But he is also a transcendent God who does not live in temples. This point clearly opposes both the philosophical schools that were represented in Paul’s audience, the Epicureans and the Stoics.

1. God – the sustainer of life

He gives life and breath and everything else to us. In support of this point Paul quotes one of the Greek poets.

1. God – the ruler of all nations

Beginning with Adam he has made all nations and given them their place on earth and in history. So we should seek him so that we can find him.

1. God – the father of human beings

In support of this point Paul quotes another Greek poet. So how can the Athenians think of him as a lifeless thing made of gold or silver or stone? Making images of God and worshipping idols is inexcusable. In the past God tolerated such ignorance, but now he has called us to repentance.

1. God – the judge of the world

The religion of the Athenians is based on ignorance. This ignorance has to be judged. This judgement will include the whole world. This judgment will be just. And this judgment will be definite – both the day and the judge has already been appointed.

1. The gospel about Jesus

Who is this appointed judge? It is Jesus Christ! At this point in his sermon, Paul must have presented the gospel about Jesus Christ – his suffering, death and resurrection – to the Athenians (even if Luke does not mention it in the text). Because it was when they heard the word resurrection that they interrupted him.

You can use this sermon outline and adjust it to your own South Indian audience.

([Go to Answers 47](#Answers47))

### Study 48. Corinth, 18:1–18

The passage

From Athens Paul travelled to Corinth, by road or by ship. In Corinth Paul stayed and worked with Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish believers who had been deported from Rome by emperor Claudius. They were tentmakers by trade. He spoke in the synagogue on Sabbath days. Later Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia. Then Paul fully occupied himself with preaching the gospel. When the Jews opposed him, he instead turned to the Gentiles. Many people responded to the gospel and were baptized, including the synagogue ruler Cripsus and his family. The believers gathered in a house that belonged to Titius Justus. One night Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision, strengthening and comforting him. When a new Roman proconsul, Gallio, was appointed one and a half years later, the Jews decided to stop Paul’s ministry so they took him to court. But Gallio did not take up their accusations, which showed that he did not consider the gospel to be illegal. Paul stayed some more time in Corinth.

Comments

Corinth (v 1): If Paul travelled by land, the distance was 80 km. He could also have travelled by sea from Pireus (Athen’s port) to Cenchrea (Corinth’s eastern harbor). Corinth was one of the biggest cities in the Roman empire with a population of about 250 thousand free persons and 400 thousand slaves. It was perhaps the most important city in Greece, famous for its commerce (with its two harbors), its culture (with its focus on philosophy and wisdom), its religion (with many temples, including the temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love) and its immorality (with 1000 temple prostitutes in the Aphrodite temple). It had a mixed population of Romans, Greeks and Jews (who had a synagogue).

Aquila ... Pontus ... Italy ... Priscilla ... Claudius ... Rome (v 2): Aquila and Priscilla (also called Prisca) became Paul’s close friends and co-workers. They are mentioned several times in Acts and in Paul’s letters. Pontus was a Roman province in Asia Minor south of the Black Sea. Rome was the capital of the Roman empire and situated in Italy. The Roman emperor Claudius ruled A.D. 41–54. In A.D. 49 he banned all Jews and Christians from Rome. Later they were allowed to return.

tent maker (v 3): It was a Jewish custom to provide manual training for their sons. A tent maker produced all kinds of leather good, including saddles and tents. So Paul was not ashamed of working with his hands to provide a living for himself.

Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia (v 5): Paul had told his co-workers to meet him in Athens. At least Timothy must have done so, for he had travelled from Athens back to Thessalonica to check on the situation for the believers there (1 Thess 3:1). They probably brought money from the churches in Macedonia.

Titius Justus (v 7): Titius is a common Roman name, so he must have been a God-fearing Roman.

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue (v 8): A synagogue ruler was a person responsible for calling readers and preachers and for arranging the service and maintaining order. In 1 Cor 1:14 Paul mentions that he baptized Crispus.

believed and were baptized (v 8): The grammar of the original text indicates that this was an ongoing process, something that happened over a period of time.

when Gallio was proconsul in Achaia (v12): An ancient inscription mentions Gallio, who was the brother of the famous philosopher Seneca. He was proconsul in Achaia A.D. 51–52, which helps Bible scholars date Paul’s missionary journeys.

contrary to the law (v 13): The Jews were accusing Paul of propagating a religion which was not recognized by Roman law as Judaism was.

Sosthenes (v 17): He must have succeeded Crispus as the synagogue ruler. Perhaps he later became a believer, because a person with the same name is mentioned in 1 Cor 1:1.

Paul stayed on in Corinth for many more days (v 18): So Paul’s stay in Corinth was probably around two years.

Text questions

1. Find Corinth on the map Paul’s second missionary journey. ([Go to the map](#Map5PaulsSecondMissionaryJourney))
2. Who were Aquila and Pricilla? Why did Paul stay with them?
3. Why did Paul say, “From now on I will go to the Gentiles”?
4. Who was Crispus? What happened to him?
5. What was the accusation against Paul that the Jews brought to Gallio?

Think and discuss

1. What changed for Paul and his ministry, when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia?
2. Why do you think Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision?
3. How did Gallio respond to the Jews’ accusations against Paul? What could have been the implications of Gallio’s standpoint for the future of the ministry in Corinth and Achaia?
4. Who was Sosthenes? Who do you think beat him? Why did they beat him?

Sharing and application

It is clear from this story (and from Paul’s letters) that Paul was not ashamed of working with his hands for a living. But why do we find so few South Indian gospel workers who are willing to follow Paul’s example? Would you yourself be willing as a gospel worker to support yourself financially through a job, manual labor or an office job? Why? Why not?

Teach and preach

A. The story about how Jesus appeared to Paul in a nightly vision (v 9–10) can be used for a sermon called Do not be afraid! Your outline can be like this:

1. A few words about the background (Paul in Corinth)
   * + Paul speaks in the synagogue
     + The Jews oppose his ministry
     + Paul speaks in the house of Titius Justus
     + The result of the ministry: Some Jews saved and baptized (Crispus and his family and probably others). Many Gentiles saved and baptized.
2. The nightly vision
   * + What Jesus said to Paul – but stress the first sentence about “Do not be afraid!”
3. Why did Paul need to hear these words from Jesus?
   * + The Jews in Corinth had already opposed him, and Paul was expecting the opposition to become worse. The situation was really threatening. Paul had every reason to be afraid.
     + In addition, Paul had recently had bad experiences in three cities in Macedonia:
       - He and Silas had been flogged and imprisoned in Philippi
       - He and Silas were forced to leave Thessalonica in the middle of the night because of persecution.
       - He was forced to leave Berea suddenly because of persecution.
4. What about you? Do you need a word of assurance from Jesus?
   * + Are you facing persecution?
     + Are you facing problems in your daily life?
     + Are you afraid of the future?
5. Jesus is here today to speak to you!

* He knows your situation!
* His words to you today are “Do not be afraid!”

B. The same text (Acts 18:9–19) can be used for a Bible study for gospel workers called Keep on speaking – I have many people in the city! This could be your outline:

1. A few words about the background (Paul in Corinth)
   * + Paul speaks in the synagogue
     + The Jews oppose his ministry
     + Paul speaks in the house of Titius Justus
     + The result of the ministry: Some Jews saved and baptized (Crispus and his family and probably others). Many Gentiles saved and baptized.
2. The nightly vision
   * + What Jesus said to Paul – but stress the expression “Keep on speaking!”
3. Why did Paul need to hear the words “Keep on speaking”?
   * + Perhaps he was afraid of the opposition from the Jews.
     + Perhaps he thought that he had done enough in Corinth. Already many of the Corinthians had heard the gospel, believed and been baptized. It was now time to move on.
     + Perhaps he was tired and overworked. He had worked hard and long hours, first in the synagogue, then in Titius Justus’ house. He felt as if all his strength and enthusiasm were exhausted. He didn’t want to speak any more. He wanted to quit.
4. Why did Jesus say the words “Keep on speaking” to Paul through this vision?
   * + Jesus wanted to encourage Paul: There was no need for Paul to be afraid of the opposition
     + Jesus wanted give assurance to Paul: Nobody was going to attack him – in spite of the tense situation
     + Jesus wanted to remind Paul that there was still work to do in Corinth
     + Yes, many had already been saved and baptized, but the harvest was not yet full
       - Jesus still had many people in the city
       - Many more people were waiting to hear the gospel
       - It was not yet time for Paul to leave Corinth – or to stop speaking
5. What about you?
   * + Do you feel that you want to stop speaking about Jesus?
       - Are you afraid?
       - Are you discouraged?
       - Are you tired and overworked?
     + Do you feel like stop serving Jesus?
       - Do you feel that you have done enough?
       - Do you feel that it is time to move on?
     + But perhaps Jesus is telling you today
       - “Keep on speaking”
       - “I have many more people in your city”

([Go to Answers 48](#Answers48))

### Study 49. Paul travels back to Antioch in Syria, 18:18–22

The passage

Some time after the incident with Gallio, Paul left Corinth. At Cenchrea he had his hair cut off, thus marking the end of a vow he must have taken earlier. Priscilla and Aquila travelled with Paul by ship to Ephesus, where they stayed. Paul ministered briefly in the synagogue before he sailed on to Caesarea, hoping to return to Ephesus at some later point. From Caesarea he went up to Jerusalem and then to Antioch. His second missionary journey was completed.

Comments

together with Priscilla and Aquila (v 18): It is interesting to note that from this point in Acts, Priscilla’s name is mentioned before her husband’s. Perhaps she was more involved in the ministry. Silas is not mentioned any more in Acts.

Cenchrea (v 18): The eastern harbor of Corinth, situated 11 km from the city.

a vow (v 18): This was probably a temporary Nazirite vow (see Num 6:1–21). Jews often took vows to thank God for deliverance from dangers or to ask God for protection. Shaving the head marked the end of the vow. The hair was first cut, then burnt.

Ephesus (v 19): The capital of the Roman province of Asia. Earlier Paul and his companions had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit from speaking the word in the province of Asia (16:6). Paul returned to Ephesus during his third missionary journey.

Verse 21: The “Western text” of Acts has some additional information in this verse: “I must be all means keep the festival in Jerusalem”, which may refer to the Passover. You will find more information about the different text versions of Acts in reference article Three text versions of Acts. ([Go to the article](#ThreeTextVersionsOfActs))

When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch (v 22): For Caesarea see Acts 8:40 and 10:1. The distance from Caesarea to Jerusalem is 100 km.

Text questions

1. Find Cenchrea, Ephesus, Caesarea, Jerusalem and Antioch on the map Paul’s second missionary journey. ([Go to the map](#Map5PaulsSecondMissionaryJourney))
2. Priscilla and Aquila did not travel with Paul all the way to Antioch in Syria. Where did Paul leave them?

Think and discuss

1. What could have been the reason for Paul taking a temporary Nazirite vow in Corinth?
2. In contrast to Corinth, Paul received a warm welcome from the Jews in Ephesus. Could there have been any special reason for that?

Sharing and application

1. Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus and became a believer and an apostle. In spite of this he seems to have kept many Jewish customs, such as the Nazirite vow in this story. What about you, your pastor and the believers in your church – do you still keep some traditional Hindu customs? Describe them!
2. Have you ever come across believers who say that we should not follow any old customs and that all cultural traditions are against the word of God? Why do you think they say that? Do you agree with them? Why? Why not?

([Go to Answers 49](#Answers49))

### Study 50. Apollos in Ephesus and Corinth, 18:23–28

The passage

Paul spent some time in his home church in Antioch in Syria before he set out on his third missionary journey. Meanwhile a Jewish-background preacher and teacher called Apollos came to Ephesus, where he spoke about Jesus with great enthusiasm. Priscilla and Aquila, whom Paul had left in Ephesus, met him and explained to him more about the “way of God”. Later Apollos left Ephesus with the recommendations of the church and went to Corinth in the province of Achaia to help with the ministry there.

Comments

After spending some time there (v 23): Paul may have spent nine months in Antioch after he had been in Jerusalem for the Passover festival of AD 52. During the spring of AD 53 he probably set out on his third missionary journey, which lasted about four years.

Apollos, a native of Alexandria (v 24): This is the first time Apollos is mentioned in the New Testament, and this is the only passage that has any background information about him. Alexandria was situated in Egypt. It was the second largest city in the Roman empire and had a population consisting of Jews, Greeks and Egyptians. Alexandria was an important naval base and had a port, from which grain was sent by ship to Rome. It was also an important cultural centre and its university was famous. Alexandria had the largest library in the world with perhaps one million books and scrolls. The Jewish population was large and very influential. It was here that the Old Testament was translated into Greek (the Septuagint) about 200 years before Christ.

Priscilla and Aquila (v 26): See 18:2 and 18:18.

Achaia (27): Achaia was a Roman province and consisted of the southern part of Greece. Its capital was Corinth (see also 19:1).

Text questions

1. What did Paul do as he travelled through Galatia and Phrygia?
2. Why did Priscilla and Aquila invite Apollos to their house?
3. Where did Apollos go after he had spent some time in Ephesus?

Think and discuss

1. What do you think Paul did as he spent some time in Antioch?
2. What do we learn about Apollos and his background from verses 24–26?
3. Pricilla and Aquila explained the way of God more accurately to Apollos (v 26). What do you think that they explained to him?
4. In what way did Apollos help in the ministry in Corinth?

Sharing and application

1. Evangelists and Bible teachers may have come to your church and said things that were not doctrinally sound or correct. How did you (your pastors, your church elders) deal with them?
2. How did Priscilla and Aquila deal with Apollos in Ephesus, when they heard him speak things that were not accurate – or at least incomplete? What can we learn from Priscilla and Aquila?

Teach and preach

Prepare a sermon or a Bible study called Apollos – a man equipped for service based on this passage. This could be your outline:

1. Introduction:
   * Priscilla and Aquila were left by Paul in Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey (18:19). They were in place when God needed them to guide and train Apollos!
   * The city of Ephesus (notes to 18:19 and 19:1): Some general information
2. Who was Apollos? – See 18:24–25 and answers to question Think and discuss 2:
   * A Jew from Alexandria
   * Good knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures
   * A good speaker and a trained orator
   * A believer who was bold and willing to share the gospel
   * But he had limited understanding of the Christian faith, of the church, and of Christian way of life
3. How did God equip Apollos for service?
   1. Stage 1: Through his background and training in Alexandria
      * His cultural background: a Jew from the diaspora
      * His educational background: Old Testament knowledge, oratory skills
      * His personality: boldness, eagerness
      * His salvation experience
      * His knowledge about the gospel (even if this knowledge was limited)
   2. Stage 2: Personal guidance through wise believers (Priscilla and Aquila) – probably about things like this:
      * The gift of the Holy Spirit
      * The mission of the church to reach all peoples to the end of the earth
      * Baptism and church life
      * How to live a life pleasing to God – to walk in the Spirit
      * The Kingdom of God and the second coming of Jesus
4. How did God use Apollos?
   * As an evangelist in Ephesus (18:25–26)
   * As a debater and defender of the gospel in Corinth (18:27–28)
   * As a Bible teacher and a pastor in Corinth (1 Cor 3:4)
5. What can we learn from Luke’s story about Apollos?
   1. We need to have good initial training!
      * Go to a Bible college where you can study the Bible systematically and get a good foundation in Christian doctrine!
      * Be regular with your personal devotional life: read the Bible, meditate on the word of God, and spend time in prayer!
   2. We need to allow God to mould us through his servants!
      * Humbly receive instruction from servants of God – and from older and more experienced believers – who have more know-ledge than you in the Bible and about Christian doctrine!
      * Have “saints” in your church as your role models!
      * We need to have people like Priscilla and Aquila in our churches!
      * People with good knowledge of Bible and Christian doctrines
      * People who can be good examples to both believers and servants of God
      * People who have the wisdom to tutor, correct and encourage even servants of God, when there is need for that
      * We need to be sensitive to God’s guidance into new situations!
   3. Where does God want to use you?
      * In your “Alexandria” – your hometown?
      * In your “Ephesus” – the city where you are studying or working?
      * In your “Corinth” – some other place far away?
   4. What does God want you to do?
      * Evangelistic ministry?
      * Teaching ministry as a Bible teacher or a pastor?
      * Ministry among children or youth?
      * Prayer ministry?
      * Music ministry?
      * Practical ministry in the church, full-time or part-time?
      * To be a “defender of the gospel” – debating with non-Christians about the truth of the Christian faith?

([Go to Answers 50](#Answers50))

### Study 51. Paul in Ephesus, 19:1–20

The passage

When Paul reached Ephesus on his third missionary journey, he met twelve men who were really confused about the Christian faith. So he taught them about Jesus and baptized them. Then he laid his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. In Ephesus, Paul first spoke in the synagogue for three months. But when he met opposition there, he moved to a lecture hall where he talked and had discussions for two years. As a result the gospel spread all over the province of Asia, to Jews as well as to Gentiles. God also performed extraordinary miracles through Paul. Seven sons of a priest called Sceva tried to imitate Paul, but they were overpowered by an evil spirit. As they saw this, many people turned to God. Even sorcerers believed, and they made a fire and burned their scrolls with magical formulas. The last verse of this passage concludes the fifth unit of the book of Acts: The word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

Comments

Ephesus (v 1): Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia and one of the largest and most famous cities in the Roman empire. During Paul’s time it was in decline, as its harbor was silting up. Its theatre was the largest in the world and could accommodate 50 000 spectators. Ephesus was famous for its temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis (called Diana by the Romans). It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and made Ephesus a place of pilgrimage. All the pilgrims and tourists wanted to buy and take home a souvenir (either a small silver shrine or a copy of the meteoric stone that represented the goddess “fallen from heaven”). The souvenir trade supported many silversmiths and made Ephesus a prosperous city (see v 23–24).

No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit (v 2): As the twelve Ephesians had been baptized with John’s baptism (and in that connection been told about John’s message and the Old Testament references to the Holy Spirit), they must at least have heard about the Holy Spirit. Paul’s question to them was if they had ”received the Holy Spirit.” So we should probably understand their answer to mean that they did not know that the Holy Spirit had been given. Paul realized as soon as he met them that there was something important lacking in their understanding of the Christian faith.

the lecture hall of Tyrannus (v 9): There are no other references to either Tyrannus or his lecture hall. But he was probably a philosopher who had some kind of school where he lectured.

Sceva, a Jewish chief priest (v 14): Nothing is known about a priest with that name. It is possible that he took this title himself in order to impress on the people in Ephesus.

books (v 19): These were documents that contained magical formulas and secret spells. Such scrolls have been found in Ephesus, which was a centre for witchcraft in New Testament times.

fifty thousand silver coins (v 19): One such coin was worth about one day’s wages. This high price had nothing to do with the quality of the books, but they were so expensive because people considered their magical contents so powerful and valuable.

Text questions

1. What did Paul do with the twelve men from Ephesus before he placed his hands on them?
2. What happened when Paul placed his hands on the twelve men?
3. Why did Paul discontinue his ministry in the synagogue in Ephesus?
4. What was the result of Paul’s discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus?
5. What happened to the Jewish men who tried to cast our demons in the name of Jesus? Why did they fail?
6. Why were so many valuable scrolls burned in Ephesus?

Think and discuss

1. What is the structure of this passage?
2. Were the twelve men that Paul met when he came to Ephesus believers or not? Give reasons for your standpoint.
3. The twelve men had already been baptized. So why did Paul baptize them again?
4. Many well-known non-Pentecostal Bible scholars (for example F.F. Bruce and John Stott) claim that the story about the Holy Spirit coming on the twelve men from Ephesus proves that “baptism with the Holy Spirit” is not a “second experience” but something you get when you accept Jesus as your personal savior. Do you agree with them? Why – why not?
5. In India there is a big discussion among believers about the “baptism formula”: Should we baptize “in the name of Jesus only” or should we “baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”? In this text (v 5) Paul baptized the twelve men “into the name of the Lord Jesus.” Does this support the “Jesus only” view? Give reason for your answer.
6. Compare verses 11–12 with 5:15–16. Why do you think these two passages are so similar?
7. The last verse of this passage concludes the fifth picture that Luke paints of the glorious expansion of the gospel.
   * In which verse did Luke start painting this fifth picture?
   * What has happened in this fifth picture?

Sharing and application

1. Have you ever had a discussion in your church about “re-baptizing” a person? Discuss different situations when “re-baptism” can be considered.
2. Paul’s “Bible college” in Ephesus:
   * + It can be said that Paul was running a Bible college in the lecture hall of Tyrannus for two years. Explain how. What was the result of this “Bible college”?
     + What about your own Bible college? What must be done so that we will get the same results as Paul did?
3. The story about what happened to the seven sons of Sceva’s is very dramatic. Have you had any similar experiences? What can we learn from this story?
4. The story about the burning of books in Ephesus (v 19) has been used by Christians throughout history as an example to follow.
   * What about you and your church? Have you ever organized (or taken part in) book burning (or the burning of music records/CDs/DVDs, or of film reels), as a method of demonstrating that we as believers must get rid of bad and harmful material that can influence our lives? Share what happened and how you did it.
   * Do you think that this is a good (and biblical) way of expressing our Christian faith and our opposition to the influences of this world? Why – why not?

Teach and preach

Base a Bible study called The Holy Spirit and the twelve men from Ephesus on the comments to verse 2 and the answers to Think and discuss 1 and 3. I suggest that your study contains at least three main points:

1. The role of the Holy Spirit when we accept Jesus and his salvation: We are born by the Spirit and the Holy Spirit takes his dwelling in us.
2. The role of the Holy Spirit for our Christian walk: The Spirit guides us and moulds us into the likeness of Christ. The Holy Spirit produces his fruit in us as we walk in the Spirit.
3. The role of the Holy Spirit for our ministry: The Spirit clothes us with power from on high and gives us the boldness and strength that we need to proclaim the gospel.

([Go to Answers 51](#Answers51))

Unit 6. Paul’s third journey part 2 (Acts 19:21 – 21:16)  
and From Jerusalem to Rome (Acts 21:16 – 28:31)

### Introduction to unit 6

Luke’s sixth and last picture of the early church starts with a riot in Ephesus. As a result, Paul and his companions leave Asia to revisit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia. Paul’s third missionary journey ends in Jerusalem, where he is arrested. After a two-year period of trials and imprisonment in Caesarea, the capital of the Roman province of Judea, Paul is finally taken to Rome as a prisoner. Luke concludes the book of Acts with Paul proclaiming the gospel in Rome, the capital of the Roman empire.

Paul preached the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hinderance (Acts 28:31).

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### Study 52. Riot in Ephesus, 19:21–41

The passage

In Ephesus a silversmith called Demetrius and his craftsmen started a riot against Paul. They accused him of leading people astray, discrediting the goddess Artemis and spoiling their business. A huge mob rushed into the theatre shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Paul’s friends stopped him from going to the theatre to defend himself before the crowd. Finally the city clerk was able to calm down the people and dismiss the crowd.

Comments

He sent to Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus (v 22): About Timothy see comment on 16:1. Erastus is mentioned in two other passages in the New Testament. In Romans (which Paul wrote from Corinth some time after he had been in Ephesus), he calls him “the city treasurer” (Rom 16:23). So Erastus was a very highly placed administrator in Corinth. His name is also found on an inscription in Corinth, which says that he laid the pavement of a courtyard near the theatre. In 2 Tim 4:20 Paul again mentions Erastus in connection with Corinth. For Macedonia see comment on 16:9.

A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis (v 24): Demetrius was probably the leader of the association of silversmiths in Ephesus. They manufactured small shrines and statues of the goddess Artemis, which were sold to pilgrims and tourists. Artemis in Ephesus was a fertility goddess and very popular. Many prostitutes were connected to her temple, which was 130 m long and 67 m wide, and had 127 white marble columns 19 m high. For more information about Ephesus see comment on 19:1.

Gaius and Aristarchus (v 29): Gaius was a common Roman name, and there are other men with the same name in the New Testament. Aristarchus, a native of Thessalonica in Macedonia, later travelled with Paul from Corinth to Jerusalem (20:3–4) and then from Jerusalem to Rome (27:1–2), where he became Paul’s fellow prisoner (Col 4:10).

officials (v 31): These officials belonged to a council, which promoted emperor worship in the province. They were wealthy and influential men. So Paul also had powerful friends like these.

Alexander (v 33): He was a Jew, but nothing else is known about him.

city clerk (v 35): This was the most important official in the city and the contact person between Ephesus and the Roman authorities. He was the chief executive of the assembly.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map Paul’s third missionary journey: Ephesus, Macedonia and Corinth. ([Go to the map](#Map6PaulsThirdMissionaryJourney))
2. Who was Demetrius?
3. What made the people so furious?
4. Why didn’t Paul go to the theatre to speak to the crowd?

Think and discuss

1. What arguments did Demetrius use to accuse Paul?
2. Do you think that Demetrius’ accusations were justified? Why – why not?
3. What arguments did the city clerk use to make the crowd quiet?
4. Do you think that his arguments were correct? Why – why not?
5. What role does Paul play in this story? Do you think that he did the right thing?

Sharing and application

1. Have you ever experienced a riot like the one in Ephesus? What caused it? How was it dissolved?
2. One of the accusations that Demetrius had against Paul was that Paul claimed that man-made gods were no gods at all (v 26). Share your experiences and discuss questions like these:
   * + Have you ever been accused of speaking against idols by non-Christians in your area?
     + Have these accusations been true – or do you avoid the topic of idol worship in order not to offend people?
     + Is it right for believers to avoid the topic of idol worship?
     + Do believers avoid speaking about idol worship, because they are afraid of opposition and trouble?

([Go to Answers 52](#Answers52))

### Study 53. Macedonia and Greece, 20:1–6

The passage

From Ephesus Paul travelled with a large group of companions through Macedonia and down to Corinth in Achaia and back again. They visited the churches that Paul had planted a few years earlier during his second missionary journey. Then they crossed the sea from Philippi (or rather from its seaport Neapolis) to Troas in Asia.

Comments

Paul departed to go to Macedonia … travelled through those parts ... and came to Greece (v 1–2): During New Testament times modern Greece was divided into two Roman provinces: Macedonia in the north (with Thessalonica as its capital) and Achaia in the south (with Corinth as its capital). In this passage Luke uses Greece for the Roman province of Achaia. Paul stayed there over winter (three months, v 3), while the weather was bad and ships could not sail regularly.

Sopater … Aristarchus and Secundus … Gaius … Timothy… Tychicus and Trophimus (v 4): Luke has carefully recorded the names of Paul’s traveling companions, probably because they were official delegates appointed by their respective churches to make the journey with Paul and to present the collection to the poor people in the Jerusalem church (see Rom 15:25–27). Luke was also travelling with Paul (v 5). Sopater is called Sosipater in Rom 16:21. Secundus is not mentioned anywhere else. Gaius (from Derbe) was probably not the same person as Gaius in 19:29 (who was from Macedonia). For Aristarchus see comment on 19:29. For Timothy see comment on 16:1. Tychicus, who came from Asia (perhaps a native of Ephesus), was a close friend and valued helper of Paul. He was with Paul during the first Roman imprisonment, when he carried the letters to the Ephesians (Eph 6:21) and the Colossians (Col 4:7-9). He was also with Paul during his second Roman imprisonment and sent by Paul from Rome to Ephesus (2 Tim 4:12). Paul had a very high opinion of him and called him “a dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord (Eph 6:21) and a beloved brother, a faithful servant and fellow servant in the Lord (Col 4:7). Trophimus was from Ephesus. He later became the innocent cause of the tumult resulting in Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem (21:29). He is also mentioned in 2 Tim 4:20, so he was connected with Paul over many years.

Troas (v 5): See comment on 16:8.

Philippi (v 6): See comment on 16:12. They must have sailed from Philippi’s seaport Neapolis, 15 km away.

the days of the Unleavened Bread (v 6): This feast began with Passover and lasted one week. Paul spent this period in Philippi. See also comment on 12:3.

Text questions

1. Find these places on the map Paul’s third missionary journey: Macedonia, Achaia, Syria and Troas. ([Go to the map](#Map6PaulsThirdMissionaryJourney))
2. What did Paul do as he travelled through Macedonia?
3. Why did Paul visit Macedonia two times during his journeys in this passage?
4. How did Luke travel to Troas?

Think and discuss

1. Paul had spent up to three years in Ephesus before he left. During these years he wrote some of his letters. Go through the reference article Acts and Paul’s Letters. Then answer this question: Which letters did Paul’s write from Ephesus? ([Go to this article](#ActsAndPaulsLetters))
2. Paul spent three months in Corinth (v 3). During that time he wrote one of his letters. Which one (if you don’t know, look it up in the reference article mentioned in the previous question).
3. In this passage Paul revisits Macedonia and Achaia, where he had spent most of his time a few years earlier during his second missionary journey:
   * Which places in Macedonia did Paul minister at during his second missionary journey?
   * Which places in Achaia did Paul minister at during his second missionary journey?
4. There is one person (not Luke!), who is not at all mentioned in Acts, but who played a very important role during Paul’s journeys in this passage.
   * + Can you figure out who that person is?
     + Have you given up? Then look up these passages: 2 Cor 7:5–7; 7:13–16; 8:1–7.

Sharing and application

Paul was careful not to handle large sums of church money on his own. This is evident from this story. He had a group of men representing different churches travel with him from Achaia and Macedonia and then all the way back via Asia to Jerusalem. This was not only for safety reasons. But the fact that so many churches were represented among his travel companions, shows that the money collected from the Gentile churches was handled with full transparency.

1. How is church money handled in your churches? Is there full transparency? Or does the pastor handle all the offerings himself – without any accountability to the believers?
2. What can we learn from Paul in this passage about how to handle church money?

Teach and preach

Tychicus is a man in the New Testament that is unknown to most Bible readers. But he was Paul’s close friend and co-worker over period of ten years. See comment on verse 4 above.

These are all the references to him in the New Testament:

* + - He is first mentioned in Acts 20:4, when he travelled from Ephesus with Paul and several other men through Macedonia and Greece and then on to Troas (probably in AD 56–57). As he was assisting Paul with the collection of money from the Gentile churches to the poor believers in Jerusalem, he must have travelled with Paul all the way back there.
    - The next reference to him is in connection with Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome (AD 60–62), when he became Paul’s “courier” carrying Paul’s letters to the Ephesians (Eph 6:21) and the Colossians (Col 4:7–9). He was travelling with Onesimus, who was returning to his master Philemon in Colosse (so he must also have carried the letter to Philemon).
    - Some time later Paul planned to send either him or Artemas to help Titus in the ministry on Crete (Tit 3:12).
    - The last reference to him is found in 2 Tim 4:12, where Paul writes to Timothy that he has sent Tychicus to Ephesus, probably to help him in the ministry there. That was during Paul’s second imprisonment in Rome only a short time before he was executed during the persecution under emperor Nero (probably in AD 66).

Prepare a Bible study for pastors and other church leaders called Tychicus – Paul’s Fellow-Servant. Here are some keywords that you can use for your study:

* + 1. Background: He was from Asia, probably from Ephesus: he probably got to know Paul during his long visit there (Acts 19), so he probably experienced the riot in Ephesus
    2. Faithful: He was with Paul over period of ten years, faithful to Paul even in times of imprisonment and persecution (Paul’s two imprisonments in Rome), Paul called him faithful (Col 4:7, Eph 6:21)
    3. Trustworthy: He assisted Paul in the collection and trans-portation of money from the Gentile churches to the poor in Jerusalem, carried Paul’s letters from Rome to Asia (Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon), Paul trusted him for the ministry in Crete (Tit 3:12) and Ephesus (1 Tim 4:12), Paul trusted him to carry all the news about Paul’s situation (Col 4:7)
    4. He was a true servant of the Lord: Paul calls him a faithful minister and fellow servant (Col 4:7), willing to serve where ever Paul sent him (with letters to Asia, in the ministry in Crete, in the ministry in Ephesus)
    5. He was willing to suffer hardships: probably experienced the riots in Ephesus, long and dangerous journeys with Paul over land and sea
    6. He had a pleasant personality: Paul calls him a dear brother (Eph 6:21, Col 4:7)

Then you should make applications to your own church situation and to servants of God in the South Indian context today. You can use the six points above.

([Go to Answers 53](#Answers53))

### Study 54. Troas, 20:7–12

The passage

Paul spent a whole week in Troas even though he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (v 16). Most probably he wanted to take part in a Sunday service and speak to the church before he moved on. Paul spoke so long that a young man called Eutychus got sleepy. He fell out of the window and was killed. But Paul raised him from the dead. Afterwards the service continued until daybreak.

Comments

On the first day of the week we gathered together to break bread (v 7): Sunday was the first day of the week. To break bread refers to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

Eutychus (v 9): His name is mentioned only here in the New Testament.

Text questions

1. Find Troas on the map Paul’s third missionary journey. ([Go to the map](#Map6PaulsThirdMissionaryJourney))
2. What time of the day did the church in Troas celebrate its Sunday service in this story?
3. How did Eutychus die?

Think and discuss

1. In this story, Luke writes that Eutychus was picked up dead (v 9), but Paul says that he was alive. How do you explain this contradiction?
2. Luke draws several parallels between Peter’s ministry and Paul’s ministry in the book of Acts. What about raising a person from the dead? Where and whom did Peter raise from the dead?
3. What can we learn from this story about a Sunday service during New Testament times?

Sharing and application

In Troas the church had its weekly worship service in the evening of a Sunday after the believers had finished their work for the day.

* 1. Do you think that in the South Indian context Sunday is only the day of the week that a church must gather for worship service? Or is any weekday just as good? Why – Why not?
  2. Does you church have its weekly worship service at any time of day, or do you follow the tradition that a service must on Sunday morning? Why?

([Go to Answers 54](#Answers54))

### Study 55. Paul and the Ephesian elders, 20:13–38

The passage

On his journey to Jerusalem, Paul made a stop at Miletus, where he met the elders from the Ephesian church. First Paul spoke to them about his own ministry in the past. Then he urged them to keep watch over themselves and to be faithful shepherds of the church over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers. Finally Paul committed them to God and to the word of his grace. After a time of prayer, the elders took farewell and accompanied Paul to his ship.

Comments

Miletus (v 15): Miletus was situated 50 km south of Ephesus. It would have taken a messenger three days to travel to Ephesus and bring the elders back to Miletus.

the elders of the church (v 17): Paul also calls the same group of people overseers and shepherds (or pastors) in verse 28. These words are in the plural, which makes it clear that the church in Ephesus had a team of pastors. It did not have a single pastor who had a one-man rule over the church. It also did not have a hierarchical leadership with one main leader and under him assistant leaders.

When they had come to him, he said to them (v 18): This is the only speech in Acts that is addressed to a group of believers. All the other speeches are gospel sermons (addressed to Jews or Gentiles) or defense speeches (before the Sanhedrin or before Jewish or Roman authorities).

none of you ... will ever see ny face again (v 25): This should not be understood as a message from God. It was what Paul expected would happen. Paul must have come back to Ephesus some years later – after his first imprisonment in Rome (see 1 Tim 1:3 and 2 Tim 4:20).

taken care of my own needs (v 34): Paul had not received any financial support from the church in Ephesus. As in Thessalonica (1 Thess 2:9) and Corinth (Acts 18:3), he had worked with his own hands as a tentmaker and supported himself.

to remember the words the Lord Jesus himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (v 35): This saying of Jesus is not found in any of the gospels, but it must have been familiar to the Ephesians.

Text questions

1. Follow Paul’s journey recorded in verses 13–15 on the map Paul’s third missionary journey. ([Go to the map](#Map6PaulsThirdMissionaryJourney))
2. Why did Paul decide not to visit Ephesus this time?
3. Who did Paul meet in Miletus?
4. What had the Holy Spirit warned Paul about in every city?
5. What was Paul’s attitude to money and clothes?

Think and discuss

1. What are the points in Paul’s testimony in verses 18–21, 24, 27 and 33–36?
2. What are the points in Paul’s address to the Ephesian pastors in verses 28–31?
3. As Paul was heading towards Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit had spoken to him (probably through prophecies) in city after city that prison and hardships would face him there (v 23). At the same time Paul felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem (v 22). How should we understand the Holy Spirit’s activity in Paul’s situation?

Sharing and application

1. Paul proceeded to Jerusalem in spite of repeated prophecies that he would experience prison and hardships there (v 23). Would you be willing to do the same thing in a similar situation? Why – why not?
2. In this passage Paul testifies to the Ephesian church leaders about his attitudes to his ministry.
   * In what areas are our church leaders in South India today “imitators of Paul” in their attitudes to their ministry?
   * In what areas do our church leaders in South India today fail to be “imitators of Paul” in their attitudes to their ministry? What can be the reasons for their failures?
3. In this passage Paul reminds the Ephesian church leaders about their tasks.
   * Which of these tasks are our church leaders in South India today good at?
   * Which of these tasks are our church leaders in South India today not good at? What can be the reasons for this?
   * Are there other important tasks for a pastor/overseer/elder (not mentioned by Paul in his speech), which our church leaders in South India are good at? Please explain!

Teach and preach

A. Prepare a Bible study based on 20:8–21 for gospel workers called Let’s Imitate Paul!. This could be your outline:

1. Introduction:
   1. Paul expected his readers to imitate him:
      * 1 Cor 4:16 – Therefore I urge you to imitate me
      * 1 Cor 11:1 – Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.
      * 1 Thess 1:6 – You became imitators of us and of the Lord
      * Phil 3:17 – Join with others in following my example, brothers
      * 2 Thess 3:7 – For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example
   2. Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesian elders:
      * Read Acts 20:17–21
      * This passage contains Paul’s testimony as the begins his farewell speech
      * Paul’s testimony highlights some key points about his ministry in Asia. These were examples to the elders from Ephesus!
2. The key points in Paul’s testimony:
   1. Paul was an example in the way he was living (v 18)
   2. Paul was an example in humble service; he was even serving with tears (v 19)
   3. Paul was an example in enduring persecution and threats from the Jews (v 19)
   4. Paul was an example in preaching God’s word:
      * He preached and taught things that were useful (v 20)
      * He preached and taught everywhere, both publicly and in the homes (v 20)
      * He proclaimed the gospel to everybody; both Jews and Greeks (v 21)
   5. Paul’s gospel message was an example. Two main points:
      * Turn to God in repentance: This concerns how you live!
      * Have faith in Lord Jesus: This concerns who you believe in!
3. Questions to us as gospel workers in South India today:
   1. Is the way we live our lives an example to believers and to church leaders?
   2. Is our ministry characterized by humble service?
   3. Can we face persecutions and threats in such a way that we are an example to other believers?
   4. Is the way we focus our preaching and teaching on useful topics an example to other preachers Do we base our messages on central and important Bible doctrines?
   5. Is the way we present the gospel to non-Christians an example to other evangelists?
      * Are people’s lives changed?
      * Do they understand the truths about Jesus:
        + God who became man
        + His death and resurrection
        + His ascension and his pouring out of the Holy Spirit
        + His second coming

B. Prepare a Bible study called Keep Watch! for pastors and other church leaders based on 20:28–32. Use information from the comments and questions above. This could be your outline:

1. Introduction:
   * The background: Paul’s earlier ministry in Ephesus for almost three years (v 18–24, 31–35)
   * The situation: Paul’s “farewell” speech in Miletus. He thought that he would never meet them again (v 25, 38).
2. Paul’s message to the Ephesian pastors:
   1. Keep watch over yourselves (v 28, 31)!

First, their calling: As pastor of the church they had been appointed by the Holy Spirit for his purposes, not their own. They were responsible to God for their calling! They must remember that the flock (the church) is God’s, not theirs (v 28)!

* + - * As leaders (v 28)
      * As proclaimers of the gospel, like Paul (v 21, 24)
      * As teachers of God’s word, like Paul (v 20, 27, 31)

Second, their doctrine: They knew the whole will of God (v 27). Paul had taught them that, and this knowledge carried responsibility. They must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it had been taught, so that they could encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who opposed it (Tit 1:9). They must not distort the truth (v 30). They must correctly handle the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15).

Third, their lifestyle: They knew how they must live their lives in humility, servanthood and simplicity – Paul had been their example (v 18–19, 34–35)!

Fourth, their goal: Like Paul they must focus on finishing their race and completing their task (v 24).

* 1. Keep watch over your flock (v 28)!

First, they were overseers:

* + - * They must live up to their responsibility as leaders!
      * They must be examples to the flock!

Second, they were shepherds/pastors of God’s flock: As such they had three duties:

* + - * To feed the sheep: That means to teach the believers the word of God in a complete and balanced way. The sheep/church must be well nourished!
      * To guide the sheep: That means to show the believers how their lives as Christians should be lived and to guide them through life’s difficulties and temptations.
      * To guard and protect the sheep: That means to protect the believers from false teachers and harmful doctrines.

“Wolves” (deceiving, false and selfish leaders) will come in from outside the church (v 29)!

“Wolves” (deceiving, false and selfish leaders) will come from within the church and split the church (v 30)!

1. Application:

Paul’s message to the Ephesian pastors can be applied to us as pastors in our churches in South India today!

([Go to Answers 55](#Answers55))

### Study 56. Journey to Jerusalem, 21:1–16

The passage

From Miletus Paul and his companions continued their journey by ship towards Jerusalem. On the way there they stopped in Tyre for a week and in Ptolemais for a day. In Caesarea they stayed several days in the house of Philip the evangelist. There the prophet Agabus prophesied that Paul would be imprisoned in Jerusalem. So everybody pleaded with Paul not to go there. But Paul answered that he was ready not only to be bound but also to die for the name of Jesus.

Comments

Phoenicia ... Syria ... Tyre (v 2–3): Tyre was the main city in Phoenicia, which in New Testament times belonged to the Roman province of Syria. Tyre was an important center of trade and industry.

Ptolemais (v 7): This was a seaport near Mount Carmel and situated 50 km south of Tyre and 55 km north of Caesarea.

Caesarea (v 8): The capital of Judea and Jerusalem’s seaport. See also comment on 8:40.

Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven (v 8): Luke last mentioned Philip in 8:40, when Philip had arrived in Caesarea about 20 years earlier. Perhaps it was now that Philip told Luke about the revival in Samaria and his experience with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8).

a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea (v 10): Luke mentions the same prophet in 11:28, where he predicted a severe famine. Politically Caesarea was the capital of the Roman province of Judea, but as a predominantly Gentile city many Jews did not feel that it was part of their land.

went up to Jerusalem (v 15): The distance between Caesarea and Jerusalem was over 100 km and the journey took two days by horse.

Mnason (v 16): He is only mentioned here in the New Testament. Like Barnabas, he was a Jew from Cyprus and a member of the early church in Jerusalem. He must have had a big house in Jerusalem in order to accommodate Paul and his companions (about nine persons) during the season of Pentecost.

Text questions

1. Follow Paul’s journey recorded in verses 1–8 on the map Paul’ third missionary journey. ([Go to the map](#Map6PaulsThirdMissionaryJourney))
2. How long did Paul and his companions stay in Tyre and what happened there?
3. Who accompanied Paul to Jerusalem?

Think and discuss

1. In the previous story (see 20:16), Paul did not take the time to visit Ephesus, as he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. But in this passage we read that Paul stayed seven days in Tyre and several days in Caesarea. So he didn’t seem to be in a hurry any longer. How can we explain this difference?
2. When we compare 20:22 and 21:4 there seems to be a contradiction in what the Holy Spirit tells Paul to do about going to Jerusalem. In 20:22 Paul testifies that he is compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. In 21:4 Luke writes that the believers in Tyre urged Paul through the Spirit not to go on to Jerusalem. How should we understand these conflicting messages of the Holy Spirit?

Sharing and application

1. One aspect of this passage is the Christian fellowship during New Testament times. Paul and his travel companions experienced this in Tyre (where they stayed for seven days), in Ptolemais (where they greeted the believers and stayed one night), in Caesarea (where they were accommodated in the house of Philip the evangelist for several days) and in Jerusalem (where they stayed with Mnason over the Pentecost holidays and were received warmly by the church).

Do you experience this kind of Christian fellowship and hospitality in South India today? How – or why not?

1. When Luke and the believers in Caesarea heard Agabus’ prophecy about what would happen to Paul in Jerusalem, they pleaded with him not to go there (v 12). This made Paul really upset and he told them, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (v 13).
   * Have you met believers like Paul – people who are willing to suffer and even die for the sake of the gospel? Share the stories about them in your group!
   * What about you?
2. Prophecy plays an important role in this passage (and also in the previous passage, 20:23). Philip the evangelist had four daughters who were prophets. The prophet Agabus followed the example of some Old Testament prophets of acting out their prophecies (for example Ahijah in 1 Kings 11:29–31, Isaiah in Is 20:3–4 and Ezekiel in Ezek 4:1–9).
   * What role does prophecy plays in your church? Give examples.
   * Have you experienced any “acting prophecies” like the one Agabus delivered in Caesarea in your church? If you have, please share in your group.
   * Do you think that there is a need for more prophecies in our South Indian churches today? Why – why not?

([Go to Answers 56](#Answers56))

### Study 57. Paul reaches Jerusalem, 21:17–26

The passage

On their arrival at Jerusalem, Paul and his travel companions were warmly welcomed by the church. James and the other leaders praised God for Paul’s ministry among the Gentiles. But James was concerned about the accusations that the Jewish Christians had against Paul and this teaching about Old Testament law and Jewish traditions. So he asked Paul to join four men in their purification rites and pay for the expenses. This would prove that there was not truth in the accusations. Paul agreed to do so.

Comments

James (v 18): He was the brother of Jesus and a leader of the Jerusalem church. See comments on 12:17 and 15:13.

We have four men who have taken a vow. Join these men in their rites of purification and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads (v 23–24): In New Testament times it was common for Jews (and Jewish-background believers) to take temporary Nazirite vows in accordance with Numbers 6. During the period of the vow they were not allowed to cut their hair. If they became ceremonially unclean during that period (for example by coming too close to a dead body), they had to undergo purification rites at the temple and have their hair shaved again. In verse 26 Paul goes with the four men and purifies himself with them (probably because he had become ceremonially unclean during his travels). He also sets the date for their purification sacrifices, which would cost a large sum of money for five persons. When Paul was arrested in the temple a few days later he was ceremonially clean (24:18).

But concerning the Gentiles who believe ... abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality (v 25): James was referring to the letter that was the result of the Jerusalem council. See comments and questions to 15:1–34.

Text questions

1. Who did Paul report to about his ministry among the Gentiles?
2. Why did the leaders of the Jerusalem church praise God?
3. What do we learn about the Jewish converts in Jerusalem in v 20?
4. What did Paul do in the temple?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think that the church in Jerusalem received Paul and his travel companions so gladly (v 17)?
2. What did the Jewish converts accuse Paul of? Do you think that there was any truth in their accusation?
3. Why did James ask Paul to join the four men in their purification rites?
4. Why do you think Paul agreed to do as James asked him?

Sharing and application

Paul agreed to do as James proposed. He purified himself together with the four men and he agreed to pay the cost for the purification sacrifices. He didn’t do it because it was something that he had to do. He did it in order not to hurt the feelings of the traditional Jewish Christians.

1. Can you think of any similar situations in a South Indian church context?
2. Would you in these situations be willing to do like Paul did in Jerusalem – to walk the extra mile in order not to hurt the feelings of your more traditional Christian brothers?

Teach and preach

This passage can be used for a Bible study about Christian doctrine and holding on to traditions – or about willingness to consider the “weaker brother.” It can be called James and Paul have the following outline:

1. Introduction: The great tension in the early church between Jewish background and Gentile background believers. James represented one side and Paul the other. Read the story in Acts 21:17–26.
2. The two representatives:
   1. James: A Jew from Palestine. A leader of the Jerusalem church. As such he was representing the Jewish Christians who were zealous for the law and who followed Jewish traditions (v 20)
   2. Paul: A Jew from the diaspora. The apostle to the Gentiles. As such he was representing the Gentile Christians who did not follow Jewish traditions.
3. What they agreed on:
   * + The way of salvation. Both James and Paul agreed that salvation is through Christ and not through the law.

So the issue was not about salvation but about discipleship and the requirements on a believer.

* + - Paul’s teaching to Gentile believers about circumcision. Both James (see the decision of the Jerusalem council which he himself referred to) and Paul agreed that circumcision was not necessary for Gentile converts.

But the issue was what Paul had taught the Jews who lived among the Gentiles, the diaspora Jews (v 21).

* + - The moral law of the Old Testament. Both James and Paul agreed that God’s people must live holy lives in accordance with God’s commandments.

But the issue was about Jewish customs and traditions. There were rumors about Paul that he was teaching the diaspora Jews that they should not hold on to circum-cision and other Jewish customs.

1. What James asked Paul to do? – He asked Paul to prove that he was not against Jewish customs by joining the four men in their purification rites and paying for their expenses (v 23–24).
   * + But James also reminded himself and Paul that there was no need to discuss which Jewish customs that the Gentile believers should follow, as that had already been decided earlier through the Jerusalem council (v 25).
     + And Paul did not comment on James’ reminder about the cultural expectations on the Gentiles. Also he never brings this matter up in his letters, it does not seem to have been of real importance to him that the Gentile believers kept these expectations.
2. Why did Paul agree to James’ request?
   * + He agreed to do as James asked in order not to hurt the feelings of the traditional Jewish Christians.
     + He didn’t do it because it was something that he had to do, because it was part of the Christian faith.
     + But he was willing to go the extra mile for the weaker brother (compare Rom 15:1 and 1 Cor 8:9).
3. What can we learn from this passage?
   * 1. We must distinguish between doctrines and traditions/culture:
        + The doctrine of salvation through Jesus all believers must agree on – irrespective of our cultural background and traditions.
        + God’s requirements that his people must live holy lives that reflect his own holiness is something all believers must agree on – irrespective of our cultural background and traditions.
        + Cultural expressions (such as food habits and dress habits) will differ between believers from different cultural backgrounds. Which cultural expressions that are acceptable and which cultural expressions that are unacceptable is something that believers often disagree about.
     2. We must be willing to “go the extra mile” so that we do not offend our “weaker brother”. We should not become a stumbling block to others (1 Cor 8:9).

([Go to Answers 57](#Answers57))

### Study 58. Paul is arrested, 21:27–36

The passage

When the seven days of purification were coming to an end, Paul went to the temple. Some Jews from Asia recognized him and stirred up a large crowd against him and accused him of blasphemy and desecration of the temple. As the crowd was trying to kill Paul, the Roman troops interfered and arrested Paul.

Comments

the seven days (v 27): These were the days required for purification (see the previous passage).

the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and his place (v 28): Compare the accusation that the Jews had against Stephen almost 25 years earlier (6:13–14), and against Jesus before that. To speak against the Jerusalem temple and the Law of Moses was a very serious offense. For the Jews nothing was more sacred or precious than their temple and their law. The temple was the holy place of God’s presence, and the law was the revelation of God’s mind and will. Consequently Paul, Stephen and Jesus were accused of blaspheming God himself.

brought Greeks into the temple (v 28): Gentiles were permitted to enter only the outer temple court, the Court of Gentiles. A 140 cm high stone wall separated this court from the Court of Israel. On this wall there were inscriptions in Greek that prohibited foreigners to enter or they would be put to death.

Trophimus (v 29): He was a Gentile believer from Ephesus. See also comment on 20:4.

commanding officer of the regiment (v 31): His name was Claudius Lysias (23:26) and he was in charge of the Roman regiment stationed in the Tower of Antonia at the northwest corner of the temple area.

soldiers and centurions (v 32): The commander must have brought at least 200 soldiers, as each centurion was in charge of 100 soldiers.

Text questions

1. Who were the people that stirred up the crowd and seized Paul at the temple?
2. Who arrested Paul, and why was he taken to the barracks?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think that Jews from Asia were in Jerusalem at this time?
2. What were the accusations against Paul?
3. Do you think that the accusations were true? Explain!

Sharing and application

In this story it is the Jews (the religious people) that accuse, beat and try to kill Paul. Their accusations are based on misunderstandings and lies. And it is the Roman commander (the government representative) who saves Paul’s life – even if he in the process has to arrest and chain him. The commander tries to find out the truth about Paul – but cannot get any clear answers from the religious crowd.

1. Does this remind you of the situation in India in recent years? Share you stories.
2. Or do you think that the situation in India is totally different and cannot be compared with Paul’s situation? Explain!

([Go to Answers 58](#Answers58))

### Study 59. Paul defends himself, 21:37–22:21

The passage

As he was taken into the barracks of the Roman regiment, Paul asked the commander for permission to speak to the crowd. In his speech Paul presented his family background, his religious training and his conversion experience on the road to Damascus. Then he described how the Lord had called him to go far away to the Gentiles.

Comments

the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt (v 38): The Jewish historian Josephus mentions an Egyptian false prophet and terrorist whose revolt a few years earlier had been crushed by the Romans. But the Egyptian himself had escaped. So the commander thought that Paul was this Egyptian.

Hebrew (v 40, 2): In New Testament times the Greek word in this text was used for both Hebrew and Aramaic. Paul probably spoke in Aramaic, as this was the commonly used language among Palestinian Jews.

Acts 22:1–16: On the steps leading up to the Tower of Antonia Paul gave his testimony to the Jewish crowd in the temple courtyard about his life, his conversion(v 1–16) and his call to be Jesus’ witness to the Gentiles (v 17–21). This is the second time that Luke documents Paul’s conversion experience in Acts. He will do it a third time as Paul speaks before king Agrippa in chapter 26. See also comment on 9:1–19.

Tarsus (v 39, 3): Tarsus was the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia and had in New Testament times a population of five hundred thousand. It was situated on a river 15 km from the Mediterranean Sea and 40 km south of the Taurus mountain range. The road from Tarsus to Syria passed through the Cilician Gates, the only major pass through the mountains. Tarsus was an important commercial center, but also a city of learning with a school of philosophy and a well-known university.

Gamaliel (v 3): He was the most honored Jewish rabbi in New Testament times. See also comment on 5:34).

but they did not understand the voice of him who spoke (v 9): Paul’s companions heard the sound (9:7), but they did not understand what was said.

Ananias (v 12): See comment on 9:10.

to see the Righteous One (v 14): This expression refers to Jesus. It was the resurrected Jesus who showed himself to Paul and made him an apostle to the Gentiles (see also v 21, 26:15–18 and 1 Cor 9:1).

Text questions

1. Why was the commander surprised, when Paul asked for permission to speak to the crowd?
2. Who did the commander think that Paul was?
3. How did Paul describe Ananias?
4. What did the Lord tell Paul in the temple?

Think and discuss

1. What information about his family background did Paul give to the Roman commander? And in his testimony before the crowd? What could be the reason for the differences?
2. When we give our personal testimonies, we usually adjust what we say (and how we say it) to our audience. In what way can we see that Paul adapted his testimony to the Jewish crowd in the temple courtyard?
3. When you compare the two stories in Acts about Paul’s first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion (see v 17–18 and 9:26–30), you will find that they are quite different. What are the main differences and how do you explain them?

Sharing and application

Paul’s vision in the temple soon after his conversion (v 17–21) is worth a closer study. Paul was in the temple praying. As he was praying, he fell into a trance and saw the Lord speak to him. Jesus told him to leave Jerusalem immediately, as the Jews there would not accept the gospel from Paul. But Paul argued with the Lord. Paul’s point was that he was the most suitable person to proclaim the gospel to the Jews in Jerusalem, because of his background as a persecutor. He had even been present at the stoning of Stephen. Then the Lord told Paul to go, and that he would send him far away to the Gentiles.

1. Paul had his vision while he was in prayer. It was then that Jesus revealed himself to him and gave him instructions about his future ministry. What about you? Does the Lord reveal himself to you and make his will known to you in a special way, when you spend time in prayer? Share your testimonies!
2. Paul argued with the Lord! He did not immediately accept Jesus’ message to him. Instead he made his objections clearly known to the Lord. What about you? Have you had arguments with the Lord, questioning his instructions to you? Share your testimonies!
3. Paul finally accepted Jesus’ instructions and left Jerusalem to carry the gospel far away to the Gentiles. He was obedient in the end – even if that obedience also led to hardships and persecution. What about you? Do you feel that you are in God’s will and perfect plan with your life? Have you been obedient to the Lord’s calling – in spite of problems and difficulties? Share you testimonies!

Teach and preach

Prepare a sermon based on Acts 22:6–16 called What Shall I Do, Lord? This can be your outline:

1. Brief introduction: Paul and his conversion on the road to Damascus
2. Paul’s question to Jesus: “What shall I do, Lord?”
3. Jesus’ two answers to Paul:
   1. Go to God’s people! They will help you! You need to be part of the church!
      * There you will receive healing from your blindness! There is physical healing in the church!
      * There you will receive spiritual sight! There you will be taught about God and his word! There you will learn how to live a life pleasing to God!
      * There you will receive your assignment! There you will understand God’s plan for the rest of your life!
   2. Get up! Don’t wait!
      * Call on Jesus’ name! Accept him as your personal savior!
      * Be baptized!
      * Join the church – your spiritual home!

([Go to Answers 59](#Answers59))

### Study 60. Paul a citizen of Rome, 22:22–29

The passage

Paul’s testimony was interrupted by the Jewish mob shouting that he should be killed. The Roman commander ordered his soldiers to take Paul into the barracks and have him flogged and questioned. As the flogging was being prepared, Paul disclosed that he was a Roman citizen. When the commander heard this, he was alarmed.

Comments

by flogging (v 24): In Philippi, Paul and Silas were flogged with rods (16:22–24). This time in Jerusalem, the commander planned to use a scourge (a whip made of leather straps with pieces of bone or metal attached). This was a fearful instrument of torture used to force confessions from slaves and foreigners. A man could easily die as he was scourged. A scourge (or any other degrading form of punishment, such as crucifixion) could not be used with a Roman citizen (see v 25).

citizenship (v 28): There were four ways to obtain Roman citizenship: 1. You could get it by right if you held an important office, 2. You could receive it as a reward for outstanding services to the Roman empire, 3. You could pay a substantial bribe to some corrupt official in the Roman administration (This is what the commander must have done – his name Lysias, see 23:26 and 24:22, reveals that he was Greek, and his extra name Claudius indicates that he obtained his citizenship under the administration of emperor Claudius), 4. You could, like Paul, be born into a family of Roman citizens. It is not known how Paul’s family had become Roman citizens.

Text questions

1. Why did the commander order Paul to be flogged and questioned?
2. What did the centurion do with the information that Paul was a Roman citizen?

Think and discuss

1. The Jewish crowd became furious when they heard Paul’s testimony, and they shouted, “Rid the earth of this man, for he is not fit to live!” What could have been the reason for their strong reaction?
2. Paul did not inform the commander right away that he was a Roman citizen. What could have been the reason for that?

Sharing and application

Paul escaped being flogged (a punishment that could have killed him or maimed him for life) by revealing to the centurion that he was a Roman citizen.

1. Was it right of Paul to use his “influence” in this way? Or should he have suffered silently for the Lord? What would you have done in Paul’s situation? Share!
2. Share you own experiences of using “influence” to escape from a tricky situation. For example by mentioning the name of a powerful person you know? Or by referring to your family background, your educational qualifications or your position in society?

([Go to Answers 60](#Answers60))

### Study 61. Paul and the Sanhedrin, 22:30–23:11

The passage

The following day the commander told the Jewish leaders, consisting of both Sadducees and Pharisees, to assemble and then he brought Paul before them. As Paul began to speak, the high priest got angry and told the bystanders to slap Paul in the face. Paul rebuked him, but was told not to insult the high priest. As Paul started to speak about the resurrection, a dispute broke out between the two Jewish groups. The situation became so violent that the commander had to rescue Paul and take him back to the barracks. During the night Paul had an encouraging vision of Jesus.

Comments

the council/the Sanhedrin (v 30): See comment on 5:21.

Ananias (v 2): Ananias, who was high priest AD 47–59, was known for his cruelty and corruption. At the time of the Jewish revolt some years later, Ananias was killed by his own people.

you whitewashed wall (v 3): This was an insult meaning “you hypocrite.”

I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest (v 5): Paul’s words can be interpreted in different ways. I think Paul used irony, meaning that a true high priest would not have ordered a man standing before the Sanhedrin to be struck on the mouth, thereby violating the law.

Sadducees ... Pharisees (v 6): The Sadducees denied the resurrection, angels and spirits. They were often worldly and politically minded. See also comments on 4:1 and 5:34. The Pharisees were a legalistic and separatistic group, who strictly kept the Law of Moses and the unwritten “tradition of the elders.”

Text questions

1. Why did the commander bring Paul before the chief priest and all the Sanhedrin?
2. What caused the Pharisees and the Sadducees to fight?
3. What did Jesus say to Paul in the vision the following night?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think Ananias was so upset about Paul’s words that he ordered the bystanders to strike Paul on the mouth?
2. Was it right of Paul to call himself a Pharisee (v 6), now that he had become a believer?
3. How do you think Paul felt, when the commander took him back to the barracks?

Sharing and application

In this story Paul plays on the differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees and causes a fight between them that brings the interrogation proceedings to an end. Luke seems to imply that Paul did this on purpose (v 6). As a result of the fight Paul is taken back into custody.

1. Do you think that this was a wise thing for Paul to do (considering the consequences)? Why – why not?
2. Do you think that this was proper thing for Paul as an apostle and a great church leader to do? Why – why not?
3. What about you (or your pastor or elders)? Have you ever been in a situation where you have said things on purpose that caused confusion within “the enemy camp”? Share your stories!
4. Is this a good thing for believers in South India to do? Is it too risky? Is it unethical (or unspiritual) to do something like this? Why – why not?

Teach and preach

Prepare a sermon based on Acts 23:11 called Words of Comfort. This can be your outline (don’t spend too much time on point 1, focus more on points 2–4!):

1. The background:
   1. Paul in Jerusalem, bringing a large love offering from the Gentile churches to the poor believers in the Jerusalem church and giving wonderful reports to the church leaders from his ministry among the Gentiles
   2. The Jewish believers angry with Paul, accusing him of leading Jewish diaspora believers away from the Law of Moses and Jewish traditions.
   * But Paul does his utmost to prove that he is faithful to Jewish customs by undergoing purification rites and offering to pay for four men’s sacrifice expenses
   1. The Jews angry with Paul,
      * Accusing him of defiling the temple by bringing Trophimus in there: But this accusation is totally false!
      * Accusing him of blasphemy against the Jewish people, the Law of Moses and the temple: But this accusation is based on misunder-standings!
   2. The Jewish mob trying to kill Paul – but he is twice saved by the Roman commander Claudius Lysias, even though he ends up in custody!
   3. The Jewish leaders (Sadducees and Pharisees) trying to tear Paul to pieces in the midst of their fight (23:10) – but he is again saved by the Roman commander
2. So now Paul is back in custody in the Tower of Antonia in the northwest corner of the temple complex. How does he feel?
   * Afraid for his life: Is there any hope for him to escape from Jerusalem alive?
   * Anxious about his future:
     + What about his ministry among the Gentiles?
     + What about his plans to preach the gospel in Rome (Rom 1:15)?
3. But Jesus comes to him in a vision at night (23:11)!
   * He speaks words of encouragement!
   * He reveals that Paul has a future ministry!
   * He reveals that Paul will preach the gospel in Rome!
4. So what about you?
   * What is your situation?
   * Jesus is there by your side speaking to you words of comfort!

([Go to Answers 61](#Answers61))

### Study 62. A plot against Paul’s life, 23:12–22

The passage

The next day a group of over 40 Jewish men took an oath to kill Paul. Their plot was approved by the chief priests and elders. But Paul’s nephew heard about it and came to the Roman barracks to warn Paul. The young man was taken to the commander, who listened to him attentively.

Comments

Paul’s sister’s son (v 16): This is the only passage in the New Testament, in which Paul’s sister and nephew are mentioned.

Text questions

1. Who were involved in the plot to kill Paul?
2. What was their plot?
3. When was the plot going to be carried out?

Think and discuss

1. How do you think Paul’s nephew heard about the plot?
2. Do you think that it was a good plot that could have been successful? Why – why not?
3. Why do you think the commander told Paul’s nephew not to tell anyone about his report?

Sharing and application

A young man, Paul’s nephew, plays a key role in this passage.

1. Discuss what he must have felt when he heard about the plot to kill Paul. Also discuss the problems he must have had in order to get access to Paul inside the Roman barracks. And how do you think he felt when he was taken to the Roman commander Claudius Lysias to tell him about the plot? And what were his thoughts and feelings afterwards, as he was waiting for news about what had happened to Paul – wondering if Paul had been killed or if he had survived?
2. Write, practise and perform a skit about the young man and his adventures in this dramatic story!

([Go to Answers 62](#Answers62))

### Study 63. Paul moved to Caesarea, 23:23–35

The passage

That same night the Roman commander sent Paul with two officers and a large military unit to Caesarea with a letter to the Roman governor Felix, explaining Paul’s case to him. The governor read the letter, took charge of Paul and kept him under guard in the palace.

Comments

Felix the governor (v 24): Felix was appointed governor of Judea by emperor Claudius in AD 52 as a favor to Felix’s brother who was the emperor’s favorite minister. The brothers were freed slaves, who became high officials in the Roman government. Felix was notorious for his cruelty and his immoral life. He began his career as governor by seducing Drusilla, the sister of king Agrippa II and wife of the king of a small nearby kingdom and marrying her. Because she was partly Jewish, Felix learned much about Jewish life and customs. See also comment on 24:22–27. For more information about the kings and governors of Palestine see the reference articles King Herod's family ([go to this article](#KingHerodsFamily)) and Palestine ([go to this article](#Palestine)).

He wrote a letter like this (v 25): This letter is written in the typical style of those days. It began with the name of the sender: Claudius Lysias was the Roman commander in Jerusalem. We don’t know if Luke was able to copy the letter while he was with Paul in Caesarea (it may also have been read out at Paul’s trial recorded in chapter 24) – or if the expression “a letter like this” means that we only have a summary of the original letter in our text.

Antipatris (v 31): This was a military post between Judea and Samaria. It was situated 50 km from Jerusalem and 40 km from Caesarea.

Caesarea (v 33): This was the headquarters for the governor over the Roman province of Judea. See also comment on 8:40.

Paul be kept under guard in Herod’s palace (v 35): The palace, built by king Herod the Great, was at this time used as the headquarters for the Roman administration in Judea and the residence of the governor. Paul was probably treated well during the two years he was a prisoner there, as he was a Roman citizen and had no criminal charges against him.

Text questions

1. How does Luke describe the military unit that took Paul away from Jerusalem during the night?
2. Look at Claudius Lysias’ letter again. How many times does he refer to himself in his letter?
3. What do you learn about Felix and his headquarters from the comments in section B above?

Think and discuss

1. Why do you think the Roman commander sent such a large military unit with Paul?
2. Compare Claudius Lysias’s letter to governor Felix (v 25–30) with the real events as recorded by Luke in 21:30–23:22. You will find that Claudius Lysias has made some adaptions.
   * What are his adaptions?
   * Why do you think he wrote the letter like this?

([Go to Answers 63](#Answers63))

### Study 64. Paul before Felix, 24:1–27

The passage

Five days later Paul was put on trial before governor Felix. By that time Ananias, the high priest, and some of the elders had arrived from Jerusalem with a lawyer called Tertullus to bring their charges against him. Tertullus finished by suggesting that Felix interrogate Paul to find that these charges were true. Instead Felix motioned to Paul to speak. Paul stated that the charges against him could not be proved, as they were false. But he acknowledged that he was a worshiper of the God of the Jews by following the Christian faith, that he believed in the Old Testament scriptures, and that he was looking forward to the resurrection. His conscience was clear before God and man. He was innocent, and it was up to the Jewish leaders to prove their charges. Felix decided to adjourn the proceedings and ordered that Paul be kept under guard. During the following two years, Felix often sent for Paul to listen to him speak about the Christian faith. Then Felix was replaced as governor by Porcius Festus.

Comments

Ananias (v 1): See comment on 23:2.

a lawyer called Tertullus (v 1): Tertullus is only mentioned in this passage, so we do not know anything else about him. His name is Latin, but he could have been a Greek-speaking Jew from the diaspora like Paul. The trial was probably conducted in Latin, but it is possible that the governor allowed the use of Greek in consideration to Ananias and the other Jewish leaders present. Tertullus was a professional orator (this is the word used in the Greek text) and his speech (of which Luke only records a brief summary) consists of the traditional three parts: a flattering opening, the statement of charges and supporting evidence (which in this case was very weak).

a plague … an agitator among all the Jews ... a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes ( v 5): To create trouble and to cause conflicts in the Roman empire was considered treason against the emperor. It was also against the law to be a leader of a religious sect that was not approved by the government. This is the only time that the expression “the sect of the Nazarenes” is used about the Christians in the New Testament.

Verse 7 is not found in the best Greek manuscripts and is not included in many translations.

the Way (v 14): Luke also uses this special expression about the Christian faith in 9:2 19:9, 19:23 and 24:22.

well informed about the Way (v 22): Felix had been the governor of Judea (which included Samaria) for six years. During this time he must have heard a lot about the church and the Christian faith.

Drusilla (v 24): For more about Drusilla see comment on 23:24.

Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus (v 27): Felix was recalled to Rome in AD 59 to answer for misrule and other problems during his time as governor of Judea. Festus, who succeeded him as governor, died in office in AD 62. Nothing is known about Festus before he came to Judea. But he was a much better person than his predecessor. He is described as an honest and able administrator. See also the reference article The Roman empire. ([Go to this article](#TheRomanEmpire))

Text questions

1. What accusations against Paul did Tertullus bring before governor Felix?
2. In his defense speech Paul mentioned the reasons for his visit to Jerusalem? Which were they?
3. What reason did Felix give for postponing his decision on Paul’s case?

Think and discuss

1. Analyze the structure of Paul’s defense speech!
2. What do you think were the reasons why Felix kept Paul in prison for two years?

Sharing and application

Have you faced a trial as a consequence of your faith or your ministry? What were the accusations? Where they true or false? How did you deal with them? How did the judge conduct himself (honorably? expecting bribes? with prejudice?)? Share you experiences.

Teach and preach

Prepare a Bible study called Paul before Felix based on Acts chapter 24. This could be your outline:

1. The background: What happened before this story (but be brief!)
2. The three parties (only short presentations!):
   * + The plaintiff (accusers): Ananias and the elders with their lawyer Tertullus
     + The defender: Paul
     + The judge: governor Felix
3. The case:
   * + Three charges against Paul (see answer to text question 1 above)
     + Paul’s defense (see answer to Think and discuss 1 above)
     + The judgment (see answers to questions text question 3 and Think and discuss 2 above). But Felix never passed a judgment in Paul’s case.
4. Our conclusions of the case:
   * + The plaintiff (accusers): False accusations
     + The judge: Afraid of making a decision, expecting bribes, afraid of displeasing the Jews – but kind to Paul (allowed him to speak, interested in the faith, gave Paul freedom in captivity)
     + The defender: Honest, brave, convincing in his arguments, innocently accused, clear conscience before God and man (v 16)
5. What can we learn from this story? – We should not be like the plaintiff or the judge – but to be like Paul!
   * + Be honest and convincing in our arguments – whether or not we are on trial for our faith!
     + Always strive to keep our conscience clear before God and man!
     + Always be ready to stand up for our faith – even before the highest religious or secular authorities!

([Go to Answers 64](#Answers64))

### Study 65. Paul before Festus, 25:1–12

The passage

As soon as Festus became governor over the province of Judea, he travelled to Jerusalem to meet the Jewish leaders there. They reminded him of the case against Paul and asked that he be tried in Jerusalem. Festus told them that he would reopen Paul’s case in Caesarea and that they could press charges against him there. The Jews presented many serious accusations against Paul, but they could not prove them. Paul claimed that he was innocent of all charges, religious as well as secular. Festus then suggested that Paul’s trial be moved to Jerusalem. This Paul refused. Instead he appealed to the emperor.

Comments

from Caesarea to Jerusalem (v 1): The distance was 100 km and the journey took two days.

chief priests and the Jewish leaders (v 2): Luke is referring to the members of the Sanhedrin.

Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against the emperor have I committed any offense (v 8): Here Paul again claims that he is innocent of the charges against him. He had not broken – or spoken against – the Jewish law. He had not defiled the temple. He had not caused rioting or propagated any illegal religion. This is the first time the emperor is mentioned in the case against Paul.

I appeal to the emperor! (v 11): As a Roman citizen Paul had the right to have his case heard before the Roman emperor. Nero, who was emperor in Rome at this time, ruled from AD 54 to 68.

Text questions

1. What request did the Sanhedrin present to Festus, and what was the reason for this request?
2. Where did the trial against Paul take place?
3. Why did Festus ask Paul if he would be willing to be tried in Jerusalem?

Think and discuss

1. What could be the reason for Festus to go to Jerusalem so soon after he became governor?
2. As soon as Festus reached Jerusalem the Jewish leaders presented their charges against Paul. What can we learn from this fact?
3. Why do you think that Paul refused to accept Festus’s suggestion that he be tried in Jerusalem?
4. What picture do we get of Festus from this story?

Sharing and application

In this story Paul faced a very tricky situation. The charges against him were very serious, even if they could not be proven. Paul was innocent of all the charges. But he also knew that his life would be in danger if his case – as requested by the Jewish leaders and suggested by governor Festus – was moved from Caesarea to Jerusalem. So he opted for the safest way out and appealed to the emperor in Rome – instead of risking a trial in Jerusalem or hoping for Festus to do the right thing and acquit him in Caesarea.

1. Do you think that Paul did the right thing? Give your reasons.
2. What would you have done if you had been in Paul’s situation? Give reasons for you decision.
3. Have you ever faced a situation similar to Paul’s? Please share. Did you take a risk (as Paul would have done if his case had been moved to Jerusalem)? Did you hope for the right thing to be done (as Paul would have done if he had insisted on governor Festus to acquit him)? Or did you opt for the safest way out (as Paul did when he appealed to the emperor)?

([Go to Answers 65](#Answers65))

### Study 66. Festus and king Agrippa, 25:13–22

The passage

King Agrippa and his sister (who probably also was his mistress) Bernice came to Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus, the new governor of the Roman province of Judea. During the visit, Festus discussed Paul’s case with Agrippa. Agrippa became curious about Paul and asked if he could meet him.

Comments

Agrippa the king (v 1): King Agrippa II was the son of king Herod Agrippa I (see 12:1–24, where he is called king Herod). Supported by his friends the Roman emperors Caligula and Claudius, Agrippa I became king over all Palestine. At his death in AD 44 his son (Agrippa II) was only 17 years old and the rule of Palestine was transferred to Roman governors. Some years later, Agrippa II gradually received kingship over parts of Galilee and other territories. He was a man of considerable influence, as emperor Claudius had put him in charge of the temple in Jerusalem and of the appointment of the high priests. For more information about the kings of Palestine see the reference article King Herod's Family. ([Go to this article](#KingHerodsFamily))

Bernice (v 13): She was older sister to Kking Agrippa II. Rumours claimed that she was living in incest with her brother.

to welcome Festus (v 1): King Agrippa followed the custom of those days when he paid a courtesy visit to the newly appointed governor. It was an advantage for both parties that they were on good terms.

Text questions

1. Why did king Agrippa and Bernice come to Caesarea?
2. How did Festus present Paul’s case to king Agrippa?
3. What was Agrippa’s reaction to Festus’ presentation of Paul’s case?

Think and discuss

1. The presentation of Paul’s case to king Agrippa differs considerably from Luke’s account in the previous passage (v 1–12). What are the main differences?
2. Why do you think Festus presented Paul’s case in this way?

Sharing and application

Discuss how Festus presented Paul’s case to Agrippa (see answers to text question 2 and Think and discuss 1 avobe).

1. Was it right for Festus to “edit” Paul’s case in the way he did? Why – why not?
2. What about yourselves? Do you sometimes present “edited” versions of the truth? What could be the reasons for doing so? Is it right for Christians to do so? Why – Why not?

([Go to Answers 66](#Answers66))

### Study 67. Paul before Agrippa, 25:23–26:32

The passage

The next day Paul was taken before king Agrippa, governor Festus and the Roman leaders of the city of Caesarea. After Festus’s introduction of Paul, Agrippa invited Paul to speak. He spoke about his religious background as a Pharisee and about his hope in God’s promises, a hope that had led to the Jewish charges against him. Then Paul gave an account of his conversion on the road to Damascus and of his call to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. He concluded his speech with the words: “I pray to God that – sooner or later – not only you king Agrippa but all who are listening to me today may become what I am (a believer in Christ) – except for these chains” (26:29). Agrippa and governor Festus agreed that Paul was innocent of the charges and could have been set free if he had not appealed to the emperor (26:32).

Comments

audience hall (25:23): This was an auditorium, which had been prepared for this pompous occasion. Present were king Agrippa, his sister Bernice, Festus the governor of the Roman province of Judea, the commanding officers of the Roman regiments in Caesarea, and important persons from the city. This hearing did not take place in a judgment hall, as the occasion was not a court trial.

commanding officers (v 23): The Romans had five regiments stationed at Caesarea. Their commanders must have been present on this occasion.

I have nothing specific to write (v 26): Festus had to send a report with Paul to Rome explaining his case and the charges he was facing (see also v 27). Festus hoped that Agrippa would help him with the material for this report.

especially before you, king Agrippa, so that after this examination (v 26): This was not an official trial of Paul’s case. It was a special hearing to satisfy Agrippa’s curiosity. At the same time Festus wanted to get Agrippa’s help for his report. Festus probably considered Agrippa an expert on Jewish matters: Agrippa belonged to the Herodian family who had earlier converted to Judaism. He had a palace in Jerusalem and the Roman emperor had put him in charge of temple matters and of the appointment of the high priests.

You have permission to speak for yourself (26:1): As guest of honor, and because Festus had given him charge of the hearing, it fell on Agrippa to invite Paul to speak. So Paul begins by motioning with his hand in order to get the attention of all the people present (v 1). In his speech Paul addresses Agrippa (v 2).

King Agrippa, I am priviledged to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, because you are an expert on all the customs and controversies of teh Jews (v 2–3): Paul followed the oratory style of his days when he opened his speech by complimenting king Agrippa. But Paul’s compliments were appropriate, as Agrippa was considered an expert on Jewish matters by the Roman authorities. This was not an official trial, so the word defense should be understood in a more general way.

my own countrymen (v 4): Paul was a native of Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia.

my hope (v 6). The hope of which Paul spoke was not only that of resurrection. This hope also included the coming of the Messiah and the kingdom of God, of which the resurrection of the dead was a part.

Why is it considered incredible tby any of you hat God raises the dead? (v 8): Paul turned to the whole audience with this question. The Romans did, of course, not believe in the resurrection. Agrippa was a Jew, but as he was allied to to Sadducees, he probably rejected both the resurrection of Jesus and resurrection in general.

I cast my vote against them (v 10): It is unlikely that Paul (because of his youth and of his non-aristocratic family background) was a member of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, who must have been the ones who actually voted against the Christians. Perhaps Paul was a member of a commission that carried out the persecution of Christians (compare v 12), and that was where he cast his vote.

I tried to make them blaspheme (v 11): By this expression Paul probably meant that he tried to force the Christians to curse the name of Jesus, to deny their Savior.

Verse 12–18: This is the third account of Paul’s conversion experience on the road to Damascus. The others are found in chapters 9 and 22.

in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul’ (v 14): The voice had spoken to Paul in Aramaic (see comment on 21:40), using the Hebrew/Aramaic form of his name.

to kick against the goads (v 14): The general sense of this Greek proverb was that it is foolish to struggle against one’s destiny. The ox that kicks against the goads only ends up hurting itself. So resistance is useless.

Text questions

1. How did Festus introduce Paul to the audience?
2. Who did Paul address in his speech?
3. On what authority did Paul travel to Damascus?
4. How is Paul’s commission described in v 17–18?
5. What did Paul mean by “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision” (v 19)?
6. Who interrupted Paul’s speech? Why did he interrupt Paul?
7. What was Agrippa’s conclusion about Paul being guilty to the charges against him?

Think and discuss

1. Why did Festus arrange a hearing of Paul’s case before king Agrippa, and what were the circumstances around this hearing?
2. Why did Paul motion with his hand before he began his speech?
3. How can Paul’s speech (v 2–23) be structured?
4. Why do you think Paul mentioned that he had lived for a long time as a Pharisee, after the strictest sect of the Jewish religion (v 5)?
5. Compare Paul’s testimonies in 22:3–16 and 26:2–23. Which are the three most important differences between them? What do you think are the reasons for these differences?
6. How do you understand Agrippa’s words to Paul, “Do you believe that you can so quickly convince me to become a Christian?” (v 28)?

Sharing and application

In this story we find Paul as a prisoner in chains standing before the highest authorities of the nation, making his defense against all the accusations of the Jews (v 2), who for two years have been trying to have him killed (if possible legally through the Roman authorities, otherwise illegally through murderous ambush).

1. Go through this story again together from the perspective of “Paul – an example to us”:
   * + How did he conduct himself?
     + How did he present his defense speech?
     + What did he speak about?
     + How did he present the gospel message – even to an immoral Jewish king and an ignorant Gentile governor?
     + What final impression did he convey to those who had listened to him?
2. How can we apply Paul’s example to our own situations?

Teach and preach

A. Prepare a Bible study based on Acts 26:16–20 called Jesus commissions Paul. This could be your outline:

1. Introduction:

* Paul’s defense before king Agrippa (briefly)
* Paul’s testimony about his conversion experience on the road to Damascus (briefly)

1. Jesus’ commissioning of Paul was based on three verbs:
   1. “I have appeared to you for this purpose: to appoint you as a servant and as a witness” (v 16):
      * Paul had a personal meeting with Jesus
      * Paul had a personal call by Jesus to be his servant and his witness
   2. “I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles” (v 17):
      * This did not mean that Paul would be protected from problems and suffering.
      * But it meant that Paul’s testimony would not be silenced until his God-appointed ministry was done.
      * Jesus would “rescue” Paul in the sense that nobody or nothing would be able to stop his preaching of the gospel.
   3. “I am sending you” (v 18):
      * Paul was sent to his own people the Jews
      * Paul was also sent to the Gentiles
2. Paul's task consisted of
   * + Opening their eyes (v 18).
     + Turning them from darkness to light (v 18).
     + Turning them from the power of Satan to God – and as a result they would receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified in Christ (v 18).
3. Paul was not disobedient to the vision from heaven (v 19):
   * + He had preached (v 20):
       - To the Jews in Damascus, in Jerusalem, in Judea, throughout the Roman empire.
       - To the Gentiles all over the Roman empire
     + His message had been clear (v 20):
       - They must repent and turn away from their old life
       - They must turn to God
       - Their deeds must show their repentance and their new life with God
4. What about you?
   * + Has Jesus appeared to you – and called you to serve him?
     + Has Jesus rescued you – been with you and protected your preaching of the gospel?
     + Have you been obedient to your call to serve Jesus?
     + Has your message been clear so that people’s lives have been transformed?

B. Prepare a sermon based on Acts 26:22–23, 27 called King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? This could be your outline:

1. Introduction: Paul’s defense before king Agrippa
2. Paul had said nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen (v 23).
   1. The Old Testament had predicted three New Testament events (v 23):
      * Christ would suffer.
      * Christ would be the first to rise from the dead.
      * Christ would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.
   2. Christ was Isaiah’s “suffering servant” of the Lord, who would
      * Suffer and die for our sins (Is 53:4–9)
      * Be raised and highly exalted (Is 52:13; 53:12)
      * Become a light to the Gentiles (Is 42:6; 49:6)
   3. The gospel is centered on three things that Christ did:
      * Atonement through his death on the cross
      * His resurrection from the dead
      * Proclamation (through his witnesses on whom he has poured out his Holy Spirit) of his saving power to the nations
3. King Agrippa’s answer to Paul’s question:
   * + He did not answer it at all. Instead he countered Paul’s question with a question of his own (v 28).
     + He did not accept the gospel. From historical sources we know that Agrippa never became a Christian.
4. Your answer to Paul’s question: Do you believe in the prophetic message of the Old Testament?
   * + Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? Have you experienced peace with God?
     + Do you believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus? Do you understand the centrality of Jesus’ resurrection for our Christian faith and our Christian life (see for example 1 Cor 15:1–2, 12–24).
     + Are you part of God’s great salvation plan? Has the Holy Spirit been poured out upon you, so that you can proclaim Jesus’ saving power to the nations?

([Go to Answers 67](#Answers67))

### Study 68. Paul sails for Rome, 27:1–12

The passage

Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to Julius, a Roman centurion who was to take them to Rome. Luke and Aristarchus, a believer from Thessalonica, joined them. They sailed from Caesarea to Sidon and on to Myra in Lycia, where they boarded a ship bound for Rome. But they had problems with unfavorable winds, which delayed their journey. Finally they came to a place on the south coast of the island of Crete called Fair Havens. Now they had to decide if they should stay there over winter or try sail to Phoenix, which had a more suitable harbor.

Comments

we would sail (v 1): This is the beginning of the last of the four “we” narratives in Acts. Luke probably spent the two years of Paul’s imprisonment in Caesarea visiting people in Palestine collecting material for his two books (the gospel and Acts). Now he joins those ready to sail.

a centurion named Julius (v 1): This Roman centurion is only mentioned in this narrative. He was in charge of transporting the prisoners to Rome. A group of soldiers assisted him (see v 31, 32, 42).

a ship of Adramyttium (v 2): This was a port south of Troas on the west coast of the the province of Asia. At one of the stops that the ship made along the coast of Asia, Julius would plan transfer his group of prisoners to a ship sailing for Rome.

Aristarchus (v 2): See comment on 19:29.

Sidon (v 3): Sidon was situated 110 km north of Caesarea. See also comment on 12:20.

Myra, a city in Lycia (5): Under the Romans, Myra became the capital of the province of Lycia. It was an important trading center and a city where grain was stored. The journey from Sidon to Myra took 10–15 days. Julius decided to change ships here and get a ship headed directly to Rome.

ship of Alexandria (v 6): This was ship from Alexandria in Egypt carrying grain (see v 38) bound for Rome.

Cnidus (v 7): This was the most westerly point of Asia. It was situated 270 km from Myra and journey took 10–15 days.

Crete (v 7): A 260 km long island. Sailing south of it would give protection from the winds.

by now the Fast has already passed (v 9): This refers to the Jewish Day of Atonement, which in AD 59 (when this narrative probably took place) fell on October 5. The Romans considered sailing after the middle of September risky and by the beginning of October very dangerous.

Phoenix (v 12): A major city with a harbor protected against the winter storms.

Text questions

1. Find the following places on the map Paul’s journey to Rome: Caesarea, Sidon, Cyprus, Pamphylia, Myra, Lycia, Cnidus, and Crete.
2. Who was in charge of taking Paul and the other prisoners to Rome?
3. What was Paul allowed to do when they reached Sidon?
4. In which port did the travelers change to another ship?

Think and discuss

1. In verse 9 Luke writes that sailing had already become dangerous. Why?
2. The centurion Julius was in charge of the travel party with the prisoners on the journey to Rome. When they came to Fair Havens in Crete, he had to make a decision, either to stay there over winter or continue with the ship to a safer harbor in Crete. Paul advised them to stay. The pilot and the owner of the ship wanted to sail on. Why do you think Julius followed the advice of the pilot and the owner of the ship instead of Paul’s advice?

Sharing and application

Julius was in a very tricky situation and did not know whether to stay in Fair Havens or continue with the ship to a safer harbor. Paul gave him one advice. The ship’s pilot and owner were of a different opinion.

Sometimes we as church leaders are in situations where we have to make very important decisions and need the advice of others. But some people advise us to do like this. Other people advise us to do like that. How do we know who we should to listen to? Share your experiences! How can we make the right decisions?

([Go to Answers 68](#Answers68))

### Study 69. The storm, 27:13–26

The passage

So it was decided that the ship should sail on to Phoenix and that the crew and the soldiers with their prisoners would stay over winter there. But soon the ship ran into a terrible storm, which lasted for many days. Finally they gave up all hope of being saved. Then Paul spoke to them words of encouragement. An angel had revealed to him that they would all be saved.

Comments

Verses 14–15: This was a common experience for ships travelling in the waters south of Crete during the winter months. Ancient ships were unable to head into heavy seas or even to sail close to the wind, as modern sailing ships can. With this storm sweeping down upon them from the mountains of Crete, they had no option but to run before it, and so they were driven southward.

Cauda (v 16): This small island was situated 37 km from Crete. There they could get enough shelter to prepare themselves for the storm.

to secure the ship’s boat (v 16): A small boat was towed behind the ship. It had to be taken aboard, or else it would have been damaged. It would also have interfered with the handling of the ship in the storm.

passed ropes to help reinforce the ship (v 17): This was to keep the ship together so that it wouldn’t be broken apart by the storm.

the Syrtis sand (v 17): Dangerous sandbars ran along the north coast of Africa. They were still 600 km away, but a ship could be driven very far by a storm like this.

sea anchor (v 17): The Greek word means “object, thing”. It is sometimes trans-lated “sail”.

throw the cargo overboard (v 18): They did this to make the ship lighter. But they kept some bags of grain (see v 38).

they threw out the ship’s tackle (v 19): They probably threw overboard anything movable lying on the decks.

Text questions

1. What happened when they came to the small island of Cauda?
2. How could Paul be certain that all the people on the ship would be saved?

Think and discuss

1. What would be the navigational implication of the information that Luke gives in verse 20 (“neither sun nor stars shone on us for many days and no small storm continued raging”)?
2. There seems to be a discrepancy between what Paul said in 27:10 and what the angel told to Paul in 27:24. Point out the discrepancy. How would you explain the difference?

Sharing and application

Luke includes a very human trait in Paul’s behaviour in this passage. When the storm had raged for many days, Paul stood up and said: “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete” (v 21). Paul was, of course, an apostle and a great man of God. But he was not free from human weaknesses. He could not stop himself from reminding the others: “Remember what I told you! Now you see that I was right!”

Even today we will find this mixture of greatness and human weakness in the personalities of Christian leaders:

1. Do you have any examples? Please share!
2. When we come across Christian leaders with evident human weaknesses, we may feel disappointed or betrayed. Have you ever experienced this? Please share!
3. What would be your advice to fellow believers, who experience this kind of disappointment or betrayal?
4. How can we use spiritual wisdom to help fellow Christian leaders to overcome their human weaknesses? It could be weaknesses related to pride, overconfidence, self-centeredness, arrogance, power play, laziness, gluttony, love of money and possessions, luxurious lifestyle etc.

([Go to Answers 69](#Answers69))

### Study 70. The shipwreck, 27:27–44

The passage

The storm drove the ship with its 276 persons (sailors, soldiers and prisoners) across the sea for many days. One night at midnight the sailors realised that they were getting close to land, so they started measuring the depth of the sea. Then the sailors planned to escape from the ship and leave the others on board. But Paul told the centurion to make sure everybody stayed on the ship or else they would die. At dawn they prepared the ship in order to run it aground, but it got stuck on a sandbar and started to break up. So the people left the ship and they all reached land safely.

Comments

the Adriatic Sea (v 27): This is the part of the Mediterranean Sea that lies between Italy, Crete and Greece.

Altogether we were two hundred seventy-six persons on board (v 37): Perhaps the people on board were counted in connection with the distribution of the food. We may be surprised that the ship could carry so many people, but some of the Alexandrian grain ships were very large. The Jewish historian Josephus was also shipwrecked in the Adriatic Sea, and there were about 600 people on board his ship. Most of them died.

Casting off the anchors ... untying the rudder ropes ... hoisting up the foresail (v 40): The sailors hoped to ground the ship on the beach in order to save the people, even if the ship would be destroyed. So they let go the anchors in the stern and untied the ropes that held the rudders (two large steering oars, one on each side of the ship). These rudders had been lifted from the water and tied up while the ship was anchored. At the same time, one of the sails, which had been rolled up overnight, was raised to make it possible to steer the ship. And so they headed for the beach.

The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners (v 42): If a prisoner escaped, the soldier who was in charge of him was killed. So the soldiers did not want to take any risk with the prisoners escaping.

Text questions

1. Find The Adriatic Sea on the map Paul’s journey to Rome. ([Go to this map](#Map7PaulsJourneyToRome))
2. How many days did the storm last?
3. Why did the sailors lower the ship’s boat into the sea?
4. What did Paul do with the bread before he ate it?
5. Why did they throw the grain into the sea?
6. How were all the people on the ship saved?

Think and discuss

1. Why did the soldiers cut the rope that held the lifeboat and let it drift away?
2. Why did the centurion tell the soldiers not to kill the prisoners?

Sharing and application

In this story a large group of people face a life-threatening situation on board a ship in the middle of a severe storm. But Paul keeps his cool and becomes a role model for other Christians in four ways (v 33–36):

* + - He ate food so that he would be nourished and get his strength back before facing the danger of reaching the shore. He showed common sense.
    - He gave thanks to God for the bread that he was about to eat. He gave honor to God for God’s provision.
    - He did this in front of all the people on the ship, almost all of them Gentiles and idol worshipers. He was not ashamed of his Christian faith.
    - He encouraged his fellow travelers and he urged them to eat so that they would regain some strength. He showed concern for the other people on board the ship.

1. Do you know of believers in South India who – like Paul in this story – have been good role models for other believers in life-threatening situations? Please share!
2. What can you yourself learn from Paul’s example in this story? Please share!

Teach and preach

Prepare a Bible study based on the two stories in Acts 27:13–44 (The Storm and The Shipwreck) called Paul – A great leader. You can use the following outline:

1. Introduction:
   * Paul and the other 275 persons on board a sailing ship in the middle of a terrible storm
   * Paul a prisoner respected by all, even the centurion Julius
   * Paul a Christian among Gentiles and idol worshipers
2. Paul’s background:
   * He was a matured man (probably around 55 years of age) with a lot of life experience
   * He had travelled a lot (2 Cor 11:23–27). Much of his travelling had been on ships (Luke records 11 sea journeys before the voyage to Rome)
   * He had been a Christian leader for about 25 years (pastoring churches, planting churches, proclaimed the gospel in all kinds of situations, led missionary teams in many different countries)
3. Paul demonstrates his leadership qualities in these two stories:
   1. Paul encouraging his fellow travelers (27:21–26):
      * Their lives would be saved, only the ship would be destroyed (v 22)
      * God would make sure that his promise through the angel would be fulfilled (v 25)
      * Paul knew from his experience that God could be trusted
   2. Paul telling his fellow travelers to stay together (27:27–32):
      * Paul’s experience and wisdom made him realize that the sailors were trying to escape (v 30).
      * Paul’s experience and wisdom made him realize that they all had a bigger chance of surviving if they stayed together.
      * Paul’s trust in God’s promise that they would all be saved convinced him that if they didn’t stay together lives would be lost.
   3. Paul urging his fellow travelers to eat (27:33–38):
      * They had not eaten for fourteen days: perhaps they were too afraid, perhaps they were seasick, perhaps they had not been able to prepare any food in the storm. In any case: they were weak and starving
      * Paul’s experience and wisdom made him realize that they would not be able to face the challenges of the day unless they ate and regained some strength.
      * Paul showed his leadership qualities by leading the way: first he ate, then he encouraged the others to eat. They followed his example.
   4. Paul showing his spiritual qualities (even as a prisoner on board a ship in the middle of a storm):
      * Paul was in close touch with God: an angel appeared to him in the night (v 23).
      * Paul was a servant of God, to whom God showed his favor: God gave Paul the life of all those on board the ship (v 24).
      * Paul gave thanks to God for the bread (v 35).
      * Paul wasn’t ashamed of expressing his Christian faith in front of all the Gentiles on board the ship (v 35).
4. What about us?
   1. Do we as Christian leaders make use of our life experience, like Paul did?
   2. Do we as Christian leaders show common sense and wisdom in even difficult situations, like Paul did?
   3. Do we as Christian leaders show concern for our fellow men, like Paul did?
   4. Do we as Christian leaders lead the way for our fellow men in difficult situations, like Paul did? Are we examples to others? Do people follow our example?
   5. Do we as Christian leaders walk in close fellowship with God even in difficult situations, like Paul did?
   6. Do we as Christian leaders express our Christian faith in front of unbelievers even in difficult situations, like Paul did?

([Go to Answers 70](#Answers70))

### Study 71. On the island of Malta, 28:1–10

The passage

Those who had been shipwrecked found out that they had come to the island of Malta. There they were received well by the local people, who built a fire to welcome them. Then they were taken to an estate belonging to Publius, the most important person on the island, who entertained them well for three days. Paul healed Publius's father by praying for him and placing his hands on him. Then the islanders brought all their sick to Paul to be healed. The islanders honored the visitors and provided for all their needs.

Comments

Malta (v 1): They had been shipwrecked on the island of Malta, about 800 km from Fair Havens where they had been caught in the storm. Malta (30 km long and 13 km wide) belonged to the Roman province of Sicily. Sicily is a much larger island about 100 km to the north of Malta. On the northeastern coast of Malta there are many inlets and bays. One of them is called Saint Paul’s Bay today, and this is probably where they landed.

The natives (v 2): The Greek text has a word that means “un-civilized people, foreigners, natives”. Luke uses this word to indicate that the people of Malta did not have Greek as their mother tongue. Many centuries earlier Malta had been colonized by Phoenicians, a Semitic people originally from ancient Canaan, who had expanded to and colonized large parts of North Africa.

rain and cold (v 2): This was probably at the end of October or the beginning of November, and winter was approaching.

a viper (v 3): The islanders must have known that this was a poisonous snake. There is an ancient Greek poem that tells of a murderer who escaped from a storm at sea and was shipwrecked on the North African coast, only to be killed by a viper. With stories like this going around, it is easy to understand why the islanders reacted the way they did. They could see that Paul was a prisoner, and they supposed from the incident itself that he was a murderer, for one death requires another.

Publius, a leading man of the island (v 7): Publius is a Roman name. He was probably the highest official on the island and must have had a large estate with many slaves to be able to entertain so many people hospitably during three days.

Text questions

1. Find Malta and Sicily on the map Paul’s journey to Rome. ([Go to the map](#Map7PaulsJourneyToRome))
2. Why did the islanders think that Paul was a murderer?
3. Why did the islanders later change their mind and say that Paul was a god?
4. What was wrong with Publius’ father?

Think and discuss

1. How do you understand the story about Paul and the snake? Was it a miracle or not? Give your reasons.
2. What do we learn about Publius in this story?
3. How did the islanders treat the shipwrecked visitors after Paul had healed the rest of the sick on the island?

Sharing and application

The story about Paul and the poisonous snake is very fascinating – and perhaps you have heard pastors preach about it. But I think that the fact that Paul was gathering firewood and throwing it into the fire as the snake fastened itself on his hand can teach us an even more important lesson – the model behaviour of a true servant of God.

Picture a similar situation in India! A world-famous Indian evangelist and his co-workers are travelling by ship from Malaysia to Chennai, when suddenly the ship is caught in a cyclone in the Bay of Bengal. The ship is wrecked. The evangelist and his co-workers are thrown up on the Andhra coast. It is rainy, cold and windy. So they decide to gather some wood and make a fire. Do you think that the world-famous Indian evangelist will help with this? Or will he just sit on a stone and wait for his co-workers to get the fire ready for him? Share what you think!

In my experience big pastors in India very seldom behave like Paul did in this story. They expect their co-workers to wait on them. They expect servants and others to do all the manual work for for them. Do you agree? If you agree – why do you think “servants of God” in India are like this? And what can an Indian “servant of God” learn from Paul’s example in this story?

([Go to Answers 71](#Answers71))

### Study 72. Paul arrives in Rome, 28:11–16

The passage

Three months later it was possible for the soldiers with their prisoners to leave Malta and continue their journey to Rome. The first two parts of the journey was by a ship from Alexandria, which had wintered on Malta. The last 120 km (from Puteoli to Rome) went overland. Along the way groups of believers from Rome came to meet them, which made Paul very happy. In Rome, Paul was allowed to live in his own accommodation guarded by a soldier.

Comments

After three months (v 11): The winter season when the seas were closed to navigation ended in the middle of February. So probably the travelers’ three-month stay on Malta ended about that time.

a ship of Alexandria with the figurehead of the twin gods (v 11): The ship in which they resumed their journey was another Alexandrian vessel. It was very likely a grain ship, as Egypt was Rome’s main supplier of food grain. Perhaps it had been driven to Malta by the same storm that had brought Paul and his fellow travelers there. Its figurehead was the twin gods. This expression probably refers to the Egyptian custom to ornament each side of the prow of their ships with figures of deities. In this case, it was with the twin sons of Zeus, Castor and Pollux, who were the patron gods of navigators in the ancient world.

Syracuse (v 12): This was a large coastal city at the southeastern corner of the island of Sicily. Under the Romans it served as capital of the eastern half of Sicily. The distance from Malta to Syracuse was 150 km.

Rhegium (v 13): This was a town on the extreme southwestern tip of the Italian peninsula. Rhegium was separated from the island of Sicily by the Straits of Messina, and it was a stopping place for ships travelling from the west coast of Italy to the eastern Mediterranean. Ships would wait in its harbor for favorable winds from the south, which were needed to navigate the difficult and dangerous straits.

Puteoli (v 13): The distance from Rhegium to Puteoli was about 300 km. They must have had very favorable wind to cover it in two days. Puteoli was the most important harbor in Italy and it was Rome’s main port, in spite of the fact that it was situated 120 km southeast of the city. Both Jews and Christians lived there. That the travelers spent a week in Puteoli is best explained by the centurion Julius having to report his arrival and receive his orders from his superiors in Rome.

the brothers (v 15): The Christians in Rome seems to have sent one group to meet Paul at the Forum of Appius and another group to meet him at the Three Taverns.

Forum of Appius (v 15): This was a small town situated 70 km from Rome, a distance which could be covered in one day.

Three Taverns (v 15): A town 53 km from Rome.

Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him (v 16): Later Luke writes that Paul stayed in his own rented house (v 30). Paul had not committed any obvious crime and was not a threat to the political situation in Rome. So he was allowed to live by himself in a rented house. But a guard was probably chained to him the whole time (compare v 20, Phil 1:13–17).

Text questions

1. Find these place names on the map Paul’s journey to Rome: Malta, Syracuse, Rhegium, Puteoli, Forum of Appius, Three Taverns and Rome. ([Go to the map](#Map7PaulsJourneyToRome))
2. Which of the places mentioned above were situated on the island of Sicily, and which of them on the Italian peninsula?
3. What did Paul do in Puteoli?
4. What was the total distance that Paul had to travel from Malta to Rome?

Think and discuss

1. Why did Paul and his fellow travelers have to spend three months on Malta?
2. How do you think the Christians in Rome found out that Paul was on his way so that they could send groups of believers to meet him on the way?

([Go to Answers 72](#Answers72))

### Study 73. Paul preaches in Rome, 28:17–31

The passage

Very soon after he had arrived in Rome, Paul called together the leaders of the Jews to explain his situation to them. They received his words well and were interested in hearing more about the “Christian sect.” During a whole day Paul proclaimed the gospel to all the Jews who had gathered in his house. Some believed, others did not believe. Paul remained imprisoned in Rome for two whole years. He had his own rented house and he preached the gospel to all those who came to see him with all boldness and without hinderance (v 31). On this positive note Luke ends the sixth unit of his story about the glorious expansion of the gospel – and the whole book of Acts.

Comments

the leaders of the Jews (v 17): emperor Claudius deported all Jews from Rome in AD 49, but later he allowed them to return (see also comment to 18:2).

the hope of Israel (v 20): This was the Jewish hope for the coming of the Messiah (se also comment to 26:6).

from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets (v 23): This expression means “from the Old Testament scriptures.”

to the Gentiles (v 28): Earlier in Acts, Luke has recorded how Paul three times turned to the Gentiles after the Jews had refused to listen to the gospel: in Pisidian Antioch (13:46), in Corinth (18:6) and in Ephesus (19:8–9). Now, in the capital city of the world, the same thing happens for the fourth time.

Verse 29 is not found in the best Greek manuscripts.

in his own rented house (v 30): So Paul must have had the financial resources to pay the rent for his own accommodation during his imprisonment. Most probably he worked (at least part-time) with his usual tent making business. According to a Roman writer, prisoners awaiting trial were allowed to work and to live in hired lodgings. So Paul’s condition can be described as house arrest. He was bound to a soldier by a light chain (see v 20), so he could not leave the house as he pleased. But otherwise he must have been allowed quite a bit of freedom. Paul also received gifts from churches (see Phil 4:18), and he may have had some personal resources to pay for his expenses.

two whole years (v 30): During these two years of imprisonment, Paul wrote four of his letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Then he was released and could continue his ministry a few more years. During those years (sometimes called “Paul’s forth missionary journey”) he wrote First Timothy and Titus. Paul was again imprisoned in Rome during the persecutions under emperor Nero and was martyred, perhaps in AD 66. He must have written Second Timothy just before he was executed.

Text questions

1. Why was Paul compelled to appeal to the emperor?
2. What was Paul’s personal situation, when he received the leaders of the Jews?
3. How did the Jews react to Paul’s presentation of the gospel?
4. What did Paul tell the Jews about the Gentiles?
5. To whom did Paul present the gospel during his two-year imprisonment in Rome?

Think and discuss

1. How would you structure this passage?
2. In verse 20 Paul says “For this reason.” So what was Paul’s reason for calling the leaders of the Jews?
3. What do you think Paul did during his two-year imprisonment in Rome?

Sharing and application

When we read Paul’s “prison letters” (the four letters he wrote during his two-year imprisonment in Rome), we feel the atmosphere of joy and peace. And we sense Paul’s feeling of happiness and satisfaction. We also marvel at the focus of his prayers and thoughts: His focus is not on himself, his imprisonment and his sufferings. No, it is on God, on the person and work of Jesus, and on the life and ministry of the churches.

1. What about us (and our South Indian Christian leaders) when placed in situations similar to that of Paul’s in Rome? What is the atmosphere around us? Are we upset, nervous, afraid, confused, troubled? Or are we like Paul? What do our thoughts and prayers focus on? Do they focus on us and on our own difficult situation? Or are we like Paul? Please share and discuss!
2. What can we learn from Paul’s example? How can we become more like Paul? Please share and discuss!

Teach and preach

A. Prepare a Bible study called Paul sharing the gospel in Rome based on Acts 28:17–31. You can use this outline:

1. Introduction: Paul’s imprisonment in Rome
2. Paul explained about the “Christian sect” to the Jews in Rome (v 22–24):
   1. The Jews came to Paul’s “prison home” and spent a whole day with him. What did Paul do?
      * He explained and declared to them the kingdom of God (v 23).
      * He tried to convince them about Jesus (v 23), the hope of Israel (v 20)
   2. What was the result?
      * Some were convinced (v 24).
      * Others would not believe (v 24).
   3. What did Paul do?
      * He turned to the Gentiles (v 28).
3. Paul welcomed all (Jews and Gentiles) who came to visit him in his “prison home” during his two-year imprisonment in Rome (v 30–31).
   1. What did Paul speak about?
      * He preached the kingdom of God (v 31). The same as he did to the Jews!
      * He taught about the Lord Jesus Christ (v 31). The same as he did to the Jews!
   2. What was the result? They listened (28):
      * Some probably understood and accepted the message and became part of God’s kingdom.
      * Others probably did not understand and did not accept the message. They turned their back on God and the gospel, and they didn’t become part of God’s kingdom.
4. We should follow Paul’s example:
   1. Explain, declare and preach the Kingdom of God! (Note: To go through this point in detail you would need a separate study!)
   2. Teach and convince people about Jesus, the hope and Messiah of Israel and the hope and Savior of the world! (Note: To go through this point in detail you would need a separate study!)
   3. How people respond is not our responsibility: Some will believe and turn to God. Others will not believe and turn their back on God.

B. Prepare a Bible study based on Acts chapters 27 and 28 called God’s purpose fulfilled. You can use this outline:

1. God’s promise: Acts 23:11 – 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.”
2. Satan trying to prevent the fulfilment of God’s promise:
   * + Paul arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 22)
     + Plot against Paul’s life (Acts 23)
     + Endless trials before Roman governors (Acts 24 and 25)
     + False witnesses produced by the Jewish leaders (Acts 24:13; 25:7)
     + Unfavorable winds on the Mediterranean (Acts 27:4, 7–9)
     + The storm and the shipwreck (Acts 27:14–20, 41)
     + Almost killed by the soldiers (Acts 27:42)
     + The poisonous snake on Malta (Acts 28:3–5)
3. Satan’s attempts failed and Paul reached Rome (Acts 28:14)!
4. But why did Paul come to Rome as a prisoner? Was that really part of God’s plan and purpose for Paul? Yes it was! It was Paul’s two-year imprisonment that made God’s purpose for his witness in Rome really successful:
   * Paul’s witness was expanded: He witnessed even to the emperor. To do that Paul had to be a prisoner on trial.
   * Paul’s witness was enriched: Because of his imprisonment, Paul had time to teach and preach, Paul had time to pray and think, Paul had the opportunity to write three of his most wonderful letters (Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians).
   * Paul’s witness passed the test of suffering: The Greek word martys means both “witness” and “martyr”. Witness and suffering go together. Only through suffering can Christian witness prove its true value.
5. So what can we learn from God’s purpose fulfilled in Paul’s life as Luke recorded it in Acts 27 and 28?
   1. Satan will never succeed in preventing God’s plans to be fulfilled in our lives!
   2. We should have a right understanding of Christian suffering!
      * Suffering does not mean that Satan is successful!
      * Restriction can be a precondition for our witness: Only in jail can we effectively witness to prisoners. Only on trial can we effectively witness to the advocates and the judge.
      * Confinement can enrich our Christian faith: When we are confined to bed by sickness or old age, we have more time to pray and to meditate on God’s word.
      * Suffering and Christian witness are intertwined. Only through suffering can Christian witness prove its true value.

C. Prepare a Bible study based on Acts 28:30 (“Paul stayed two whole years there”) called Paul’s two-year imprisonment in Rome. You can use the six points in the answer to Think and discuss 3 as you outline.

You should also include a closing point about how Paul can be a model for us in these six areas.

([Go to Answers 73](#Answers73))

Unit 1 answers

### Answers 1. Jesus is taken up into heaven, 1:1–11

Text questions

1. –
2. During the 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension Jesus did at least three things:
   * + He showed himself to prove that he was alive and that he had really been raised from the dead.
     + He taught his disciples about the kingdom of God.
     + He instructed his disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they had been baptized with the Holy Spirit.
3. The “gift” that Jesus told his disciples to wait for was what the Father had promised through John the Baptist: That they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (see Mark 1:8, John 1:33, Is 44:3, Joel 2:28).

Think and discuss!

1. I think Luke is using the expression “what Jesus began both to do and to teach” about his gospel to indicate that the book of Acts is about what Jesus continued to do and teach through his apostles and his church. This continued work of Jesus is done through the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Through their question to Jesus in v 6 the apostles revealed these three major misunderstandings about the kingdom of God:
   * 1. They thought that the kingdom of God would be a territorial and earthly kingdom. But the kingdom of God is actually spiritual in character. It would transform the lives and values of its citizens.
     2. They thought that the kingdom of God would be the political liberation of the people of Israel from their Roman rulers and the re-establishment of Israel as a nation. But the kingdom of God is actually international and it includes people from all nations, Jews as well as Gentiles.
     3. They thought that the kingdom of God would be established at that point in history. But the kingdom of God is actually gradual in its expansion (like the growth of the mustard seed and the yeast that penetrates the dough) until it will come in its fulness with the return of Jesus.

The apostles also wanted to know “times and seasons”, which were not their business to know. But these are secret things that belong to God. The apostles – and we – should do our business, which is to be Jesus’ witnesses “to the ends of the earth” (1:8) and “to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20).

1. Jesus’ words in v 8 can be seen as an outline of the whole book of Acts, or a “table of contents”, like this:
   * + Chapters 1–7 describe events in Jerusalem.
     + Chapter 8 is about the disciples being scattered “throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria” (8:1).
     + The conversion of Paul in chapter 9 leads on in the rest of the book to his missionary journeys and finally to his journey to Rome.
2. The story in Acts about Jesus’ ascension is more detailed than the story in Luke. There are also other differences, some which may seem contradictory. But there are no real contradictions. Both stories have the same author, so why should he contradict himself? The other three gospels do not have any details at all about the ascension.
3. The angels told the apostles not to stand and look at the sky waiting for Jesus to come back. Jesus had told them to go out into the world and preach the gospel.

This is the “order of events”:

* + 1. Jesus returned to heaven (Ascension)
    2. The Holy Spirit comes (Pentecost)
    3. The church goes out to witness (Mission)
    4. Jesus will come back (Parousia)

([Go to Study 2](#Study2))

### Answers 2. Matthias replaces Judas, 1:12–26

Text questions

1. The believers gathered for prayer in the room upstairs consisted of the 11 remaining apostles, a group of women (perhaps including the apostles’ wives), and the believers from Jesus’ own family (his mother and brothers). The total number of believers was 120.
2. Akeldama was the name for the piece of land, where Judas died (and probably was buried). The name means “Field of Blood” in Aramaic.
3. Peter quoted two Old Testament verses to support his suggestion that Judas had to be replaced: Ps 69:25 and Ps 109:8. The first was to explain what had happened: Judas’s betrayal and death. The second was to guide them about what to do about it: they should replace him.

Think and discuss!

1. The believers gathered for prayer in the room upstairs to wait and pray for God’s promised gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had told them to wait and not leave Jerusalem until they had “been clothed with power from on high” (Luk 24:49; Acts 1:4–5).
2. There are actually two implications that can be drawn from the expression “in their language” in v 19:
   * That v 18–19 should not be understood as part of what Peter said. Peter spoke Aramaic with the 120 believers, so there was no need for him to give the interpretation of the Aramaic name. But it must be something Luke put in to explain to Theophilus what had happened to Judas. Luke and Theophilus did not speak Aramaic.
   * That the author of Acts was not an Aramaic-speaking person. This is one reason why Luke, who was a Gentile and spoke and wrote Greek, is likely to be the author of Acts.
3. It is very interesting for us to note that all the 120 believers were present and participated in the appointing of Matthias as the apostle who replaced Judas. It was not a matter only for the 11 remaining apostles, or for Peter himself as their leader. From this we can learn that the process of appointing of church leaders should involve the whole church.
4. These were the qualifications for an apostle, according to Peter’s words in this passage:
   * + An apostle must be a witness to Jesus’ resurrection (so that he could testify that the resurrection had really happened).
     + An apostle must have been together with Jesus during his ministry (so that he could guarantee the true traditions about Jesus – his life, his actions and his teaching).

There is, however, one more qualification in the story: An apostle must be personally appointed by Jesus. This is what they did by praying and casting lots. The role of the believers was to find the two best candidates that met the first two qualifications. Then they asked Jesus to decide by praying and casting lots.

Sharing and application

This is what this story states the first believers did when they chose an apostle to replace Judas:

* 1. They studied the Bible and came to the conclusion that Judas should be replaced.
  2. They used their common sense: If another person was to replace Judas, that person should fulfill the same criteria as the 11 remaining “original” apostles.
  3. They prayed to Jesus, who knows the heart of man in a way the believers didn’t.
  4. They cast lots, trusting Jesus to make his choice known. The casting of lots was a practice found in the Old Testament.

This story took place before the Day of Pentecost. That is probably the reason why the casting of lots to decide God’s will is never again mentioned in the Bible. We now have the Holy Spirit to guide us in our selection of leaders. But the first three steps – to study the Bible, the use our common sense and to pray – must be valid for us even today.

([Go to Study 3](#Study3))

### Answers 3. The day of Pentecost, 2:1–13

Text questions

1. The text only states that “they were all together in one place” on the day of Pentecost. In the immediate context “they” seems to refer to “the eleven apostles” (1:26). But the wider context makes it more probable that “they” refers to all the 120 believers. The expression “in one place” is not clear. It could either refer to the “room upstairs” (1:13) or to some place in the temple area, where the believers gathered regularly (Luk 24:53; Acts 2:46).
2. These three manifestations of the arrival of the Holy Spirit are recorded in v 2–4:
   * + Something that sounded like a violent wind
     + Something that looked like tongues of fire
     + Speaking in “other tongues”

The Jew associated wind, fire and voice with the events at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16–19; 20:18–19).

1. The message that was spoken “in other tongues” was about the “the wonders of God” (v 11).
2. The people who heard the apostles (and the other believers?) declare the wonders of God in the different languages reacted in two ways. Most of them were really surprised and confused and wondered what it was all about. But some of them joked about the whole matter and said, “They are drunk!”

Think and discuss!

1. I think that it is reasonable to say that the “harvest” on the first day of Pentecost were the three thousand people who accepted Peter’s message and were baptized (2:41). These three thousand were the “Firstfruits” of all the hundreds of millions of people who would be saved (and are still being saved) through the Spirit-empowered work of the church that started on the first day of Pentecost.
2. I think that we should understand Pentecost as the New Testament fulfillment of the covenant that God made with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai after the exodus from Egypt. That is why the Holy Spirit came to the believers on that day and not at some other time of the year or at some other festival. On the first day of Pentecost the Feast of the Weeks was prophetically fulfilled:
   * + The manifestations are the same on both occasions: wind, fire and speech.
     + God’s covenant with his Old Testament people was made at Sinai. God’s covenant with his New Testament people was made at Easter and sealed at Pentecost. The seal was put on “a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6).
     + The Law was given at Sinai. The Spirit was given at Pentecost. The fire of the Spirit in the hearts of the disciples was the fulfillment of the law, just as the Old Testament prophets had foretold (Jer 31:31–33; Hes 11:19–20; 36:26–28).
     + God’s word was written on tablets of stone at Sinai. God’s word was written on tablets of human hearts at Pentecost (2 Cor 3:3).
3. I think that it is reasonable to see the first day of Pentecost in the light of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9):
   * + At Babel human languages were confused and people could not understand one another. But on the first day of Pentecost the language barrier was supernaturally overcome and people from many different countries could understand the apostles as they declared the wonders of God.
     + The result of the Tower of Babel was that the people were scattered all over the earth. But on the first day of Pentecost the people “from every nation” came together in Jerusalem as a sign that the nations would now be gathered in Christ. Nothing could have demonstrated more clearly the multi-racial, multi-national, multi-lingual nature of the kingdom of Christ.
     + At Babel, people proudly wanted to make a name for themselves and reach heaven. But on the first day of Pentecost, God the Holy Spirit came down to earth to fill and enable his humble disciples.

Somebody has said that Pentecost was God’s deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel.

([Go to Study 4](#Study4))

### Answers 4. Peter speaks at Pentecost, 2:14–41

Text questions

1. The crowd Peter spoke to on the first day of Pentecost consisted of Jews from the dispersion (2:5) and of those living in Jerusalem.
2. Joel’s prophecy said that God would pour out his Spirit on “all people,” which includes men and women, young and old – irrespective of rank (even on servants).
3. At the end of Peter’s sermon the crowd asked this question, “Brothers (referring to the twelve apostles), what shall we do?” Peter answered by telling them to repent and be baptized.

Think and discuss

1. It is not likely that Luke has recorded the speeches and sermons in Acts word by word. This is why:
   * + The speeches are too short. Peter’s sermon on the first day of Pentecost takes only three minutes to deliver and Paul’s sermon in Athens one and half minutes.
     + Luke says at the end of Peter’s sermon,“With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation ’”(2:40). This shows that Luke did not claim to hand down the complete speech word by word.
     + There was no recording equipment in those days, and people were not able to write fast enough to put down every word of a speech.
     + Luke was not present to hear every speech himself. So he must have depended on other people’s (or the speakers’ own) summaries of the speeches.

So instead we should look on speeches in Acts as reliable summaries of what was said on each occasion.

1. Peter’s sermon consisted of these three main sections:
   * He explained the events of the first day of Pentecost (v 14–21).
   * He presented the gospel of Jesus Christ: his death, his resurrection, his exaltation, and his pouring out of the Holy Spirit (v 22–36).
   * He exhorted his listeners to repent and to be baptized (v 37–40).
2. Peter changed “afterward” (Joel 2:28) to “in the last days” (Acts 2:17) in his quotation of Joel’s prophecy. He did this to emphasize that with the Spirit’s coming the last days had come. The New Testament teaches clearly that the coming of Jesus inaugurated the last days or the Messianic age. The final proof of this was the outpouring of the Spirit. This was the Old Testament “promise of promises” for the end-time.
3. We find the Trinity (the three persons in the Godhead) at work together in v 32–33: “This Jesus God raised to life, of which we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you now see and hear.”

([Go to Study 5](#Study5))

### Answers 5. The fellowship of the believers, 2:41–47

Text questions

1. The four activities that the first believers in Jerusalem devoted themselves to according to 2:42 were
   * + The apostles’ teaching
     + The fellowship
     + The breaking of bread
     + Prayer
2. The two places of activity for the Jerusalem church as recorded in 2:46 were:
   * + The temple
     + Their homes

Think and discuss

1. These expressions in the passage describe the fellowship of the early church in Jerusalem:
   * + They devoted themselves to the fellowship (v 42)
     + All the believers were together (v 44)
     + They had everything in common (v 44)
     + They gave to anyone as he had need (v 45)
     + They continued to meet together in the temple (v 46)
     + In their homes they broke bread and ate together with glad and sincere hearts (v 46)

So there are six expressions about fellowship in these six verses! Fellowship must have been a top priority in the early church. This is perhaps something for us to think about and follow!

1. Luke mentions three reactions from the general public to the life of the Jerusalem church in this passage:
   * + People were filled with awe (v 43), probably as a result of the wonders and miraculous signs done by the apostles.
     + The believers enjoyed the favor of all the people (v 47), which probably meant that there wasn’t any persecution or major opposition. The believers were even able to gather daily within the temple complex (v 46).
     + Many people must have been attracted by the fellowship of the believers and accepted the message of the gospel, as new people were saved and added to the church every day (v 47).
2. The apostles of the Jerusalem church – together with Paul and others – were the authors of the New Testament books. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit to document their teaching in the gospels, the book of Acts, the epistles and the book of Revelation. So we cannot say that there is any “teaching gap” in our churches. These writings were collected and became the “canon” or the “rule” for us. No other teachers or books are inspired in the same way. Consequently, we do not have New Testament type of “teaching apostles” in each generation. Instead we have the New Testament collection of books.

([Go to Study 6](#Study6))

### Answers 6. A crippled beggar is healed, 3:1–10

Text questions

1. The beggar expected Peter and John to give him some money.
2. As soon as the beggar had been healed he jumped and walked. Then he went with the apostles into the temple courts praising God.
3. The people, seeing the beggar healed, realized that a miracle had taken place. They were filled with wonder and amazement.

Think and discuss

1. Peter and John went to the temple in Jerusalem to pray. This shows that they still considered themselves to be Jews. So they took part in the Jewish way of daily life. “Christianity” did not have its own identity as yet. I think that it is surprising that the believers did not understand the uniqueness and the universality of the Christian faith from the beginning itself. This understanding developed only when the church was scattered as a result of persecution and the believers came into contact with Samaritans and Gentiles. As we study the history of the church, we find again and again how the understanding of believers is limited by their own culture. This is quite sad!

I don’t think that this story teaches us to go to temples to pray! The Bible is very clear that we should not take part in any kind of idol worship or pagan religious practices. Of course, no idolatry took place in the temple in Jerusalem!

1. Peter showed that he had faith for the beggar to be healed by taking him by the arm and helping him up. Peter’s behaviour did not express lack of faith!

([Go to Study 7](#Study7))

### Answers 7. Peter speaks in the temple, 3:11–26

Text questions

1. Peter begins his speech by stating that the reason for the healing miracle was not the power or the godliness of the apostles.
2. It was the name of Jesus and the faith that comes through Jesus that healed the man.
3. Peter tells his listeners to repent and turn to God. Then they will receive the forgiveness of their sins.

Think and discuss

1. This is the structure of Peter’s speech in Solomon’s portico (1:12–26):
   * + Peter explains how the miracle has happened, not through any human power or godliness but by faith in the name of Jesus, v 12–16
     + What happened to Jesus, his death and his resurrection, was according to the Old Testament prophecies, v 17–18
     + Now people should repent and turn to God. Then they would receive the forgiveness of sins, times of refreshing from the Lord and be ready for Christ’s return, v 19–21
     + The coming of Jesus was foretold by the Old Testament prophets, v 22–26
2. Peter calls Jesus “the Holy and Righteous One” in v 14. The word “holy” can be seen as referring to God and the word “righteous” as referring to man. Jesus was blameless in relation to both God and man.
3. Personally I don’t think that it was the faith of the crippled beggar that healed him. He didn’t even expect to be healed, and he probably didn’t believe in Jesus before this miracle happened. I think that it was the apostles’ faith that healed him. In Acts 14:8–10 another crippled man was healed. Luke writes about him that “he had faith to be made whole.” But the background of that man was different: he had first listened to Paul’s teaching of the gospel, so he already had faith in Christ, “faith to be made whole.”
4. Peter states that there are three consequences (or three blessings) that follow as people repent and turn to God:
   * The wiping out of their sins (v 19). Their sins are forgiven.
   * Times of refreshing from the Lord (v 19). The old sinful life is replaced by the freshness of a new life in the Spirit, a life full of spiritual blessings.
   * God sending the appointed Jesus Christ to them (v 20). This refers to God’s promise to send Christ to restore everything at the end of time (v 21). So the believers can confidently look forward to the second coming of Jesus.
5. The best way to understand the expression “restoration of all things” in v 21 is that Peter is referring to the eschatological restoration (which Jesus called “the regeneration” in Matt 19:28), when nature will be liberated from its bondage, its pain and its decay (see Rom 8:19–22) and God will make a new heaven and earth (2 Pet 3:13 and Rev 21:1, 5).

([Go to Study 8](#Study8))

### Answers 8. Peter and John face the Sanhedrin, 4:1–22

Text questions

1. The Jewish leaders, consisting of the priests on duty, the captain of the temple guard and the ruling party of the Sadducees were upset about the apostles and their teaching. They were upset because Peter and John were proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. The Sadducees didn’t believe in the resurrection of the body, and they were afraid of incidents that could disturb the political situation. But the people who had seen that the crippled beggar was healed and who had listened to the teaching of the apostles believed in Jesus. As a result thousands of people were saved.
2. The Holy Spirit is at work throughout the book of Acts. Sometimes he is mentioned openly, at other times he is acting through the apostles. In this story, Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit as he starts speaking to the Sanhedrin, sharing the gospel about Jesus (v 8).
3. The members of the Sanhedrin were astonished as they listened to Peter’s speech about Jesus, because the apostles were “unschooled and ordinary men” without any degrees in rabbinic theology, and yet they spoke with such boldness. Then they remembered that they had been with Jesus!
4. The Sanhedrin let Peter and John go with a strict command “not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

Think and discuss

1. This is one way of structuring Acts 4:1–22:
   * The Jewish leaders are upset with the teaching of Peter and John, so they arrest them an put them in jail overnight, v 1–4
   * Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin and asked about the power behind the healing of the crippled beggar, v 5–7
   * Peter proclaims that the man had been healed by the name of Jesus and that there is salvation in no other name, v 8–12
   * The Sanhedrin is astonished at the boldness of the apostles and don’t know what to say, v 13–14
   * The Sanhedrin has a private meeting to decide what to do with the apostles. As they are afraid of the people’s reaction, they decide to release Peter and John with a strict warning not to speak in the name of Jesus, v 15–17
   * Peter and John are again taken before the Sanhedrin and informed about the decision. The apostles reply that they must obey God rather than the Jewish leaders, so they will not stop witnessing. After further threats the Sanhedrin let the apostles go, v 18–22
2. There were probably two reasons behind the question that the Sanhedrin asked Peter and John: “By what power or what name did you do this?”
   * They were afraid that the apostles planned to start some kind of political movement that would make the Roman authorities angry. The Sanhedrin was controlled by the Sadducees, who supported the Roman occupation of Palestine.
   * They opposed the basic Christian doctrines of Jesus as the Messiah and of Jesus’ resurrection. The Sadducees didn’t believe in the resurrection of the body, and they believed that the messianic kingdom foretold by the Old Testament prophets had already come.

Peter answered their question by preaching a sermon about Jesus.

1. There seems to have been more than one reason why the Sanhedrin decided to release the apostles with only a warning:
   * + They were afraid that the general public would support the apostles and cause an uproar if they were kept in jail.
     + They couldn’t deny that a miracle had really happened. The well-known crippled beggar was healed and was walking around and seen by everybody.
     + They thought that a strict warning would be sufficient to stop the apostles from speaking about Jesus.
2. Peter and John show remarkable boldness in this story. We must remember that the Sanhedrin had been behind the killing of Jesus some time earlier (Mark 14:55, 15:1), and that its leaders Annas and Caiaphas had played key roles at that time as well (John 18:12-14). Peter and John had every reason to be afraid as they were taken before the Sanhedrin after a night in jail!
3. So how should we understand this boldness? The answer cannot be in the fact that they “had been with Jesus” (v 13). That had not stopped them from fleeing when Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane or from denying him three times. No, it was the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost that changed the lives of the apostles. The courage and the boldness were the workings of the Holy Spirit in their lives!
4. In this passage (as in the two passages in chapter 3) the “name of Jesus” is in focus. But we should not be tempted to see the name “Jesus” as a magic formula, or some kind of mantra. In biblical language “name” stands for the nature, the character, the personality of the carrier of the name. So in the case of Jesus, his “name” stands for who he is and for what he has done. He is God in human flesh. He came to this world to reveal God’s love to a fallen mankind in a unique way by dying on the cross for our sins and bringing redemption to us who were lost. In him – that is in “his name” – we have salvation. And in him – that is in “his name” – the crippled beggar experienced healing. “There is salvation is in no one else” (4:12). For there is only one Savior, for there is only one Jesus. No one else has that “name.”

Sharing and application

I think that there is a “correct” way and a “wrong” way of using the “name of Jesus” in the ministry. It is wrong to use the name “Jesus” as a mantra or as a magic formula, thinking that the sound itself has some kind of power over people or situations. It is correct to use the name “Jesus” as a reference to “Jesus Christ” as a person in the Godhead: Jesus - God in human flesh, Jesus the sacrificial Lamb of God, Jesus who suffered, died and rose again, Jesus exalted in heaven, Jesus the Spirit baptizer, Jesus the returning King, Jesus our healer, Jesus our redeemer, Jesus our Lord.

([Go to Study 9](#Study9))

### Answers 9. The believers pray, 4:23–31

Text questions

1. In their prayer the believers addressed God as “Sovereign Lord.” This word in Greek is used by slaves speaking to their master and by citizens of a country speaking to their king.
2. In their prayer the believers mentioned four conspirators against Christ:
   * Herod Agrippa who at the time of Jesus’ ministry ruled a part (Galilee and Perea) of his father Herod the Great’s previous Palestinian kingdom.
   * Pontius Pilate who was the Roman procurator (or governor) of Judea at the time of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion.
   * The Gentiles, referring to the Roman empire, who ruled Palestine at the time of Jesus.
   * The people of Israel, who rejected Jesus as their Messiah
3. The result of the believer’s prayer:
   * + The meeting place was shaken.
     + The believers were all filled with the Holy Spirit.
     + The believers spoke the word of God boldly.

Think and discuss

1. The believers describe three aspects of God’s activities in their prayer:
   * God the creator: He made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.
   * God the revealer: He spoke by the Holy Spirit through king David in Psalm 2 and foretold that the kings and rulers of this world would oppose Jesus.
   * God the master of history: He was in control of the events even at the time of Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion.
2. The believers request these things from God in their prayer:
   * That God would consider the threats of the Sanhedrin.
   * That God would enable his servants to speak his “word with great boldness”.
   * That God would heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders.

Sharing and application

1. –
2. –
3. A third standpoint on spectacular healing miracles:

John Stott has pointed out that there is much agreement among Bible believing Christians about two matters:

* + God’s creation reveals the uniformity and regularity of his universe. Otherwise there would be no basis for any kind of scientific activity.
  + On the other hand, God is the supreme creator who can also break his own natural laws. When this happens we call it a “miracle.. So who are we to tell God what he can do and what he cannot do?

Then John Stott formulates three questions relating to John Wimber’s standpoint on the New Testament miracle narratives:

* + Is it certain that signs and wonders are the main secret of church growth in the book of Acts? John Stott’s answer: It seems to be John Wimber, and not Luke, who makes this strong connection between miracles and church growth (the story about Philip and the revival in Samaria in chapter 8, where we find this strong link, is an exception). Luke predominantly sees church growth as the result of the preaching of the gospel.
  + Is it certain that signs and wonders are meant by God to be “everyday occurrences and normal Christian life”? John Stott’s answer: By definition miracles are not normal, or else they would not be called miracles. And a closer study of the book of Acts reveals that miracles were not very common or widespread in the early church. Luke emphasizes that they were mostly performed by the apostles (2:43; 5:12), and especially by Peter and Paul. And Paul refers to his miracles as “the things that mark an apostle” (2 Cor 12:12). But there are situations in the church today where miracles will play an important part in the expansion of the gospel into new areas and situations. However, these are special cases rather than “a part of daily Christian life.”
  + Is it certain that today’s claimed signs and wonders are parallel to those recorded in the New Testament? John Stott’s answer: Some probably are, other are probably not. Jesus’ miracles of turning water to wine, stilling the storm, multiplying loaves and fish, walking on the water seem to point forward to the “not yet” aspect of the kingdom of God – rather than expressing the “already” aspect of the kingdom of God. Should we expect to be miraculously rescued from prison by an angel of the Lord like Peter and Paul? And should we expect to see cheating church members struck dead like Ananias and Sapphira? Probably not. Even the healing miracles in the New Testament have characteristics, which we rarely find manifested in the church today: They were instantaneous, complete and permanent healings of obvious and well-documented serious physical conditions.

John Stott’s conclusion is that the extreme standpoints either for or against spectacular healing miracles may not be in line with the teachings of the Bible. We should not describe miracles as “never happening” or “impossible.” But we should also not describe miracles as “everyday occurrences” or “normal.” Instead, we should be totally open to God who works both through his laws of nature and through his miracles. And when a healing miracle is claimed, we should expect it to be an instantaneous and complete cure of a well-documented physical condition, just like the healing miracles recorded in the New Testament.

The story of the crippled beggar in Acts 3–4 shows that the preaching of the gospel and the miraculous sign of the physical healing together testified about the unique and powerful name of Jesus. These two together were the reason for spectacular church growth.

([Go to Study 10](#Study10))

### Answers 10. The believers have everything in common, 4:32–37

Text questions

1. Luke describes the general attitude of the believers in 4:32 with “All the believers were of one heart and soul.”
2. The “apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (4:33).
3. Barnabas, whose real name was Joseph, sold a field that he owned in his home country (the island of Cyprus) and gave the money to the apostles for distribution to the poor and needy in the church.

Think and discuss

1. It is interesting to note the parallelism between the consequences of “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” in 2:4 and 4:31:
   * + First the apostles speak the word of God boldly (compare 2:14 with 4:31).
     + Then Luke specifically mentions how the apostles testified to the resurrection (compare 2:32 with 4:33).
     + Thirdly, Luke presents a description of the sweet fellowship of the believers (compare 2:42–47 with 4:32–35).
2. Luke presents two snapshots of the Spirit-filled church in Jerusalem in 2:42–47 and 4:32–36. The first one is a more general picture. The second one focuses more on the sharing of their possessions.

So how does Luke describe this special aspect of their “fellowship”? The believers were really committed to one another, and they had a very radical attitude to their possessions. They had everything in common (2:44). “No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had” (4:32). From the story about Ananias in chapter 5 we find that the believers did not give all that they had to the church. So the meaning must be that they made their resources available to the needy brothers and sisters in the church, as there “were no needy persons among them” (4:34). Their radical attitude led to sacrificial action, and their action was based on the needs of their fellow-believers. The church seems to have had a philosophy of “material equality” or “Christian communism” among the church members.

God’s blessings on the church are mentioned in both passages.

Sharing and application

1. –
2. I suggest that you do something on these lines:
   * + Listen to him carefully and allow him to explain his views.
     + Ask him to clarify to you how the Holy Spirit has spoken to him about following these isolated words from the Bible. Then ask him listen to you and to answer your questions.
     + Remind him that the Bible is full of descriptions of how people were or what people did. Then ask him to explain why the Holy Spirit has not spoken to him about copying all the people (some were good, but others were very bad) and their actions (some actions were pleasing to God, but other actions were detestable to God). Also remind him that a biblical narrative or a biblical description of a situation shouldn’t necessarily be copied (or be followed) by believers today.
     + Then remind him of the description of other churches in the New Testament. It is evident that the pattern of “Christian communism” of the Jerusalem church wasn’t followed by the other churches – not by the church in Antioch in Syria, not by the church planted by Paul in Corinth, or by any other church. So why should we follow the “Jerusalem pattern” when Barnabas or Paul didn’t do so?
     + Finally, help this young pastor realize that he has no right to tell other pastors (or other churches) what to do. Who has made him the judge of other believers or of other churches? He and his church can decide to follow the “Jerusalem pattern” in the area of “Christian communism” if they want to. But they are wrong to claim that it is the only true biblical pattern for social and economic fellowship. In addition, they have no right to condemn others who do not want to follow their ideas but feel that the Holy Spirit has led them to do things differently!

([Go to Study 11](#Study11))

### Answers 11. Ananias and Sapphira, 5:1–11

Text questions

1. Ananias and Sapphira kept part of the money for themselves (the Greek text says that they “misappropriated, embezzled or stole”) and gave the remaining amount to the apostles.
2. Similarities between Barnabas’s behaviour (4:36–37) and the behaviour of Ananias and Sapphira):
   * + Both had property, which they sold.
     + Both brought money from the sale to the apostles to be used for the needy people in the church.

Differences between Barnabas’s behaviour (4:36–37) and the behaviour of Ananias and Sapphira:

* + - Barnabas brought all the money to the apostles.
    - Ananias kept some of the money for himself and his wife.

1. Peter asked Ananias why he had allowed Satan to fill his heart in such a way that he had stolen some of the money and lied about what had happened.
2. The church reacted to the sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira with great fear (v 5 and 11).

Think and discuss

1. In this passage God is mentioned three times, and each time a different expression is used:
   * + To lie to the Holy Spirit (v 3), with reference to God the Holy Spirit
     + To lie to God (v 4), with reference to God (the Father)
     + To test the Spirit of the Lord (v 9), with reference to God (the Son), as most of the times “Lord” refers to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

From a theological point of view, it is interesting to note that all the three persons of the Trinity are mentioned and sinned against in Luke’s account of the first sin in the life of the New Testament church.

1. It is not so easy to answer the question about the sin that Ananias and Sapphira committed.

The fact that they kept some money for themselves was no sin. Peter said that they could have kept all of it (v 4). The property was at their disposal, and the money they received when they sold it was at their disposal – some of it or all of it.

According to Peter’s statement in v 3 the sin that Ananias and Sapphira committed consisted of stealing and then lying about the theft. The expression “keep back“ has the meaning “misappropriate, embezzle, steal”. Ananias and Sapphira were dishonest and deceitful. They not only deceived the apostles and the poor people in the church. But even worse: they were lying to God and trying to deceive him.

Behind the sins of dishonesty and deceit in the case of Ananias and Sapphira there was very likely greed or “love of money.” The Bible says that this is a root of all kinds of evil and a sin (1 Tim 6:3; Heb 13:5). But we should note that the sin of “greed or love of money” is not mentioned in this story.

Our own conclusion is that hypocrisy was the sin that compelled Ananias and Sapphira to behave the way they did. First, they kept money that they had promised to give to the church. This was theft. Then they wanted to appear as “holy and spiritual” as some of the other people in the church (for example Barnabas), who had given all their money to the apostles. So Ananias and Sapphira lied about what they had done. Their sin of hypocrisy made them both thieves and liars.

1. The story about how God judged Ananias and Sapphira for their sin can teach us as believers and churches today three things about divine judgment:
   * + Sin is serious. God hates sin, especially the sin of hypocrisy (see Luk 6:42; 12:1). Ananias and Sapphira threatened the good name of the church and the sweetness of the fellowship by their hypocrisy.
     + To have a clear conscience is important. When Paul stands before Felix he says that he has kept his conscience clear before God and man (Acts 24:16). The story about Ananias and Sapphira illustrates that by soiling their conscience they invited disaster.
     + Church discipline is necessary. That the New Testament church practised church discipline in the form of excommunication can be seen from 1 Cor 5:6 and 1 Tim 1:20. In the story about Ananias and Sapphira it is God himself who disciplines and excommunicates them.
2. This is a terrible story. The sudden divine punishment of Ananias and Sapphira was the result of the first recorded sin in the New Testament church. I think that Luke is doing the right thing by including it. Here are three reasons for this conclusion:
   1. It certainly happened. Luke is an honest historian, who does not hide this sad story.
   2. It throws light on the life of the of the early Jerusalem church. There was not only sweet fellowship and fantastic church growth. There were also problems with sinful believers.
   3. It illustrates Satan's counterattack against the amazing revival empowered and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Satan attacked the church on three fronts in Acts chapters 5 and 6:
      * From within the church through Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11): Bible scholars see the parallel to the death of Achan in the Old Testament (Joshua chapter 7). Satan is explicitly mentioned as the force behind Ananias and Sapphira’s act of deceits (Act 5:3).
      * From the enemies of the church (5:17–42): The Jewish leaders persecuted the apostles.
      * From trying to distract the apostles from their main task of the ministry of the word (6:1–6): The practical duties threatened to take too much of their time.

([Go to Study 12](#Study12))

### Answers 12. Many signs and wonders, 5:12–16

Text questions

1. The passage starts by stating that the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. It ends by stating that many people came from nearby towns with their sick and demon-possessed, and they were all healed.
2. The believers gathered in Solomon’s Colonnade (see 3:11), which was on the east side of the outer temple complex.

Think and discuss

1. People reacted in two opposite ways to the miraculous signs and wonders in the early church:
   1. Some were afraid of joining them. This expression can be understood in three different ways:
      * The Jewish leaders were afraid of getting into a discussion with the apostles. This is probably the most unlikely interpretation.
      * The people were afraid of the apostles because of the signs and miracles performed by them. They were not afraid of the regular believers, so they were happy to join the church, but they kept away from the apostles.
      * Some of the people were afraid of joining the believers because of the signs and miracles performed by the apostles. This is probably the best interpretation.
   2. More and more men and women believed in the Lord and joined the fellowship of the believers. They were attracted to the church.
2. In teh Greek text, verse 15 starts with the expression “As a result.” We need to ask ourselves, “As a result of what? What made the people bring their sick and place them on the streets so that Peter’s shadow would fall on them?” There are two answers to this question:
   * Logically, “as a result” would refer to the many signs and wonders performed by the apostles (v 12). People brought their sick so that Peter’s shadow would fall on them and heal them.
   * Grammatically, “as a result” refers to the preceding verse (v 14), where it says that “more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to” the number of believers.

This would lead us to reflect on the following questions: “Why do new people believe in the possibility of miraculous healings? Is it primarily because other miracles have happened previously? Or is it primarily because more and more people put their faith and trust in Christ and join the church?”

1. The information about Peter’s shadow is intriguing. Is this a case of “magic”? Did Peter’s shadow have healing powers? No, the people had been deeply impressed by Peter’s ministry – his preaching and his miraculous signs – and they realized that he was a man of God. So they believed the sick could be healed if they were brought close to him. Their faith was not in Peter and his shadow. But in Jesus Christ who could use Peter and his shadow to heal their sick.

We find a similar case in the ministry of Jesus, when the woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years touched the edge of Jesus’ cloak hoping to be healed (Matt 9:20–22). Jesus said, “Your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed from that moment. It was the woman’s faith in Jesus that healed her. Not her faith in the edge of Jesus’ cloak.

We also find a similar case in Paul’s ministry in Acts 19:11–12, when Paul’s handkerchiefs and aprons were brought to the sick, and they were cured from their illnesses and delivered from evil spirits.

Sharing and application

1. –
2. I have come across pastors and churches who have the practice of praying over handkerchiefs to be used for the healing of sick people. I am personally not comfortable with this practice, as there is always a risk that people will be tempted to put their faith in the miraculous healing powers of the handkerchief itself – or in the miraculous powers of the person praying over the handkerchief. This would be a form of idol worship. It is faith in Jesus that provides healing to the sick. However, in his grace Jesus will sometimes allow the use of handkerchiefs or other objects as channels of his healing – as he did in the ministries of Peter and Paul.

([Go to Study 13](#Study13))

### Answers 13. The apostles and the Sanhedrin, 5:17–42

Text questions

1. The high priest and the other members of the ruling Sadducee party arrested the apostles (v 17).
2. An angel from God opened the door of the jail during the night and released the apostles (v 19). This was a wonderful miracle. Then the angel locked the prison doors again (v 23)!
3. The captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were perplexed because the officers did not find the apostles in the prison where they had locked them up. The apostles had vanished, but the prison doors were still locked (v 22–24).
4. The captain and his officers found the apostles in the temple courts, where they were preaching the gospel as the angel had commanded them (v 20, 25–26).
5. The officers took the apostles to be questioned before the Sanhedrin by the high priest who belonged to the Sadducee party (v 27).
6. The Sanhedrin got so furious with the words of the apostles that they wanted to have them killed (v 33).
7. Gamaliel’s advice to the Sanhedrin was to let the apostles go and let God deal with the matter (v 38–39).
8. The apostles were given the traditional and very severe punishment of 39 lashes (v 40).
9. The apostles were happy that God had considered them worthy of suffering dishonor for the name of Jesus (v 41).

Think and discuss

1. This passage can be structured like this:
2. The arrest and miraculous deliverance of the apostles, v 17–21a
3. The apostles before the Sanhedrin, v 21b–40
   * Rearresting the apostles, v 21b–26
   * The trial, v 27–39
     + The apostles questioned, v 27–28
     + The apostles reply, v 29–32
     + The reaction to the reply, v 33
     + Gamaliel’s speech during which the apostles were taken out, v 34–39
   1. The verdict, v 40
   2. What happened afterwards, v 41–42
4. The Jewish authorities renewed their attack on the apostles because they were filled with jealousy (v 17). The reason for this jealousy must have been the enormous success of the healing ministry of the apostles (note that this passage starts with the word “Thus”, which refers back to the previous paragraph). Crowds of people, not only from Jerusalem but also from the surrounding towns, came with their sick and demon-possessed, and all of them were healed (v 16). The apostles were becoming very popular among the people, and the Jewish leaders were afraid of their power.
5. Earlier the Sanhedrin had commanded Peter and John not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus (4:18). So what the apostles did when they followed the angel’s instruction and went to the temple to teach the people was clearly against the ruling of the highest Jewish authority of those days, something “illegal”. On the other hand, they had already warned the Sanhedrin they didn’t plan to obey orders (4:19–20)! Their reason for disobeying the Sanhedrin was that they wanted to obey God, and that the Holy Spirit was prompting them to proclaim the gospel.
6. The apostles began their defence speech before the Sanhedrin by once again stating that they must obey God rather than men (5:29). That was their whole defence! For then they went on to proclaim the gospel to the members of the Sanhedrin (v 30–32).
7. Gamaliel dealt with the case in a very clever way. First he ordered the apostles to be taken outside so that the Sanhedrin could discuss the matter in private (v 34). Then he told his colleagues to carefully consider the case and not make any hasty decision (v 35). He reminded them of two previous troublemakers who had started riots, which had come to nothing (v 36–37). Finally he gave his recommendation: “Keep away from these men and et them alone! For if their plan or their work is of human origin, it will be overthrown. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men. You may even find yourselves to be fighting against God” (v 38–39).

Sharing and application

1. The apostles used the expression “suffering dishonor” to refer to the punish-ment that they had received. To be flogged was very painful indeed. It was also a dishonor – something embarrassing and shameful – to be punished in this way. In spite of their suffering and dishonor the apostles rejoiced. They remembered the suffering and humiliation of Jesus, their Lord and Master. They were also reminded of Jesus’ word in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt 5:11–12).
2. –
3. –

([Go to Study 14](#Study14))

### Answers 14. The choosing of seven men, 6:1–7

Text questions

1. The Greek speaking Jews in the Jerusalem church were not happy. They felt that their widows were given an unfair treatment in the daily distribution of food. They complained that the widows of the Aramaic speaking Jews got more than their own widows.
2. The decision that the Twelve had to make was if they should continue being in charge of the food distribution. The church was growing and they were getting less time for prayer and teaching the word of God. They made the right decision, when they asked the church to find seven helpers for the social work so that they themselves could focus on the spiritual work.
3. The apostles required two qualifications of the seven men that the believers were about to choose to be in charge of the daily distribution to the widows:
   * They must be known to be full of the Holy Spirit.
   * They must be known to be full of wisdom.
4. The apostles did not choose the seven men but told the believers to do that (v 5). The apostles accepted the choice of the church. Then they prayed and laid their hands on them.
5. As the word of God spread, a large number of priests also became believers (v 7).

Think and discuss

1. Acts 6:1–7 can be structured like this:
   * + A problem in the church, v 1
     + The problem is dealt with, v 2–6
     + What happened afterwards, v 7
2. On a deeper level the complaint of the Greek-speaking Jews about their widows being overlooked was against the leaders of the church, the apostles. They were the ones who received the money for distribution (4:35, 37; 5:2). So they were responsible for the fair distribution of the resources. The grumbling in the church was actually against its leadership.
3. This passage reveals that there were two kinds of ministries in the early church in Jerusalem:
   * A spiritual ministry: teaching and preaching the word of God and praying (v 2, 4)
   * A material ministry: taking care of those in need, food distribution (v 1, 2, 3)
4. The expansion of the leadership of the early Jerusalem church was done through a five-step process:

* The apostles made the decision that there was an urgent need for more church leaders.
* The apostles decided on the qualifications for these new church leaders.
* Then they asked the believers to choose (or “elect”) seven men who fulfilled the necessary requirements of Spirit-filled life and wisdom.
* The church elections took place. There is no mention about the involvement of the apostles at this stage.
* The apostles approved of the church elections by ordaining the seven men, as they prayed and laid their hands on them.

1. It is significant that all seven of the men chosen had Greek names. The complaints had come from the Greek-speaking believers. We can see how the Holy Spirit led the church elections and gave the believers the wisdom to elect men from the Greek-speaking group of the church. So now their interests would be guaranteed. We cannot, however, assume that all the seven men were from this group, even if they all had Greek names. The Seven probably also included some men from Aramaic group, even they sometimes used popular Greek names.

([Go to Unit 2](#Unit2))

Unit 2 answers

### Answers 15. Stephen is seized, 6:8–15

Text questions

1. Members from the synagogue of the freedmen opposed Stephen and his ministry among the people of Jerusalem. It is likely that Saul (who later called himself Paul) was one of these opposers (v 9).
2. The opposing Jews seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin (v12).
3. When Stephen was falsely accused before the Sanhedrin his face was like the face of an angel (v 15).

Think and discuss

1. This is how Stephen is described in the two passages 6:1–7 and 6:8–16
   * + A man known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom: This was a requirement for the choosing of the seven, 6:6
     + A man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, 6:5
     + A man full of God’s grace and power, 6:8
     + A man who did great signs and miraculous wonders among the people, 6:8
     + A man who had wisdom and who spoke by the Spirit (or: who spoke by the wisdom of the Spirit) in such a way that his enemies could not stand up against him, 6:10
     + A man whose face was like the face of an angel as false witnesses were accusing him of blasphemy, 6:15

Stephen was filled with the Spirit. And consequently the Spirit had filled him with wisdom, faith, grace and power:

* + - His wisdom was evident as his enemies argued with him and accused him.
    - His faith had passed the test as he faced false accusations and death.
    - His grace was seen in his Christlike behaviour and shone through his angelic face.
    - His power was manifested in the “great signs and miraculous wonders” he did among the people.

1. This is what happened between the members of the synagogue of the freedmen and Stephen:
   * The synagogue members opposed Stephen’s powerful ministry.
   * The synagogue members argued and discussed with Stephen – but lost the discussions and arguments.
   * So the synagogue members secretly persuaded (perhaps they even bribed!) some men to speak lies about Stephen. This made the general public and the leaders angry with Stephen.
   * The synagogue members used this opportunity to catch Stephen and accuse him with false witnesses before the Sanhedrin.
2. Stephen was accused of speaking against the Jerusalem temple and the Law of Moses (v 13). This was a very serious double accusation. For the Jews nothing was more sacred or precious than their temple and their law. The temple was the holy place of God’s presence, and the law was the revelation of God’s mind and will. Consequently Stephen was accused of blaspheming God himself. From v 14 we can see that these accusations against Stephen were based on his teaching about Jesus and what Jesus would do to the temple and the law. Jesus himself had to face similar accusations (Matt 26:61 and Luke 6:1–2). Stephen had been repeating truths that Jesus himself had taught. For this he was accused of blasphemy.

So what had Jesus said about the temple and the law?

* + The temple: People witnessed against him at his trial, “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands” (Mark 14:58). But John explains Jesus’ statement in John 2:20–21: ”The Jews then said, ‘This temple is being built since forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?’ But Jesus had been speaking about the temple of his body”. So what Jesus had done was to speak of himself as God’s new temple that would replace the old temple.
  + The law: The Pharisees and the teachers of the law accused Jesus of disrespecting the law (Luke 6:1-2), when he actually spoke against the misinterpretations of the law which had become part of their Jewish traditions. What Jesus really had come to do was to fulfill the law (Matt 5:17). He was willing to lay down his life for us in order to fulfill the priesthood and the sacrifice of the Old Testament.

Sharing and application

1. –
2. I think that we would all like to be like Stephen! We all need to be persons with wisdom, faith, grace and power as we live our daily Christian lives and as we involve in the ministry of spreading the gospel.

How can we become like Stephen? By allowing to Holy Spirit to fill us more and more!

([Go to Study 16](#Study16))

### Answers 16. Stephe speaks to the Sanhedrin, 7:1–53

Text questions

1. The high priest asked Stephen if the charges against him were true (v 1).
2. Stephen talked about the following well-known Old Testament persons in his speech:
   * + Abraham (v 2–8)
     + Joseph (v 9–14)
     + Moses (v 20–44)
     + David and Solomon (v 45–47)
3. Stephen accused the Sanhedrin of the following five things in v 51–53:
   1. That they were a stiff-necked people and uncircumcised in hearts and ears
   2. That they were just like their forefathers had been
   3. That they always resisted the Holy Spirit
   4. That they had betrayed and murdered the Righteous One (referring to Jesus, God’s Messiah)
   5. That they had not kept the law

Think and discuss

1. With his speech Stephen wanted to prove that he had not disrespected God’s word. Instead he had honored it. The Old Testament itself confirmed Stephen’s teaching about the temple and the law. It was the Jewish leaders – not Stephen – who had disregarded the law, when they totally identified God with the physical temple in Jerusalem and when they had rejected Jesus as the Messiah foretold by the prophets.

* The temple: The God of Israel is a pilgrim God, who is not restricted to one place. God revealed himself to Abraham while he was still among the pagan people in Mesopotamia (v 2). God was with Joseph even when he was a slave in Egypt (v 9). God came to Moses in the desert of Midian, and the place where Moses was standing became holy ground (v 30, 33). God was with the people of Israel in the desert and spoke to them through Moses on Mount Sinai (v 38). Stephen concluded that “the Most High does not dwell in temples made by hand” (v 48). So it is evident from the Old Testament that God’s presence cannot be localized to one single place, and that no building can hold him or restrict his activity. God lives with his people.
* The law: Stephen’s line of argument was that the Old Testament texts laid more emphasis on the law than the Jewish leaders did. Stephen’s speech showed that he himself was more biblical than the Sanhedrin. It was not he who had disrespected the law, but they – just like their fathers before them. In his account of the life of Moses, his calling and ministry, Stephen showed that he clearly respected Moses and the law (v 20–44). The Israelites of the Old Testament had rejected Moses, the one sent by God to be their deliverer. After having exposed Israel’s past unfaithfulness to the law and the prophets, Stephen went on to accuse the Jewish leaders of the same sin: they had rejected Jesus, God’s Messiah.

Stephen’s speech was not so much a self-defense as a testimony to Christ. Jesus was the Messiah who had come to replace the temple and fulfill the law.

1. Stephen said that the members of the Sanhedrin had “uncircumcised hearts”. This expression is metaphorical. Stephen’s accusers were physically circumcised, but they were acting like uncircumcised pagan people. They were not truly dedicated to the Lord.
2. Stephen’s speech reveals at least these three things about him:
   * He knew the Old Testament texts very well.
   * He was man who really had the wisdom of the Spirit (6:10).
   * He was totally fearless as he accused his accusers of resisting God and disobeying the law (7:51–53).

([Go to Study 17](#Study17))

### Answers 17. Stephen is stoned, 7:54–8:1

Text questions

1. As Stephen looked up to heaven he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
2. The Sanhedrin expressed their anger at Stephen and his words in the following ways:
   * + They gnashed at him with their teeth, v 54
     + They covered their ears, v 57
     + They shouted loudly, v 57
     + They rushed at him, v 57
     + They dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death, v 58–60
3. Stephen speaks three times in this passage. First he speaks to the Sanhedrin about seeing Jesus in heaven. The other two times he prays to Jesus.
4. We can see the Triune God presented in v 55–56 like this:
   * + In v 55 Luke says that Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God indwelling in the believers, giving them strength to live godly lives, wisdom to present the gospel convincingly and courage to face persecution and death.
     + In v 56 Stephen sees the glory of God. This is God the creator, God the ruler of heaven and earth, God who is in control of people and history.
     + In v 56 Stephen sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God and he presents him to the Sanhedrin as the Son of Man. Jesus as the Son of Man is God in human flesh, God who became man in order to reveal God’s love and bring about God’s salvation by offering his life on the cross as a sacrifice and a ransom. Stephen is looking into heaven and he sees the ascended and glorified Jesus, the Son who now rules with his Father in heaven.

Think and discuss

1. These are the parallels between the death of Stephen and the death of Jesus:
   * + In both cases false witnesses were brought forward.
     + Both Jesus and Stephen were charged with blasphemy.
     + Angry people were present in both cases.
     + Both Jesus and Stephen were killed outside the city walls of Jerusalem.
     + In both cases the dying person prayed two prayers.
2. Stephen’s first prayer (v 59) is more or less the same as Jesus’ last words on the cross, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46). This is a quotation from Psalm 31:5. The main difference is that Stephen prays to Jesus, while Jesus prays to his heavenly Father. David in Psalm 31 turns to “the LORD,” which was how the Israelites addressed God.

Stephen’s second prayer (that the Lord would not hold his stoning against the Jewish leaders, v 60) is very similar to Jesus’ prayer on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Again we see that Jesus prays to his heavenly Father, while Stephen addresses his prayer to Jesus (“the Lord” in the New Testament refers to “the Lord Jesus”).

1. We remember Stephen as the first Christian martyr: he was the first person to give his life for his testimony about Jesus. This is true, but Luke’s main focus as he arranges the flow of events in the book of Acts is not that fact. His emphasis is on the role that Stephen played in the development of the worldwide Christian mission through his teaching and his death.
   * Stephen taught that Jesus was the fulfilment of the temple and the law. This Jesus himself had claimed. God is not confined to a temple building – this Stephen made clear in his long speech before the Sanhedrin. No, he has always been present with his people as they moved from country to country, from place to place. That was the case with Abraham, Joseph and Moses in Old Testament times. Luke in the book of Acts will now show that the same is the case in New Testament times. As the gospel – after the stoning of Stephen – is taken to new countries, peoples and cultures, so Jesus will be present with his people wherever they go, even into the Gentile world.
   * Stephen’s death resulted in two things:
     + It led to a great persecution, which scattered the church and spread the gospel beyond its beginnings in Jerusalem. Stephen’s death became the first seed for world missions.
     + It contributed to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who some years later became the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul would never forget the testimony of Stephen’s words and death that day, as he was standing there watching the clothes of the witnesses and giving his approval to the killing of Stephen.

([Go to Study 18](#Study18))

### Answers 18. Persecution in Jerusalem, 8:1–3

Text questions

1. The immediate consequence of Stephen’s stoning was the persecution of the believers and the scattering of the church.
2. Luke writes that the persecuted believers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.
3. This passage tells us that Saul joined the persecutors. He tried to destroy the church by entering the homes of the believers. Then he dragged out both women and men and put them in prison.

Think and discuss

1. The only other time “Judea and Samaria” are mentioned together in Acts is when Jesus tells his disciples in 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth.” Luke wants his readers to understand that Jesus’ prophecy about the evangelistic work of the Holy Spirit through his church was now about to be fulfilled. Notice the words “all” (1:8) and “throughout” (8:1).
2. Luke doesn’t say why the apostles stayed in Jerusalem when the rest of the church was scattered. We can assume that there was nothing wrong with them staying behind. Jerusalem was to be the headquarters of the church for some more time, and the apostles were probably needed there.
3. Luke writes that “devout men” buried Stephen and that they “lamented greatly over him.” These devout men were probably not the apostles (Luke would have mentioned that) or other believers (as the church was scattered). They were probably devout Jews, who realized that Stephen had been killed unjustly.

([Go to Study 19](#Study19))

### Answers 19. Philip in Samaria, 8:4–8

Text questions

1. Philip proclaimed Christ in a city in the country of Samaria north of Jerusalem.
2. Philip’s ministry contained both
   * + The proclamation of Christ, and
     + The performance of miraculous signs: the healing of paralytics and cripples and the casting out of evil spirits
3. Philip’s ministry resulted in great joy in that city.

Think and discuss

1. Philip and Stephen must have known each other well. They both belonged to the group of seven men who were chosen by the believers “to wait on tables” in the Jerusalem church (6:1–7).
2. Luke seems to have looked on Stephen and Philip as a pair. Here is a list of the similarities between them:
   1. Both belonged to the Seven, which meant that they had social responsibilities in the early Jerusalem church (6:5).
   2. This means that they both had the same “qualifications.” They were “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom” (6:3) and they probably belonged to the Greek-speaking section of the church – at least they both had Greek names.
   3. Both were involved in evangelistic ministry and preached the gospel (6:10 and 8:5).
   4. Both performed public signs and wonders (6:8 and 8:6).
   5. Both have key roles in Luke’s story of the expansion of the gospel from its limited beginnings in Jerusalem to the Gentile world:
      * Stephen’s contribution lay in his teaching about the temple, the law and the Messiah.
      * Philip’s contribution lay in his bold evangelization of the despised Samaritans and an Ethiopian from the very end of the ancient world.

But we find a difference in how long they lived:

* + - Stephen died a violent death as a martyr at most probably an early age.
    - Philip had a much longer life (21:8)

1. Most probably Luke received his information about the life and ministry of Philip from Philip himself. In Luk 1:3 we find that Luke was careful about researching his material. He writes, “I myself have carefully investigated everything”. From Acts 21:8 we know that Paul and Luke stayed in Philip’s home in Caesarea on their way to Jerusalem. Then in Acts 27:1, which takes place about two years later, we see that Luke sails with Paul from Caesarea to Italy. So during these years Luke had many occasions to meet Philip and listen to his stories about the ministry in Samaria when he was a young man.

([Go to Study 20](#Study20))

### Answers 20. Simon the sorcerer, 8:9–25

Text questions

1. Simon boasted about being someone great, because he claimed to perform his magic and his sorcery through divine powers.
2. Simon followed Philip everywhere, because he was astonished by the great signs and miracles that Philip performed (v 13).
3. When Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritan believers, they received the Holy Spirit, which means that they were baptized with the Holy Spirit (v 17).
4. Simon offered money to the apostles trying to buy the ability that he saw Peter and John had: People received the Holy Spirit when the apostles laid their hands on them (v 18–19).
5. Simon’s final request to the apostles in this story was that they pray to Jesus for him so that God might not punish him for his sin (v 24).
6. Before they left Samaria, Peter and John preached and taught the word of God in that area. And on their way back to Jerusalem, they preached the gospel in many Samaritan villages (v 25).

Think and discuss

1. Luke does not mention why the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria. I think there could have been three reasons:
   * Perhaps the apostles in Jerusalem wanted to know if the revival in Samaria was genuine. It may have been hard for them to believe that people like the Samaritans could have received the gospel. Ever since the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity 500 years earlier, there had been hatred and enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans, who had their own religious practices.
   * Perhaps the church in Jerusalem was considered to be the “headquarters” of the Christian movement. The apostles were still there, and they felt that they had the responsibility to inspect evangelistic work in new areas and the newly planted churches.
   * Perhaps the apostles were not sure about Philip and his capacity. Earlier he had been involved in social ministry in Jerusalem, but now he was working as an evangelist and a church planter in Samaria. Perhaps they had even heard that the believers there had not yet been baptized with the Holy Spirit.
2. Luke says nothing about what Simon actually saw happen when the Spirit was given to the Samaritan believers, only that “Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands” (v 18). So some kind of evidence must have been present. Most probably Simon heard the Samaritan speak in tongues (compare Acts 2:4; 10:46; and 19:6).
3. –
4. It is hard to know for certain whether Simon’s faith was genuine or not.
   * + It says in v 13 that Simon himself believed and was baptized. That statement speaks for genuineness. We would of course not expect Philip to baptize a person who was not a true believer and who was not sincere in his acceptance of the gospel.
     + On the other hand, when Simon offered money to the apostles to get the same gift as they had, Peter told him that his heart was not right before God (v 21). In addition, early church history has nothing good to say about Simon. His name is even the source for the word “simony,” the terrible practice in the old days of the Catholic Church, which means “buying and selling church privileges, for example pardon for sin.” Also, Simon’s final words in this text do not sound very sincere: Why does he ask Peter to pray for him (v 24), when Peter had actually told him to repent of his wickedness and ask God for forgiveness (v 22).
     + My personal opinion is that Simon’s conversion was genuine. He really accepted the gospel that Philip preached and received Jesus as his personal Savior before he was baptized in water. But Simon was a weak and worldly believer. He was so fascinated by the spectacular miraculous signs that Philip performed and by the result of the laying on of hands by Peter and John that his old life as a sorcerer and magician caught up with him. He wanted to be a “big shot” in the kingdom of God, just like Philip, Peter and John. So he lost the right focus in his faith. Instead of exalting Jesus he wanted to exalt himself. I also think that his final words in this story show that he was not willing to repent and turn back to the Lord. So, as church history records, he instead became an enemy to the kingdom of God, a heretic and a false teacher.

Sharing and application

1. –
2. I personally think that it is wrong to say that Baptist and Brethren believers don’t believe in the Holy Spirit.

If you look at their “statements of faith” or textbooks on doctrine, you will find that they believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. They also believe that you are born by the Spirit (and that you receive the Spirit) when you are saved. They also believe in the importance for believers to walk in the Spirit and to produce the fruit of the Spirit. So of course they believe in the Holy Spirit.

But what many of them do not believe in is what we Pentecostals call “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” and in the speaking of tongues as an evidence of this “Spirit baptism.” They usually say that the manifestations of the Holy Spirit were only for the New Testament times and that these manifestations ceased when the last book of the Bible had been written. So they claim that speaking in tongues is not for present-day believers.

Doctrines like this (often found in Baptist and Brethren churches) are of course wrong. The Holy Spirit is at work in the church today – in the same way as he was in the days of the New Testament – with spiritual manifestations, including speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing miracles.

([Go to Study 21](#Study21))

### Answers 21. Philip and the Ethiopian, 8:26–40

Text questions

1. –
2. It was “an angel of the Lord” who told Philip to go to the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza (v 26).
3. In v 27–28 we learn the following things about the Ethiopian:
   * + He came from the country, which was called Ethiopia in those days. It was situated south of Egypt.
     + He was a eunuch, which means that he was castrated.
     + He was working for the queen mother of Ethiopia (her title was Candace) as “finance minister” (he was in charge of the treasury).
     + He was a God-fearing man, who had travelled all the way from Africa to worship God in the temple in Jerusalem.
     + He was now on his way home from Jerusalem.
     + He was a rich man, because he was travelling in his own chariot and he had his own copy of a scroll with the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Perhaps he had bought the scroll in Jerusalem as a souvenir to take home.
     + He could read (he read aloud as they always did in those days) and he seemed to be very much interested in this Old Testament text.
4. It was the Holy Spirit who told Philip to approach the chariot (v 29).
5. The Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah chapter 53 in the Old Testament. This text Jesus interpreted as a prophecy about himself as the suffering Messiah. Philip used this text to present the gospel to the Ethiopian.
6. The “baptism service” is described like this in v 36 and 38–39:
   * + It was the Ethiopian himself who asked Philip if he could be baptized.
     + Both Philip and the Ethiopian stepped into the water. So there must have been plenty of water.
     + Philip baptized the Ethiopian. The context clearly indicated immersion baptism.

Think and discuss

1. –
2. This is the first individual conversion story in Acts. All the previous stories have been about crowds or groups of people accepting the gospel.
3. I personally think that the Ethiopian eunuch was a God-fearing Gentile, not a Jew. As far as we know, castrated men were not fully accepted into the Jewish community at this time. So I agree with the opinion that this story about the Ethiopian is fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah 56:3–5. The new covenant, which Jesus introduced, welcomes even men that have been castrated.

So I think that the first Gentile to accept Christ in the book of Acts is the Ethiopian eunuch, not Cornelius and his household (Acts chapters 10 and 11). As a matter of fact, Luke never states that Cornelius was the first Gentile convert. It is Peter who claims this at the Jerusalem Council: “Brothers, you know that a long time ago God made a choice among you that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe” (Acts 15:7). Peter might very well have been unaware of Philip’s meeting with the Ethiopian. So there is no need to read any contradiction between the story about the Ethiopian in chapter 8 and Peter’s testimony in chapter 15.

1. We can say that God gave two gifts to the Ethiopian: first he gave him the scroll with the book of Isaiah. Then God gave him a teacher in Philip, who could explain God’s word to him. In the same way God has given us – as individuals as well as a church – the Bible, which is his word to us. But he has also given us Bible teachers, who can open up the Bible to us, explain God’s word to us and help us apply the teachings of the Bible to our daily lives.
2. Compare the two stories about Philip and his ministry in Acts chapter 8 – his ministry in Samaria (v 4–25) and his ministry to the Ethiopian (v 26–40). What are the similarities? What are the differences?
3. Similarities:
   * The same pioneer spirit: Philip was a true evangelist, ready to proclaim the gospel wherever he went
   * The same message: the good news of Jesus Christ (v 12, 35)
   * The same response: those who listened believed and were baptized (v 12, 36–38)
   * The same result is recorded: joy (v 8, 39)
4. Differences:
   * The ”inspection visit” by the apostles Peter and John from Jerusalem only happened in Samaria.
   * The laying on of hands and praying for the Holy Spirit to come upon the new believers only happened in Samaria.
   * The people evangelized were different:
     + In race: The Samaritans were of mixed race (half-Jewish, half-Gentile) and despised by the Jews; the Ethiopian was a black African from a far-away country.
     + In social position: The Samaritans probably were ordinary people; the Ethiopian had a very high position as the finance minister of his country.
     + In religion: The Samaritans believed in the Law of Moses but rejected the Old Testament prophets and did not accept Judaism; the Ethiopian was a God-fearer and had a strong attachment to Judaism (he had been to Jerusalem to worship)
   * The method of evangelization:
     + Mass evangelism in Samaria
     + Personal evangelism with the Ethiopian

([Go to Study 22](#Study22))

### Answers 22. Jesus reveals himself to Saul, 9:1–19

Text questions

1. –
2. Saul went to the high priest in Jerusalem to get letters of introduction and permission to visit the synagogues and arrest the believers in Damascus and bring them to Jerusalem for trial and punishment.
3. Saul had been blinded by the light from heaven that flashed around him when Jesus appeared to him, so his travel companions had to lead him into the city of Damascus.
4. Jesus spoke to Ananias in a vision and told him that Saul was staying with a man called Judas, who lived on Straight Street.
5. Ananias addressed Saul as “brother Saul” as soon as he met Saul in Judas’ house.
6. Saul was praying and fasting for three days after his experience on the road to Damascus. But he was baptized before he broke his fast and took food again.

Think and discuss

1. Jesus’ first words to Saul (v 4) are remarkable, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” What Saul seemed to be doing was to persecute the believers. But to persecute the believers is to persecute Christ, for the church is his body (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:23).
2. If we read this story carefully, we will find that Saul had more than one experience of the Lord. This is a list of his experiences:
   * 1. He met Jesus on the road to Damascus.
     2. For three days he fasted and prayed to God. So he had fellowship with God through prayer.
     3. While he was fasting and praying he had a vision of a man called Ananias who would come and heal him.
     4. He received a prophetic message from God through Ananias about his future life and a call to ministry.
     5. God healed him from his blindness.
     6. He was filled with the Holy Spirit.
3. In this passage Luke uses four different expressions for believers. They are:
   1. Disciples (v 1, 10): This implies that the believers were true followers of Jesus and that they wanted to be obedient to Jesus and his gospel. This word is used about believers in general only in Acts.
   2. Those who belonged to the Way (v 2): This implies that the believers were people willing to submit to the way of life found in Christian fellowship. This expression is used in this specific sense only in Acts.
   3. The Lord’s saints (v13): This implies that the believers were set apart from the world and that they belonged to Christ. The expression underlines the spiritual union of the believers with Christ.
   4. Those who call on the name of the Lord (v 14): This implies that the believers belonged to Christ, that they depended on him, and that they worshiped him.

There may not be much real difference in meaning between these four expressions. But is is useful to reflect on them and the different aspects of our relationship with Jesus that they convey to us.

1. The Lord revealed the following things to Ananias about Saul’s future:
   * + That Saul was chosen by God in a very special way
     + That Saul would proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles – even to their rulers – and to the Jews
     + That Saul would have to suffer greatly for the sake of the gospel
2. All these things really happened to Paul. In Acts, Luke shows how Paul was a unique instrument in God’s hands

* He preached to both Jews and Gentiles.
* He proclaimed the gospel to king Agrippa in Caesarea (and to many Roman governors, and probably even to emperor Nero in Rome).
* He experienced hardships and sufferings in his ministry.

Sharing and application

1. Paul’s conversion story is very dramatic. But I don’t think that Luke wants us to read it as a model story for us.

Some aspects of the story are exceptional and unique for Paul:

* + - Paul was saved on the road to Damascus. We can be saved wherever we are.
    - Paul had a personal meeting with the resurrected Christ. That kind of experience nobody else has had.
    - Many spectacular and supernatural events took place at Paul’s conversion (flash of lightning, voice from heaven, his name was called out in a solemn way, he was blinded). Our conversions are usually not so spectacular and dramatic. Most of them are actually simple and quiet. The fact is, that most of us don’t have “Damascus Road” type of conversion experiences.
    - Paul was called to be a special instrument in God’s hand, and he became an apostle like nobody else in the history of the church.

Other aspects of the story are typical and applicable to conversions in general:

* + - Everybody must experience a personal meeting with Jesus Christ.
    - Everybody must surrender his life to Jesus Christ.
    - Everybody must be truly converted, which means a turning around, a total change in the direction of life.
    - Everybody must receive his own call to service.

([Go to Study 23](#Study23))

### Answers 23. Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem, 9:19–31

Text questions

1. Saul was saved from the plot to kill him in Damascus by his followers. They put him in a basket and lowered him down through an opening in the city wall. This happened during the night as the enemies were keeping watch at the city gates.
2. In the beginning the believers in Jerusalem were afraid of Saul. They knew that he had persecuted the church in many places, also in Jerusalem. And they did not believe that his life had changed.
3. Barnabas helped Saul in Jerusalem by introducing him to the apostles. He explained to them how Saul had been converted and how he had preached the gospel fearlessly in Damascus.
4. Luke tells us these five things about the church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria in v 31:
5. It enjoyed a time of peace. So there was no persecution.
6. It was comforted by the Holy Spirit. As a result of that:

* It grew stronger. This probably means that the believers became more confident in their faith and in their ministry.
* It grew in numbers. This means that more and more people accepted the gospel and became believers.
* It grew in spiritual life, as the believers lived in the fear of the Lord.

Think and discuss

1. Luke doesn’t tell us in detail about the contents of Saul’s message to the Jews in Damascus and to the Greek speaking Jews in Jerusalem. But in v 20 he writes that in Damascus Saul preached in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God and in v 22 that he proved that Jesus is the Christ. In Jerusalem he preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus (v 27). So his message contained at least the following three doctrines:
   1. Jesus is God: The expression “the Lord” shows that.
   2. Jesus is the Messiah foretold by the Old Testament prophets: The expression “the Christ” shows that. It is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah”.
   3. Jesus brings salvation to those who receive him: The expression “the name of Jesus” shows that. For more explanations about “the name of Jesus” see the sermon outline in the chapter “Peter speaks in the temple” (3:11–26).

Saul’s message really astonished the Jews in Damascus and Jerusalem, for these three doctrines were the main reasons why Saul had earlier persecuted the believers.

1. We get the following additional information about Saul’s stay in Damascus and Jerusalem:
   1. 2 Cor 11:32–33:
      * Damascus was at that time in the control of king Aretas (he was king of Nabatea), who had instructed his local governor to guard the gates so that Paul would be caught. This indicates that the Jews in Damascus must have been on very good terms with the king.
   2. Gal 1:15–21:
      * “When many days had passed” (9:23) was more exactly a period of three years.
      * Saul did not stay in Damascus the whole time, but he went from there to Arabia (the Roman province of Arabia was not far from Damascus) and back again.
      * When Barnabas introduced him to the apostles in Jerusalem, most of the apostles were not present. So Saul only met Peter and James, the brother of Jesus.
      * Saul stayed in Peter’s home in Jerusalem for fifteen days.

Sharing and application

1. Without Barnabas’ help Saul’s first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion could have been a disaster and his life could have taken a very different direction. Here are some possibilities:
   * + He could have been discouraged, lost his newfound faith and turned back to his old life as a Jewish Pharisee.
     + He could have turned against the believers and again become an enemy to the gospel and a persecutor of the church.
     + He could have been disappointed with the church in Jerusalem and started his own “denomination”. This could have caused a split in the early church, which would have stunted the growth of the church and the expansion of the Christian faith.
     + He could have turned away from the early church, which would have left him isolated. Without the experience and leadership of the apostles he might have developed strange doctrines and become a heretic teaching false doctrines and causing confusion in the early church.

The church today faces the same risks that the Jerusalem church did when Saul came there after his conversion. That is why it is so important that our South Indian churches have people like Barnabas: People who are willing to trust and take care of new converts – whatever their background; people who can introduce the new converts to the church leaders; people who have the wisdom to guide new converts in matters of doctrine and spiritual life.

1. –

([Go to Unit 3](#Unit3))

Unit 3 answers

### Answers 24. Aeneas and Tabitha, 9:32–43

Text questions

1. –
2. Simon Peter travelled to Lydda to visit the believers there. There was now peace from persecution in the country (9:31) and the apostles could leave Jerusalem and visit the churches that had been planted in the countryside by the believers who had been scattered after Stephen’s death (8:1).
3. It is very reasonable to call Tabitha a saintly woman. She always did good things and helped the poor.
4. The result of the healing of Aeneas was that all who saw this happen turned to the Lord in Lydda and neighbouring villages. And when people in Joppa heard that Tabitha had been raised from the dead, many of them believed in the Lord.

Think and discuss

1. Luke doesn’t say why the believers in Joppa sent for Peter and asked him to come at once. But he says that Lydda was close to Joppa, so Peter was not far away and could reach Joppa within a few hours. I see two possible answers:
   * They wanted Peter to come and comfort them as one of the important members of the church had just died.
   * They remembered what Jesus had done with Jairus’ daughter, and hoped that Peter would raise Tabitha from the dead.
2. There are some details in the stories that indicate that Luke wanted to draw his readers’ attention to the parallel between Jesus’ ministry and apostles Peter’s ministry:
3. The healing of the two paralytic men: Jesus told the man in the gospel, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home. Peter told Aeneas in Acts, ”Get up and take care of your mat”.
4. The raising of the two females from the dead:
   * + The people were crying, wailing and mourning.
     + The mourners were not allowed to be in the room when the miracle was performed.
     + The words that Jesus and Peter used must have been almost identical. Jesus spoke in Aramaic “Talitha koum” (see Mark 5:41) and Peter probably also spoke in Aramaic “Tabitha koum”.

Of course, there are also many differences between the stories! So what do you think?

But more important than these details are the facts

* + that it was the power of Jesus that was at work both in the gospel and in the book of Acts, and
  + that as a result of Peter’s miracles Jesus was glorified.

([Go to Study 25](#Study25))

### Answers 25. Cornelius sends for Peter, 10:1–8

Text questions

1. –
2. We learn many things about Cornelius in this text:
   * + He was a Roman officer.
     + He was stationed in Caesarea.
     + He and his family were good and God-fearing people.
     + He was a generous person who helped those in need.
     + He was a Gentile, but he followed Jewish beliefs and practices.
     + He was a man of action: He immediately obeyed the angel and sent three persons to fetch Peter.
3. The angel told Cornelius to send for Peter who was staying in Joppa.

Think and discuss

The story about Cornelius is a key story in the history of the Christian church. Up to that point the gospel had been well established in Jerusalem and it was now spreading throughout the Jewish territory (9:31). It was only a matter of time before the gospel would break its Jewish limits – both geographically and socially. When that happened the problem of what to do with Gentile converts would have to be faced and solved. So the conversion of Cornelius and his household became the test case that was absolutely needed and that clearly showed that God wanted Gentiles to join the church.

Luke, of course, recorded this story many years after it had happened. So he could look back on Peter’s experience in Cornelius’ house and understand its key importance in solving the issue of Gentiles being admitted into the church. When Cornelius’ conversion actually took place, it was probably seen by both Peter and the other leaders in the Jerusalem church as something exceptional. They would not have realized its importance. But some years later – when Paul and Barnabas were criticized for accepting Gentile converts without first circumcising them and a council to discuss the issue was convened in Jerusalem – Peter and James used the story about Cornelius’ conversion to solve the issue in favor of Paul’s and Barnabas' standpoint: The church could accept Gentile converts without circumcision.

([Go to Study 26](#Study26))

### Answers 26. Peter’s vision, 10:9–23

Text questions

1. Peter went up on the roof to pray (v 9).
2. After Peter had seen the vision, he was wondering about its meaning (v 17).
3. The Holy Spirit told Peter that he had sent the three visitors (v 20). But in 10:5 we read that an angel told Cornelius to send men to Joppa. There seems to be a contradiction here! But of course there is no real contradiction between these two verses. It was God the Holy Spirit who spoke through the angel. It was not Cornelius’ initiative to send the men. It was the Holy Spirit’s initiative. And the Holy Spirit used both the angel and Cornelius.

Think and discuss

1. The lesson that God had for Peter through the vision on the roof was not about food but about people. For us today it is impossible to understand the deep divide between the Jews and the Gentiles (including even the God-fearers) during New Testament times. But this divide was not in accordance with the Old Testament message. The psalmists and the prophets foretold the day when God’s Messiah would inherit the nations, when the Lord’s servant would be their light, when all the nations would flow to the Lord’s house, and when God would pour out his Spirit on all people (Ps 2:7–8; 22:27–28; Is 2:1–4; 42:6; 49:6; Joel 2:28–32).
2. This is how God timed the various events that took place between Cornelius and Peter in a perfect way:
   * + While Peter was praying and seeing his vision, the three men from Cornelius were approaching the city (v 9–16).
     + While Peter was confused about the meaning of the vision, the men arrived at his house (v 17–18).
     + While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Holy Spirit told him that the men were looking for him and that he should go with them (v 19–20).
     + When Peter went down and introduced himself to them, they explained to him the purpose of their visit (v 21–23).

We can see God the Holy Spirit in control of the whole situation!

([Go to Study 27](#Study27))

### Answers 27. Peter visits Cornelius, 10:24–48

Text questions

1. Cornelius welcomed Peter by falling at his feet in reverence. But Peter did not accept this kind of greeting. It could be misunderstood as an act of worship. Only God is to be worshiped – not man.
2. The gathering in Cornelius’ house took place at three o’clock in the afternoon (v 30).
3. Peter and the other disciples of Jesus were witnesses of
   * 1. Jesus’ ministry (v 38–39)
     2. His crucifixion (v 39), and
     3. His resurrection and his appearances after his resurrection (v 40–41)
4. While Peter was still delivering his sermon, the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius and his household. They spoke in tongues and praised God.
5. The reason Peter decided to order Cornelius and his family and friends to be baptized was that they had received the Holy Spirit in the same way (including speaking in tongues) as he himself (among the group of the 120 first believers) had done on the Day of Pentecost.
6. After the meeting was over, Peter was invited to stay in Cornelius’ house for a few days.

Think and discuss

1. Luke doesn’t openly state why Peter introduced himself the way he did. In one way Peter seemed very arrogant, when he said that they all knew that it was against the Jewish law for him as a Jew to visit the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. But we must remember the deep divide between Jews and Gentiles in those days. I also think that Peter was still quite shocked by the vision he had had on the roof and the sternness of God’s message to him, “Do not call unclean anything that God has made clean” (10:15). And he must also have been confused by the way in which the Holy Spirit had been guiding him to Cornelius’ house (10:19–20). So it was perhaps Peter’s awkwardness and confusion that made his introduction so sharp and impolite!
2. “Four days” in the Bible is not quite the same thing as in our modern languages. In those days even a part of a day was counted as a day:
   * 1. The first day: At three o’clock in the afternoon an angel appeared to Cornelius. Soon afterwards he sent three men from Caesarea to Joppa to fetch Peter.
     2. The second day: As the three men approached Joppa around noon, Peter was on the roof praying, ordering food and having a vision. He welcomed the men and asked them to stay over night.
     3. The third day: Peter with six Jewish background believers and the three messengers started their journey from Joppa to Caesarea. The distance was 50 km. How long the journey took, depended on if you were riding or walking (and on how fast you walked) – but approximately one day.
     4. The fourth day: Cornelius had gathered his household waiting for Peter, who arrived around three o’clock in the afternoon. A gospel meeting was held in Cornelius’ house.
3. Peter said, “I now realize the truth that God does not show favoritism but accepts people from each nation who fear him and do what is right.”
   * + By that Peter meant that God does not favor a person because of his social, cultural, linguistic, economic, geographical or religious background. Peter continued to say, “but God accepts people from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (v 35). In the wider context of Cornelius' conversion story, this obviously means that God appreciates people who help the needy, fear God and are prayerful (see 10:2–4).
     + But Peter did not mean that it is possible for a person who helps the needy, fears God and is prayerful to earn his salvation by doing so. No, even a good person like Cornelius had to hear the gospel and accept Jesus as his personal savior. There is salvation in no other name but Jesus!
4. Peter’s companions were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out (v 45), because they (and all the other believers at that time) had not understood the universality of the gospel – in spite of the Old Testament prophets; in spite of the Great Commission that Jesus had given his disciples; and in spite of Jesus’ prophecy that they would be his witness by the power of the Holy Spirit “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). They still thought that a Gentile first had to convert to Judaism (like Nicolas in Acts 6:5) and be circumcised before he could be baptized and accepted in the church.

Sharing and application

I think that it is wrong to allow people to greet you in a way that can be misunderstood. They may just want to show respect to you – that’s fine! But they should do it in such a way that there can be no chance for misunderstandings. Peter in Cornelius’ house is a good example to us. He told Cornelius to stand up, because he was only a man himself. So he made clear to everybody that he was not to be worshiped.

([Go to Study 28](#Study28))

### Answers 28. Peter is questioned, 11:1–18

Text questions

1. The believers in Jerusalem accused Peter of having visited Gentile homes and eating with Gentiles (v 3).
2. In v 14, the angel clearly promises Cornelius that he and his household would be saved through Peter’s message. This information is not included in chapter 10.
3. This is the order of events in Peter’s speech in v 5–17:
   * 1. Peter’s vision in Joppa
     2. The arrival of the three messengers from Caesarea and the Spirit’s instruction to Peter
     3. Peter and his companions’ arrival at Cornelius’ house
     4. Cornelius’ story about the angel’s visit
     5. The Holy Spirit coming on Cornelius’s household as Peter speaks

Think and discuss

1. The order of events in Peter’s speech in 11:5–17 is different from Luke’s account in chapter 10:
   * + Luke’s own narrative in chapter 10 follows the time order of the events during the four days the whole story took place.
     + In chapter 11, Peter tells the same story (in less details) from his own perspective. For the Jerusalem church this was very important – see D4 below!
2. Peter must have told the Jerusalem church about the baptism in water of Cornelius and his household (see 10:48). But Luke does not mention anything about water baptism in 11:17.
3. Peter’s report to the Jerusalem church about what happened in Cornelius’ house (11:16–17) included a quotation from Jesus (‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’, Acts 1:5), which is not mentioned in Luke’s account in 10:47–48.

I think the reason for the difference is that Peter wanted to make sure that the Jerusalem church made the correct conclusion of what had happened in Cornelius’ house:

* + - It was Jesus who had promised the Holy Spirit to the believers.
    - Now the Holy Spirit had come upon the Gentiles in Cornelius’ house.
    - So by giving the same gift to the Gentiles as he had given to the Jewish believers, God had clearly shown that also Gentiles could become believers.
    - So how could Peter refuse to baptize them in water? That would be to oppose God!

And the church in Jerusalem made the right conclusion: “Then God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life” (v 18).

1. I think that there can be two answers to the question how the church in Jerusalem came to the conclusion recorded in v 18, “So then, God has granted also to the Gentiles repentance to life”:
   1. The short answer: The Holy Spirit coming on Cornelius’ household convinced them.
   2. The longer answer (which includes the short answer): As Peter told the whole story from his own perspective the church in Jerusalem realized how God had had to deal with Peter four times, before he had completely understood that God’s salvation included the Gentiles. So deep-rooted were Peter’s racial and religious prejudices!
      * God gave Peter the vision of the sheet containing all the animals (v 4–10).
      * God the Holy Spirit commanded Peter to go with the messengers to Caesarea (v 11–12).
      * God sent an angel to prepare Cornelius for Peter’s visit (v 13–13).
      * God the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius’ household as Peter was preaching (v 15–17).

Four direct divine interventions had convinced Peter that the Gentiles could be baptized with water. Peter’s testimony about these four divine interventions convinced the church in Jerusalem that the Gentiles were included in God’s great salvation plan.

([Go to Study 29](#Study29))

### Answers 29. The church in Antioch, 11:19–30

Text questions

1. –
2. The historical background to the first believers’ arrival at Antioch in Syria was the scattering of the church after the martyrdom of Stephen.
3. Barnabas is described very positively in this passage:
   * + He was happy for the revival in Antioch (v 23).
     + He was an encourager and teacher (v 23) who probably spent a few years as one of the pastors in the church before he brought Saul there.
     + He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith (v 24).
     + God used him, and many people were added to the church (v 24).
     + He was a realistic and unselfish pastor, who knew that Saul would be needed as a co-pastor for the ministry to progress further (v 25–26).
     + He was a good and faithful teamworker as he and Saul taught in the church together (v 26).
4. Barnabas travelled to Tarsus to find Saul and bring him to Antioch to help in the ministry there (v 25–26).
5. Barnabas and Saul worked together in Antioch as pastors and teachers in the church. They must have been very busy as they “taught great numbers of people (v 26).
6. In Antioch the believers were for the first time called “Christians” (v 26). Probably this was a nickname in the beginning. But it was a good name! It showed that the believers had Christ in focus: they always spoke about him and they wanted to belong to him.
7. The believers in Antioch wanted to provide help to the believers in Judea because a prophet called Agabus had foretold that there would be a famine. All over the Roman empire. This shows
   * + that the church in Antioch was concerned about the needy, and
     + that they felt brotherly fellowship of the larger church body.

Think and discuss

1. I think that the key phrase in this passage is “to Greeks also.” This shows that the expansion of the church as far north as Antioch in Syria was not only a geographical expansion. It was also a cultural expansion. For the first time in the history of the church, there was a conscious effort to reach both Jews and Gentiles (of whom the Greeks were the largest and most influential group).
2. I think that there were two reasons why the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch:
   * The Jerusalem church felt that they should check on the situation in Antioch, especially as they were hearing that the church there also consisted of Gentiles. Compare 8:14 (where they checked on the revival in Samaria) and 11:1–3 (where they interrogated Peter about what he had been up to in Caesarea).
   * The Jerusalem church realized that there was a need for a really good pastor to help in the ministry in the church in Antioch, as lots of people were being saved, and as many of the believers came from Gentile background. So they sent one of their best – Barnabas! We should remember that Barnabas was a native of Cyprus, so he was an international Jew with personal experience of living outside of Palestine and with perfect knowledge of the Greek language – in contrast to the apostles who were all Palestine-born Aramaic-speaking Jews.
3. When Barnabas came to Antioch, he saw that the grace of God was at work there (v 23). What he actually saw must have been the great number of people – Jews as well as Gentiles – who had turned to the Lord (v 21). That many people were saved was a sign of God’s grace. That many of those that were saved were Gentiles was also a sign of God’s grace. Both these things were evidence that the hand of the Lord was with the church in Antioch (v 21).
4. I think the reason why Luke included the story about Agabus's prophecy in his narrative was not primarily to tell a story about a prophet, his prophecy and the fulfillment of his prophecy.

I think that Luke’s reasons were:

* + - To show that the church in Antioch had grown not only in numbers but also in social concern for vulnerable and needy people. The collection of money was a sign of their spiritual maturity.
    - To show the link between the church in Antioch and the church in Jerusalem. Barnabas had been sent from Jerusalem to help as a pastor in the ministry in Antioch some years earlier. Now Barnabas and Saul are sent with the gift from Antioch to help in the famine situation in Judea.
    - To demonstrate the brotherhood of the universal church. All local churches belong together in one great fellowship of saints. When one local member suffers, all suffer – and try to meet the need that causes the suffering.

Sharing and application

I think that there must be a balance between both alternatives. We cannot neglect bringing in the big harvest for the kingdom of God. And we cannot neglect nurturing the flock so that the believers grow into full spiritual maturity.

So how can we do both at the same time? I think one answer to this question is the leadership of the church. One leader/pastor cannot do everything. But if a church has a team of leaders/pastors much more can be achieved.

Our passage about the church in Antioch shows that Barnabas and Saul mainly worked in the church as teachers and counsellors. But we also know that there were more people in the pastor’s team (see 13:1–2). In addition, we know from his missionary journeys that Saul was a gifted evangelist.

([Go to Study 30](#Study30))

### Answers 30. Peter saved from execution, 12:1–19

Text questions

1. King Herod arrested Peter because he wanted to please the Jews (v 3).
2. While Peter was in prison, the church was earnestly praying to God for him (v 5).
3. When the angel came and led Peter out of the prison, he first thought that it was a vision.
4. Peter didn’t realize that he was a free man until the angel had left him. By that time he had left the prison, entered Jerusalem through an iron gate and walked the length of one street (v 9–11).
5. Rhoda did not open the door at first. She was so happy when she heard Peter’s voice through the door that she immediately ran inside the house to tell the believers gathered in Mary’s house that Peter had come.
6. This story ends with Peter going into hiding and his guards executed. This was the Roman practice: Whenever a prisoner escaped his guards were given the escapee’s sentence.

Think and discuss

1. Peter went to Mary’s house to inform the church (and especially the church leaders) that an angel had rescued him from prison, that he was still alive, and that he was now going into hiding. As there were no church buildings in those days, people gathered in different homes for their meetings and for prayer. One of these homes must have been Mary’s, and Peter knew about it and thought he would find believers there.
2. Luke does not mention why the believers thought that it was Peter’s angel who had come to the door, and not Peter himself. But in spite of their earnest prayer (v 5), they must have doubted that Peter would come away alive from this serious situation. So they probably thought that Peter had already been executed and that God had sent Peter’s guardian angel to inform them about this.
3. I think that the believers in fact were praying for God to save Peter’s life and deliver him from prison. But I also think that deep in their hearts they doubted that their prayer would be answered. The church had certainly prayed for the believers that king Herod had arrested earlier (v 1), and yet James had been beheaded (v 2).
4. I think Peter told the believers to report what had happened to James and the brothers because he wanted them to know that he was well and alive, even though they would not see him in person as he was going into hiding.

Sharing and application

1. –
2. I don’t think that it is wrong to bring serious matters before God in prayer, even if you have doubts about the answer. We should always bring our matters before the Lord and trust him to deal with the situation in his own divine way.

See also the Bible study outline F 2 above in the lesson on this passage.

([Go to Study 31](#Study31))

### Answers 31. King Herod dies, 12:19–24

Text questions

1. –
2. The people of Tyre and Sidon were totally dependent on king Herod for their food supplies. He was king over Galilee (in addition to Judea and Samaria) and had control of the grain produced there.
3. God sent and angel to punish king Herod with worms, and he died a terrible death as a result of that.

Think and discuss

1. The people of Tyre and Sidon needed the help of Blastus, the king’s personal servant, in order to get an audience before Herod. The Greek text suggests that they bribed Blastus.
2. The reason for king Herod’s terrible death was that he did not deny that he was God. He should have told the people to keep quiet as they went on shouting (the Greek grammar indicates that they not only shouted once), “This is the voice of a god, not a man.”
3. In chapter 12:1–24 we see that Luke is a very talented writer:
   * + The chapter opens with the worldly power represented by king Herod triumphing: Herod is persecuting the church and arresting church leaders, James has been killed, Peter is in prison waiting to be executed.
     + The chapter ends with the kingdom of God represented by the church triumphing: king Herod is dead, Peter is free, the word of God continues to increase and spread.

([Go to Unit 4](#Unit4))

Unit 4 answers

### Answers 32. Barnabas and Saul sent off, 12:25–13:3

Text questions

1. There were five prophets and teachers in the church in Antioch. So they definitely didn’t have one pastor in charge of the whole church.
2. Fasting is mentioned two times in this text. The first is in connection with worshiping (v 2). The second is in connection with praying (v 3).

Think and discuss

1. The leadership of the church in Antioch really did reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the city and the church of Antioch:
   * + They were both Jews (Barnabas, Saul, Manaen) and Gentiles (Simeon Niger, Lucius).
     + They had different mother tongues even if they all knew Greek: Greek (Barnabas and Saul), Aramaic (Manaen) and Latin (Simeon Niger and Lucius). Barnabas and Saul also spoke Aramaic as they were Jews. In addition, Saul was well versed in Hebrew, as he had been a Pharisaic rabbi.
     + They came from different countries: Barnabas from Cyprus, Saul from Cilicia, Manaen from Palestine, Simeon Niger and Lucius from Africa.
     + They had different social backgrounds: Saul came from a working-class family, and Manaen had been raised at the royal court. We don’t’ know anything about the remaining three.
2. I think the best answer is that both the Holy Spirit and the local church commissioned Barnabas and Saul as missionaries.
   * + On the one hand: The Holy Spirit sent them out by instructing the church to do so.
     + On the other hand: The church sent them out, having been directed by the Holy Spirit to do so.
3. We should also note that Barnabas and Saul did not go out as missionaries on their own initiative. They were sent by the Holy Spirit through the church.

([Go to Study 33](#Study33))

### Answers 33. Cyprus, 13:4–12

Text questions

1. –
2. Bar-Jesus worked for the proconsul Sergius Paulus. He was probably a court wizard.
3. Bar-Jesus was trying to turn his master the proconsul from the faith. He was a child of the devil and an enemy of righteousness. He was full of deceit and was trying to pervert the right ways of the Lord.
4. He was convinced by the miracle (Bar-Jesus was stricken with blindness) and the message that Paul and Barnabas preached.

Think and discuss

1. The statement that Saul becaome Paul at his conversion does not have any biblical support, because Luke uses the name Saul also after his conversion (11:25–26; 12:25; 13:1–2). Instead the name change has to do with the ministry and culture. As Paul begins to travel to spread the gospel, his international (Roman) name is used instead of his local (Hebrew) name. He is never again called Saul is the book of Acts (except when his conversion story is retold), and he never calls himself Saul in his letters.
2. We find the story about Simon the sorcerer in chapter 8. He believed and was baptized by Philip in Samaria. But when Peter and John came from Jerusalem they found that his heart was not right before God; he had offered the apostles money for the ability to dispense the Holy Spirit on people.
3. The Ethiopian eunuch had been to Jerusalem to worship when Philip met him, explained the gospel to him and baptized him (8:26–38). Cornelius was devout and God-fearing. This means that he respected the ethical teaching of the Jews and that he believed in the Lord, even if he hadn’t converted to Judaism. Sergius Paulus, however, had no religious background in Judaism. In this story we see how Paul directly approached the Gentiles with the gospel. This was something completely new.

([Go to Study 34](#Study34))

### Answers 34. Pisidian Antioch, 13:13–52

Text questions

1. –
2. John Mark left them and went home to Jerusalem. We don’t know why, and there is no reason mentioned in the New Testament. From 15:38 we see that Paul was upset about John Mark and that Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement over him, which led to them going separate ways.
3. Paul quotes from Ps 2:7, Is 55:3, Ps 16:3 and Hab 1:5. Some of these were considered messianic texts by the Jews in those days. Later he also quotes from Is 49:6 to justify why he now turns to the Gentiles.
4. The apostles said, “We now turn to the Gentiles”. This expression symbolizes a turning point in the history of the expansion of the gospel. It signifies a new focus on the Gentiles in the ministry of the apostles. Even then, Paul usually spoke in the synagogue as he came to a new place, see 17:1–2 (Thessalonica), 17:10 (Berea), 17:17 (Athens),
5. It says in verse 49 that the word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

Think and discuss

1. It was a common practice in those days that a visiting rabbi or teacher of the law was asked to speak as part of the synagogue service. Perhaps the Jews could see from Paul’s dress that he was a rabbi. Or perhaps some people had talked to him before their service and found out that he was a rabbi.
2. It is probably not a very good idea to copy this sermon and use it to explain the gospel to a Gentile audience. Paul spoke to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. They were people who knew the Old Testament, who believed the God of the Israelites and who believed in the prophecies about the Messiah. Gentiles with no such background would not understand or appreciate the sermon. But I think that this sermon could be used as a Bible study for believers.
3. From the context the meaning of the expression is clear: they received the word, believed in the gospel message and were saved.
4. I think that the word disciples refers to the believers in Pisidian Antioch. First, it makes more sense in the context: Paul and Barnabas went to Iconium, but the believers who stayed were happy and Spirit-filled. Second, the word disciple is used 30 times in Acts. In almost all cases it refers to believers, and there is no clear reference to an apostle.

([Go to Study 35](#Study35))

### Answers 35. Iconium, 14:1–7

Text questions

1. –
2. Both Jews and Gentiles believed, when Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue in Iconium.
3. It says in verse 2 that some were rebellious (or diobedient) to the gospel. This must mean that they themselves decided not to believe the gospel that the apostles preached.
4. The apostles continued to preach the good news.

D. Think and discuss!

1. Note that verse 3 starts with the word therefore (or so). This word links this verse to the previous verse. Because the unbelieving Jews poisoned the minds of the Gentiles (v 2), Paul and Barnabas had to spend a longer time in Iconium. Then verse 3 goes on to say that they spoke boldly for the Lord. They stayed in Iconium to make sure that the gospel message was deeply rooted in that area, before they would consider moving on.
2. The main purpose of signs and wonders in this story was to confirm the truth of the apostles’ message and the approval of God.
3. The reason the apostles fled was that they found out about the plot against their lives. I think that they were guided by the Holy Spirit in this decision. If they had stayed, they would probably have been killed, and that would have been the end of their ministry. From the story we can see that the apostles were not afraid of difficulties, because they remained in Iconium a long time after the unbelieving Jews had stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against them. So in our own ministry we have to be wise and guided by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we should stay and continue the ministry, even if there are problems and dangers. Sometimes it is wiser to leave that place and spread the gospel somewhere else.

([Go to Study 36](#Study36))

### Answers 36. Lystra and Derbe, 14:8–21

Text questions

1. –
2. The people were speaking in their own local language, Lycaonian (v 11), and the apostles did not understand what they were saying about them.
3. Luke has given us a summary of the first part of Paul’s sermon to the people of Lystra in verses 15–17. Even if the occasion came suddenly as the apostles rushed out into the crowd, it is still a sermon. Paul was always prepared to share the gospel with people he met, no matter the circumstances.
4. The apostles preached the gospel successfully, and many people were saved (v 21).

Think and discuss

1. No, the healing of the crippled man in Lystra is not an isolated incident. The context shows that Paul and Barnabas were already ministering in that area. For in verse 6 it says that they fled to the cities of Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the gospel. So the healing of the crippled man is part of that preaching ministry. That would also explain why the crippled man had faith to be made whole (v 9): He had already heard the gospel about Jesus Christ and believed in Jesus as his savior and his healer.
2. The text (v 12) says that they called Paul Hermes because he was the main speaker. Hermes was the god of rhetoric, and Paul was probably a very good speaker. Another reason could have been that Barnabas was the older and more impressive-looking of the two apostles. Zeus was pictured as an older and powerful god with a big beard, and Hermes as a younger man without a beard. Of course, we don’t know if Paul had a beard or not.
3. The people who heard this sermon were all Gentiles. It is one of very few sermons recorded in the New Testament that is meant for a Gentile audience. Peter’s sermon on the first day of Pentecost was for Jews. Paul’s sermon in Pisidian Antioch took place in the synagogue, and the people who listened were Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. So for us who live and work in a completely non-Jewish cultural setting this sermon is very important. And we can learn much from it.
4. The rebellious Jews (the Jews who did not accept the gospel message) were behind the problems in all three places. In Pisidian Antioch they incited upper-class women and city leaders to stir up the persecution. In Iconium they stirred up the Gentiles. They also came to Lystra and convinced the Gentile crowd to stone Paul.

([Go to Study 37](#Study37))

### Answers 37. Back in Antioch in Syria, 14:21–28

Text questions

1. –
2. This is what the apostles did in the churches on their way back:
   * + They strengthened the believers.
     + They encouraged the believers to remain true to the faith.
     + They appointed elders in each church.
     + They committed the elders/the believers to the Lord with prayer and fasting.
     + They trusted the Lord that he would take care of the elders and the believers.
3. This is what the apostles did when they returned to their home church Antioch in Syria:
   * + They gathered the church (the believers) together to give their travel/ministry report.
     + The report that they gave to the church was detailed: they reported all that God had done.
     + The report that they gave to the church was God-centered: they reported what God had done through/together with them; they reported how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. They did not focus on their own achievements, or on their own sufferings and difficulties.
     + They stayed a long time in Antioch: During that time they could use their travel experiences in the work as pastors in the church (see 15:35). They could also get some good rest, and spiritual encouragement from their co-pastors in the church.

Think and discuss

1. –
2. It will be useful for you to keep in mind the “already–not” yet perspective on the kingdom of God, when you answer this question. The talk between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3 is about salvation. In verse 3 Jesus uses the expression “see the kingdom of God” and in verse 5 he says “enter the kingdom of God”. Both are about being born again, receiving Jesus as our personal savior. This is the "already" perspective. In Acts 14:22 Paul is speaking about the Christian life in this world, and how there are hardships and problems that we must endure until we finally enter the kingdom of God in its future fullness. This is the “not yet” perspective.
3. The elders were the pastors! They were the pastors and teachers of the church. So they were the ones who preached in the church after the apostles had left. This means that in the New Testament churches there was not one pastor who was the leader of the church. The leadership was collective. A group of elders/pastors led the church.

Sharing and application

1. –
2. Establishing a new church:
3. –
4. The situation in the Greek-Roman world was different from the situation in South India today:

* There was a strong Jewish presence in those days in the whole Greek-Roman world. And the Jews had been involved in missionary activities long before the Christian church was established. As a result the Christian missionaries found proselytes (Gentiles who had converted to Judaism) and God-fearing Gentiles everywhere. How do you think this compares with the Christian presence in South India today?
* The Christian church was new, exciting and attractive. It didn’t have the historical burden, which the church in India has today. What about the commitment of the believers then and now? Same or different?

1. The situation in the Roman Gentile world was similar to the situation in South India today:
   * + Most of the Gentiles were idol worshipers.
     + Many of the Gentiles were illiterate.
     + One dominant culture: The Hellenistic (Greek-Roman) culture then; The Indian-Hindu culture now.
     + The Holy Spirit is the same today!

([Go to Study 38](#Study38))

### Answers 38. The Jerusalem council, 15:1–21

Text questions

1. The passage can be divided into five sections, like this:
   * 1. The Judaizers come to Antioch, resulting in a dispute. Paul, Barnabas and some others are sent to Jerusalem (v 1–3).
     2. The visitors are welcomed by the apostles and elders, and they give their report. The Judaizers state their position (v 4–5).
     3. The apostles and elders discuss the issue. Peter gives his opinion based on his experience: He was the first person to preach the gospel to Gentiles (to Cornelius and his household) and God accepted their faith by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he had done to the Jewish believers. Both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace; there is no difference (v 6–11).
     4. The whole assembly listens to Barnabas and Paul and hears how God has worked among the Gentiles through them (v 12).
     5. James gives his judgement based on the fact that Peter’s testimony was in agreement with the Old Testament prophets (v 13–21).
2. The Judaizers claimed that a person could not be saved unless he was circumcised. Also the Gentiles who became believers had to be circumcized and keep the Law of Moses.
3. Peter claimed that a person – whether he has a Jewish or a Gentile background – is saved by grace. So the Gentiles should not be required to undergo circumcision. It is not right to add difficulties (referring to the keeping of the Old Testaments laws) for the Gentile believers, which not even the Jewish people could cope with. Peter’s standpoint is based on what happened at Cornelius’s house (chapter 10): God purified the hearts of the Gentile believers by faith and gave them the Holy Spirit – just as he had done to the Jewish believers.
4. James based his position on the fact that Peter’s testimony was in agreement with the Old Testament prophets. His conclusion was that there was no need for the Gentile believers to be circumcised.

Think and discuss

1. Paul’s and Barnabas’s position on the issue of circumcision of Gentile believers is not explicitly mentioned in the passage. But it is clear from the context that they were very upset with the Judaizers and that they were totally against their standpoint.
2. According to this passage, Paul and Barnabas did not argue for their standpoint. Instead they testified (v 4 and v 12) about what God had done through them and their ministry in Antioch and during the first missionary journey. If God had accepted the Gentiles and done so many miraculous signs and wonders among them without requiring them first to be circumcised, why should Paul and Barnabas make circumcision a condition for the Gentiles to be part of the Church?
3. I think that there were three reasons why the church in Antioch didn’t want to solve this issue themselves.
   * First, they acknowledged the leadership of the apostles in Jerusalem. They were the ones who had been with Jesus and to whom Jesus had given the great commission, including “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”.
   * Second, they wanted to keep the unity of the church. The Judaizers came from Judea/Jerusalem and it was important for this issue to be solved in such a way that the church did not split in two.
   * Third, the issue itself was of utmost importance. The teaching of the Judaizers corrupted the gospel, and Paul and the other leaders in Antioch were not willing to compromise “the truth of gospel” (Gal 2:14). A top-level “church council” was needed to resolve the issue once and for all: salvation is through faith in Jesus alone – and not through any kind of works.
4. There has been much discussion among Bible scholars about these four requirements that the Gentile believers were asked to keep. There are the two main views:
   * These requirements are laws that are older than the Law of Moses. So they also apply to Christian believers. This is the reason why some believers even today do not eat food that contains blood. But most of them don’t bother about how an animal is slaughtered (if there is still some blood in the meat or not), but many Jews and Muslims only eat kosher or halal meat (meat slaughtered so that the blood has drained from the carcass). Note, however, that Paul discusses meat sacrificed to idols in 1 Cor 8 and 10. His conclusion is that a believer can eat any kind of meat as long as it does not offend the weak person’s conscience.
   * These requirements were four areas where the Jews were particularly offended by how the Gentiles behaved. So it would help the relationship between Gentiles and Jews if they were observed. They are ritual/ceremonial laws, not ethical laws. The requirement “abstain from sexual immorality” refers to the list of unlawful marriages listed in Leviticus 18, which were considered incestuous by Jews but some of them were common in the Greek-Roman world. It is interesting to note that the Jerusalem council and its decision are never referred to in any of the New Testament letters.

([Go to Study 39](#Study39))

### Answers 39. The reply of the council, 15:22–35

Text questions

1. The Judaizers had come from Judea without authorization from the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church, and they had disturbed the church in Antioch.
2. The decision made by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem was communicated to the Gentile churches both by letter and by word of mouth through Judas and Silas.
3. The church in Antioch was glad for the letter from Jerusalem and encouraged by it.

Think and discuss

1. It was not sufficient for the “Jerusalem council” to state that there was an agreement on the decision between the apostles, the elders and the believers. They also recognised that the Holy Spirit had been present during the discussions and the testimonies. The Holy Spirit had also spoken through the words of the Old Testament prophet and confirmed the testimonies and the conclusions drawn by Peter, Paul and Barnabas. So the result was a joint decision between the Holy Spirit and the leaders and the believers of the church.
2. The letter mentions nothing about the motivation for the Gentiles to follow the four requirements. James had given the reason (“For …” in v 21), but it is not included in the letter. I do not think that there was any special reason for this omission, as Judas and Silas could explain the reason for these four requirements.
3. I think there were four reasons why Judas and Silas were able to encourage and strengthen the church in Antioch:
4. They had previous church experience from Jerusalem, where they were leaders.
5. They were trustworthy persons – or else the Jerusalem church would not have chosen them to go with the letter to Antioch.
6. They were prophets with the gift of encouragement (Rom 12:8).
7. At least Silas must have had earlier experience with Gentiles: He was a Roman citizen and there was a Latin version of his name. Many of the believers in Antioch were Gentiles.

([Go to Study 40](#Study40))

### Answers 40.Paul and Barnabas part ways, 15:35–40

Text questions

1. Paul and Barnabas worked as pastors in the church in Antioch before they set out on their second missionary journey. They taught and preached the word of the Lord.
2. Paul took the initiative and suggested to Barnabas that they revisit the places where they preached the gospel during their first missionary journey. His reason was to see how the churches were doing.

Think and discuss

1. Perhaps Barnabas wanted to give John Mark a second chance, even if he had failed once.
2. There were probably several reasons why Paul chose Silas as his travel companion, for example:
   * 1. Paul already knew Silas well from earlier. They had travelled together with the letter from Jerusalem (v 25–27) and they had worked together in the church in Antioch (v 32–35).
     2. Silas was an experienced and trusted servant of God, and he was a prophet. He also had leadership experience from the church in Jerusalem and from the church in Antioch (v 22, 27, 32, 33).
     3. Silas had an international background. He was a Roman citizen (16:36–37). A Latin form of his name, Silvanus, was sometimes used. Perhaps he had previous experience from travelling in the Roman empire.
     4. The church in Antioch was Paul’s home church and sending church. The church leaders knew Silas well so they were happy to bless and stand behind this new missionary team (v 40).

([Go to Study 41](#Study41))

### Answers 41. Timothy joins Paul and Silas, 15:40–16:5

Text questions

1. –
2. The newly established churches, which Paul and his team visited on the second missionary journey, were growing – in faith as well as in numbers (v 5).
3. This text gives us the following information about Timothy:
   * + He lived in Lystra, where Paul and Silas met him (v 1).
     + His mother was a Jewess who had become a believer (v 1). His father was Greek (v 1, 3).
     + He had a good reputation, both in Lystra and in Iconium (v 2)
     + He was not circumcised, but Paul arranged for his circumcision before they continued on their journey.
4. Paul wanted Timothy to join him on his missionary journeys. So he circumcised Timothy because of the Jews who lived in that area. No other explanation is given in the text. See answer to question 2 below for further discussion about this issue.

Think and discuss

1. Paul was blessed by the believers in the Antioch church before he left on his second missionary journey. Antioch was Paul’s home church, and the church showed their participation in Paul’s ministry by blessing him. Paul had the spiritual support of his home church. Perhaps there was some kind of dedication service in the church, where the elders laid their hands on Paul and blessed him. Travelling was very dangerous in those days. Paul also faced many difficulties and enemies in his ministry. So to go with the blessings of the church must have been a great encouragement for Paul.
2. Paul didn’t have Titus circumcised (Gal 2:3), but he circumcised Timothy. So what was the difference? Titus had Greek parents. Timothy’s father was Greek and his mother was Jewish. So the Jews expected him to have been circumcised as a baby. Why he wasn’t, we don’t know. Perhaps his father objected to it. Now Paul wanted to take Timothy with him on his journeys. Paul ministered to both Jews and Gentiles. So in order not to offend the feelings of the Jews, he circumcised Timothy. In this way Paul’s and Timothy’s work among the Jews could be more effective. We have to be clear about this issue: Circumcision was not a requirement for salvation. If that had been the case, Paul would have had Titus circumcised. The circumcision of Timothy was a cultural adaption to Jewish sentiment.
3. In Acts 15:21 the motivation for the decisions of the council in Jerusalem was given as “For in every city and for generations Moses has been preached and read aloud every Sabbath in the synagogues.” The four requirements were areas where the Jews of the Greek-Roman world were particularly offended by how the Gentiles behaved. So the preaching of the gospel should not be hindered by the offensive behaviour of the Gentile believers. The story about Timothy’s circumcision implies the same reason, “because of the Jews who lived in those parts” (16:3). The Jews of the Greek-Roman world would have been offended if a Jew like Timothy hadn’t been circumcised. So the preaching of the gospel should not be hindered by this circumstance.

([Go to Unit 5](#Unit5))

Unit 5 answers

### Answers 42. Paul’s vision of a Macedonian man, 16:6–10

Text questions

1. –
2. The Holy Spirit kept Paul and his friends from preaching the gospel in the province of Asia.
3. The Holy Spirit did not allow them to enter Bithynia.

Think and discuss

1. The Holy Spirit could have directed Paul and his companions like this:
   * He could have convinced them in their hearts and minds as they were praying and seeking God’s guidance that this was not the right time for them to preach the gospel in Asia and for them to enter Bithynia.
   * He could have stopped them through outward circumstances, for example though sickness, through opposition from the Jews, through government orders, or through prophetic messages or visions.
2. After Paul had had the vision of the man of Macedonia, he must have shared his vision with his companions. Together they discussed Paul’s vision and together they decided that the Holy Spirit had spoken to Paul through this vision. They also must have discussed what happened earlier when the Holy Spirit had stopped them from preaching the gospel in Asia and had forbidden them to enter Bithynia. Now God had given them the reason for the previous “negative guidance”: God’s plan for them was to take the gospel to Macedonia, not to minister in Asia and Bithynia. Together they decided to get ready at once and leave for Macedonia. They were obedient to the call and they did not make any delays.
3. The writer of the text, Luke, now joins Paul on his journeys. This is the first of the four “we-passages” in the book of Acts: 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18 and 27:1–28:16.

([Go to Study 43](#Study43))

### Answers 43. Lydia baptized in Philippi, 16:11-15

Text questions

1. –
2. As there was no synagogue in Philippi, Paul and his companions went to the river on the Sabbath day to find the place where the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles had their weekly meetings. It was common for these prayer places to be close to the running water of a local river.
3. Luke says three things about Lydia in v 14:
   * + that she came from Thyatira,
     + that she was a merchant of purple cloth,
     + that she was a worshiper of God.

So Lydia was not a native of Philippi of Macedonia, but she was a businesswoman from another country within the Roman empire. She must have been wealthy, as trading in purple cloth was good business, and she had a big house (v 15). She was not a Jewess but a Gentile who believed in the God of the Jews and wanted to live a life in accordance with the Law of Moses.

Think and discuss

1. There are three key thoughts in Luke’s description of Lydia’s conversion:
   * Paul gave a message. He presented the gospel about Jesus Christ.
   * The Lord opened Lydia’s heart. God, through his Holy Spirit, illuminated Paul’s message so that Lydia could understand the gospel message.
   * Lydia responded to the gospel message. She was obedient to the gospel and received Jesus as her personal savior.

All these three factors are needed for the gospel message to bear fruit:

* + Somebody must preach the message.
  + The Holy Spirit must be present to illuminate the message.
  + The listener must accept the message and apply it to his own life.

1. We can learn three things about baptism in New Testament times from this text:
   1. When a person accepted the gospel message, he was baptized. Baptism follows the salvation experience. Accepting Jesus and baptism went together. Paul must have preached about baptism as part of his gospel message.
   2. Baptism was not delayed. It is possible that Lydia and her household were baptized the same day they accepted Jesus as their savior. Or it could have happened a few weeks later. Paul and his companions only stayed in Philippi “a short time. So Lydia’s baptism must have taken place soon after her salvation experience.
   3. Baptism led to a new life with practical consequences. Lydia saw the need for Paul and his companions to stay in a better place, so she begged them to come to her house. As Paul writes in Romans 6:4 “Therefore, we have been buried with Christ through baptism into death so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we also might walk in newness of life.”

([Go to Study 44](#Study44))

### Answers 44. In prison in Philippi, 16:16-40

Text questions

1. Paul was upset because the slave girl kept on shouting and bothering the apostles. But perhaps he was more distressed about the poor girl’s condition and the way in which the evil spirit made her shout and behave in a disturbing manner.
2. The owners of the slave girl were upset because they knew that they had lost a source of income. They did not care about the situation of the girl, only about their own money. They wanted the apostles to suffer but knew that it would be fruitless to accuse them of having delivered the demon-possessed girl. Instead they needed to charge them with some serious offense. So they told the magis-trates that Paul and Silas were causing a riot in the city and that they were illegally propagating a foreign religion.
3. The magistrates believed the accusations that the girl’s owners and the crowd made against Paul and Silas. They ordered their assistants to strip the apostles of their clothes, to flog them severely in public and then to throw them in prison. The jailer was told to watch the prisoners carefully.
4. The jailer thought that the prisoners had escaped. The punishment for him would have been death. So if he killed himself he would not have to suffer shame and distress before his execution.
5. There was probably more than one reason why the jailer gave Paul and Silas a meal in the middle of the night. The text says that he was filled with joy, because he had come to believe in God. So he expressed his happiness by feeding the apostles. Also his life had been changed as a result of his salvation and baptism. This new life expressed itself in good deeds, such as washing the apostles’ wounds and feeding them. Finally, the apostles probably were starving after all their sufferings, and they needed food.
6. Paul accused the magistrates of having treated him and Silas illegally. As Roman citizens they could not be beaten publicly. And to do so without a proper trial was a grave injustice. So they magistrates got really nervous when they heard this. Luke does not write why this information had not been revealed earlier – before Paul and Silas were flogged. Perhaps there was too much commotion the previous day, so nobody listened to Paul and Silas.

Think and discuss

1. Three people were touched by the gospel in a special way during the apostles’ ministry in Philippi. They were:

* Lydia (v 13-15): She was a Gentile woman who believed in the God of the Jews and who followed Jewish practices, but she had not converted to Judaism. She was a foreigner, an immigrant from the province of Asia. She was also a wealthy businesswoman who belonged to the upper class in Philippi and had a big house. She received the gospel message, was saved and baptized. She invited Paul and his companions to stay in her house, which became the first church in Philippi (v 40).
* A slave girl (v 16-19): Her name is not mentioned. As a female slave she belonged to the most oppressed group in society. She owned nothing, not even herself. In addition she had a “python” spirit. This Greek word refers to an evil spirit that could predict the future. Her owners made a lot of money through her fortune-telling. Paul cast out the evil spirit. Luke does not say what happened to her later. But most probably she accepted the gospel message, was saved and baptized and became one of the first members of the church in Philippi.
* A jailer (v 23-34): His name is not mentioned. He must have been a Roman citizen, a Gentile, and a retired soldier from the Roman army. As a subordinate official in the Roman administration of the city of Philippi, he belonged to the middle class in society. His life was totally changed as he met Paul and Silas in the prison. He and his family were saved and baptized, and they must have become some of the first members of the church in Philippi.

1. Luke does not say why the crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas. Perhaps the owners of the slave girl were prominent citizens of Philippi and had the support of the crowd, in the same way as politicians and other leaders in South India often have. Perhaps the people in Philippi were genuinely upset about the ministry of the apostles and wanted to put an end to it.
2. The other prisoners were listening to the apostles as they were praying and singing songs of worship. They must have been both surprised and curious: How could men who had been stripped of their clothes, flogged severely and been fastened in the stocks in the inner cell of the prison be so calm and worshipful? They were not like other men! Their God was not like other gods! Perhaps some of these other prisoners also listened when the apostles “spoke the word of the Lord” to the jailer and his family and accepted Jesus as their personal savior and became members of the church in Philippi.
3. Luke writes that the jailer and his whole family baptized that very night. This must mean at least two things:

* The word of the Lord that the apostles spoke included teaching about the importance of baptism.
* The apostles were willing to baptize a Gentile family as soon as they had accepted Jesus as their personal savior. They did not wait until a later time, when the family had matured in the faith. The apostles must have understood baptism as part of the salvation or conversion process.

1. Paul demanded that the magistrates themselves should come to the prison and apologize and release the apostles. Paul wanted to have their case cleared by the highest authorities in the city. This was probably important for the safety of the church in Philippi in the future.
2. When they had been released from prison, Paul and Silas went to Lydia’s house, where the believers – both men and women – were gathered. Perhaps they had been praying for the apostles throughout the night. So the apostles met all the believers who had come together and encouraged all of them – both men and women. The Greek word for brothers includes both brothers and sisters. Many modern English translations use the word believers.

([Go to Study 45](#Study45))

### Answers 45. Thessalonica, 17:1–10

Text questions

1. –
2. The three main points in Paul’s sermons to the Jews in Thessalonica were:
   * Christ suffered (and died)
   * Christ rose from the dead
   * Jesus is this Christ (this Messiah), who the Jews were expecting

Paul based his sermons on the Scriptures (the Old Testament)

1. As a result of Paul’s ministry during his first weeks in Thessalonica some Jews and God-fearing Greeks and several important women joined Paul and Silas. These people were saved and became the first members of the church.
2. The reason for the riot in Thessalonica was that the Jewish leaders were jealous of the apostles. They saw that many people left the synagogue fellowship and formed their own Christian church.
3. The apostles were accused of causing trouble everywhere and of high treason. This means that they were accused of following another king instead of the Roman emperor. The punishment for high treason was death.
4. The city officials (and the people who were present) got very upset when they heard these accusations. But they did not punish Jason and the others. Instead the let them go after bail had been posted. The officials probably realized that Jason and the others who had been caught were not the real leaders. It was Paul and Silas who should have been accused. See also the answer to Think and discuss 4 below.
5. Immediately after the turmoil, that same night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away from Thessalonica. So the apostles had to leave the ministry there very suddenly.

Think and discuss

D 1. When Paul first came to Thessalonica, he spoke in the synagogue three Sabbath days in a row. His sermons were based on the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. The reason for choosing this approach in his teaching and preaching was that the audience consisted of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. They knew the Old Testament texts well, they believed in the Old Testament prophecies, and they were waiting for the Messiah to come to fulfill these prophecies.

1. It is hard to know how long Paul and Silas stayed in Thessalonica. If we base our answer exclusively on this story in Acts 17, we may say that they only stayed there about three weeks. But if we also take Paul’s two letters to the Thessalonians into consideration, it is clear that they must have stayed there at least a few months. This means that Luke does not mention everything that happened in Thessalonica during Paul’s and Silas’s stay there. Instead he focuses on a few main events during a longer visit.
2. The first converts in Thessalonica were some of the Jews, a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women (it is interesting that the prominent women are mentioned separately). So even from the beginning a majority of the believers were of non-Jewish background. After the apostles’ ministry had moved from the synagogue, those who were added to the church were probably mostly Gentiles. This can be seen from 1 Thess 1:9, where Paul reminds his readers of how they turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God. So the church in Thessalonica was predominantly a Gentile church.
3. By posting bail Jason and the others were forced to guarantee that the church in Thessalonica would be a peaceful and quiet community. Otherwise their property would be confiscated and they themselves perhaps executed. So the authorities had a grip over the church through this. Also it would be difficult for the apostles to return to Thessalonica, as that could have caused unrest in the city. Perhaps this is what Paul was referring to when he wrote to the Thessalonians a few months later “For we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, wanted to, again and again – but Satan hindered us” (1 Thess 2:18).

([Go to Study 46](#Study46))

### Answers 46. Berea, 17:10–15

Text questions

1. –
2. When Paul and Silas arrived in Berea, they first went to the Jewish synagogue to preach the gospel there. That was their custom.
3. The Bereans listened eagerly to the gospel message. But they also wanted to make sure that Paul spoke the truth. So they diligently studied the Old Testaments texts every day to see if Paul really spoke the word of God.
4. As a result of Paul’s ministry in Berea, many people became believers – many Jews, many prominent Greek women and many Greek men.
5. The Jewish leaders in Thessalonica heard about the success of the gospel in Berea. So they came there to start trouble. So immediately the believers made sure that Paul left Berea.
6. Silas and Timothy did not leave Berea with Paul. But Paul wanted them to join him again as soon as possible.

Think and discuss

1. There were many similarities and between Paul’s ministries in Thessalonica and Berea, for example:
   * + Paul and Silas first went to the Jewish synagogue to preach the gospel.
     + The preaching of the gospel had success and many people believed. Among those who believed there were both Jews and Greeks. That prominent Greek women believed is mentioned specifically.
     + The Jews started trouble. They stirred up the crowd. But the apostles were not personally attacked by the mob.
     + Because of the trouble Paul had to leave suddenly. It was the local believers that made sure that he left.

But there are also differences, for example:

* + - More Jews seemed to have believed in Berea than in Thessalonica.
    - Only in Thessalonica jealousy is mentioned as the reason why the Jews started trouble.
    - In Thessalonica, Luke describes some kind of “court case scene” with a very serious allegation against the believers (high treason). Some of them even had to post bail, which both directly and indirectly hindered the future ministry.
    - In Thessalonica both Paul and Silas left when trouble started. In Berea only Paul had to leave, while Silas and Timothy stayed.

1. Luke does not write anything about why both Paul and Silas had to leave Thessalonica, while only Paul had to leave Berea. But if we read Luke’s account of Paul’s second missionary journey carefully, we may find the reason.

In the beginning of the journey Silas seems to have played a more prominent role in the ministry. He is mentioned seven times in connection with Philippi. And in Thessalonica it is said that the believers from the synagogue joined Paul and Silas, even if Paul is mentioned as the main preacher. But in Berea Paul seems to have played a more dominant role. A probable result of that was that the Jews (and the crowd) identified Paul as the main leader of the Christians. So Paul’s life was more in danger than Silas’s or Timothy’s – and he was the one who was immediately sent away. After this story, Silas no longer plays an active part in the ministry – at least not according to Luke’s account in Acts.

([Go to Study 47](#Study47))

### Answers 47. Athens, 17:16–34

Text questions

1. –
2. Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy to come to Athens and join him there. But that did not happen. Instead they met him later in Corinth.
3. Paul was greatly distressed when he saw all the temples, the idols and the idol-worshipers in Athens.
4. Paul ministered in Athens in three ways: He spoke in the synagogue to the Jews and God-fearers. He spoke to the people (including Epicurean and Stoic philosophers) in the marketplace. And he made a speech (or preached a sermon) to the council of the Areopagus, which consisted of philosophers.
5. Luke describes the Athenians very negatively: They spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.
6. Paul was taken to a meeting of the Areopagus because the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers thought that he was introducing a new religion and propagating new gods. The council of Areopagus was the guardian of religion and philosophy in Athens.
7. Instead of referring to Jesus by name in his sermon, Paul uses the expressions “a man appointed by God” and “God raised him from the dread” (v 31).
8. When Paul mentioned the resurrection (of the body), the listeners interrupted his sermon.
9. People reacted to Paul’s sermon in three different ways: Most of them thought this was nonsense. Some of them wanted to hear more about this at a later time. But a group of people believed and became his followers.

Think and discuss

1. Paul began his sermon to the council of the Areopagus by praising the religious enthusiasm of the Athenians. Many modern Pentecostal and Evangelical pastors in India would hesitate to praise Muslims or Hindus for their religious enthusiasm! What do you think?
2. For us it may be shocking that Paul quotes Greek non-Christian poets in his sermon. These quotations are about the Greek pagan god Zeus, and Paul uses them with reference to the only true God. We would probably not do that! Why not? Or would you? And we would probably not approve of what Paul did! Why not? Or would you?

This tells us two things about Paul:

* + He was a very learned man, and his learning was not limited to the Old Testament and other Jewish literature.
  + He was willing to use various methods to reach the people of his time, even highly educated Greek philosophers.

We should note that Paul’s sermon does not contain any direct quotation from the Old Testament. The reason was that his audience did not have any knowledge or understanding of the Old Testament. But he does refer to Old Testament concepts indirectly, without giving any quotations. These concepts were of a more general nature and could be understood by his audience.

1. Paul attacked the pagan faith of the Athenians in these ways:
   * + He indirectly said that they did not know God – in spite of all the temples and idols and altars.
     + He criticized their idolatry and said that God does not live in temples and that he cannot be represented by idols of gold, silver and stone.
     + He pointed out their ignorance and said that God no longer would have patience with this ignorance, but that he would judge and punish them through a person that he had appointed.
2. I personally think that Paul’s ministry in Athens was very successful. Perhaps there was not a big crowd that became believers. But large numbers is not the only indicator of success in the kingdom of God. A member of the Areopagus became a believer, and a woman who probably also was an influential person in the Athenian society. And a number of others. This was great success – especially when we consider the very tough spiritual conditions in Athens, and the highly educated and intellectual audience that Paul had. Paul also did not have any co-workers to help him in the ministry.

([Go to Study 48](#Study48))

### Answers 48.Corinth, 18:1–18

Text questions

1. –
2. Aquila and Pricilla were Jews from Pontus in Asia Minor. They came to Corinth from Rome, where they most probably accepted the gospel and became believers. They were expelled from Rome by emperor Claudius together with all other Jews (or Christians with Jewish background). When Paul came to Corinth, he stayed and worked with them. They were tentmakers (or leatherworkers).
3. The Jews started to oppose Paul’s ministry in the synagogue in Corinth and gave trouble to him. Paul reacted by turning his back on them. He said that he no longer had any responsibility for them. Then Paul said, “From now on I will go to the Gentiles” and moved his ministry to the house of Titius Justus next to the synagogue. Note that Paul used the same words in Pisidian Antioch (13:46).
4. Crispus was the synagogue ruler in Corinth. He and his family accepted the gospel and were baptized.
5. The Jews were upset with Paul ever since he had preached the gospel in the synagogue in Corinth. When Gallio became the Roman proconsul, they thought they had an opportunity to stop Paul permanently. So they brought him to Gallio and accused him of illegal worship of God.

Think and discuss

1. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul seems to have changed his ministry from part time preaching in the synagogue (he could only minister part time as he had to work to support himself) to full time preaching in the synagogue. The probable explanation for this difference is that Silas and Timothy brought money to Paul from the churches in Macedonia. So now he did not need to work for his living any more. But he was still ministering to Jews and God-fearers in the synagogue. Only later did he move to the house of Titius Justus to focus more on ministry to the Gentiles.
2. Luke does not openly state why Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision. But – in words that remind us of how God spoke to his people in the Old Testament – Jesus tells him not to be afraid and to keep on speaking the message and many people would turn to Christ. Paul probably needed this encouragement, as he had already faced strong opposition from the Jews and could expect even more problems in the future. He might have been tempted to leave Corinth, but God wanted him to stay and finish the work there.
3. Gallio did not accept the accusations from the Jews against Paul. Paul had not committed any crime. In Gallio’s opinion it was just a matter of internal arguments between two Jewish groups. The consequences of Gallio’s standpoint for the future of the ministry in Corinth and Achaia must have been very positive. The believers could carry on and intensify their work without having to fear any objections from the Roman authorities. The Christian faith was not illegal!
4. Sosthenes was the new synagogue ruler. He succeeded Crispus who had accepted Christ and joined the believers in the house of Titius Justus. Luke is not clear about who beat Sosthenes, or why he was beaten. “They” could refer to the Gentile mob in general or to the Jews. Most probably it refers to the Gentile mob, which took this opportunity to attack one of the leaders of the Jewish community. Gallio did not interfere with the beating, probably in order to avoid further communal violence.

([Go to Study 49](#Study49))

### Answers 49. Paul travels back to Antioch in Syria, 18:18–22

Text questions

1. –
2. Paul left Pricilla and Aquila in Ephesus, where Paul met them some time later during his third missionary journey.

Think and discuss

1. There could have been two reasons for Paul taking a temporary Nazirite vow:
   * Either he was thankful to God for his protection during the incident when the Jews accused him before Gallio.
   * Or he wanted to ask God for protection during the very dangerous voyage back to Antioch in Syria.
2. Luke does not say why Paul received such a warm welcome from the Jews in Ephesus (a sharp contrast to what happened in Corinth). But perhaps it had to do with his shaved head. Because of this the Jews in Ephesus would know that Paul was not against them or their Jewish cultural traditions. So they were willing to listen to his arguments about Jesus being the expected Jewish Messiah.

([Go to Study 50](#Study50))

### Answers 50. Apollos in Ephesus and Corinth, 18:23–28

Text questions

1. As Paul travelled through Galatia and Phrygia he visited the churches and strengthened the believers (v 23). He had founded churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (which all were in this region) during his first missionary journey, and he again visited them during his second missionary journey.
2. Priscilla and Aquila invited Apollos to their house to teach him more about the “way of God” (v 26). “The way of God” probably included Christian doctrine as well as an understanding of the church and of Christian life.
3. After Apollos had spent some time in Ephesus, he wanted to go to the Roman province of Achaia in Greece. There he helped the church in Corinth, the capital city of Achaia, in its ministry among the Jews (19:1).

Think and discuss

1. I think Paul did at least two things as he spent some time in Antioch (v 23) before he set out on his third missionary journey:
   * He gave his travel report about his second missionary journey to the church and its leaders.
   * He ministered in the church as one of the pastors, teachers and prophets.
2. We learn the following things about Apollos and his background from v 24–26:
   * + He was a diaspora Jew.
     + He was a native of Alexandria, the capital of the Roman province of Egypt and the second-most important city in the Roman empire.
     + He was a good public speaker, probably trained as an orator in the Hellenistic fashion, and he spoke with great enthusiasm.
     + He knew the Scriptures (the Old Testament) well.
     + He proclaimed the gospel about Jesus, so he must have been a believer.
     + But he had limited understanding about certain matters, for example about baptism. So he needed to learn more about the Christian faith and way of life.
3. Pricilla and Aquila explained the way of God more accurately to Apollos (v 26). Perhaps they taught him about the following matters:
   * + The outpouring of the Holy Spirit
     + The gospel is not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. There is no need for Gentiles to be circumcised.
     + The church is a fellowship of believers from all backgrounds.
     + Christian life means to walk in the Spirit, living a life under God’s grace – not depending on the legalism of the Jewish faith.
     + Christ will return to establish his Kingdom. There will be a new heaven and a new earth.
4. Apollos helped in the ministry in Corinth (the capital of the Roman province of Achaia) by forcefully debating with the Jews and proving from the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus really is the Messiah, whom the Jews had been eagerly waiting for.

Sharing and application

1. –
2. Instead of publicly challenging Apollos and his incorrect – or incomplete – teachings, Priscilla and Aquila invited him to their home. There they explained everything to him in a clear and non-threatening environment. So they dealt with the situation in a positive way:
   * + They did not embarrass Apollos publicly. As a result he was not discouraged. Instead he could continue his ministry even more efficiently.
     + They did not go behind his back and warn the listeners about “Apollos – this false teacher.” As a result Apollos’s ministry was not sabotaged. Instead they trained him to become an even better gospel worker.
     + They saw the potential in Apollos: his powerful way of speaking, his zeal for the ministry, his knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, and God’s call on his life. So they were willing to spend time with him and teach him more about Christian doctrine, the church and Christian life. They were even happy to write a letter of recommendation for him, as he left Ephesus to go to Corinth and help in the ministry there.

So we have much to learn from Priscilla and Aquila and the unselfish and wise way, in which they taught, helped and supported Apollos!

([Go to Study 51](#Study51))

### Answers 51. Paul in Ephesus, 19:1–20

Text questions

1. Before Paul placed his hands on the twelve men from Ephesus, he had baptized them in water (v 5).
2. When Paul placed his hands on the twelve men, the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied (v 6).
3. Paul discontinued his ministry in the synagogue in Ephesus because some of the synagogue members opposed him. So Paul took those who believed with him and moved to a lecture hall, where he continued to teach (v 9).
4. The result of Paul’s discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus was that the gospel spread to both Jews and Greeks all over the Roman province of Asia (v 10). This means that people must have come from towns and villages to listen to Paul, and then they returned home and preached the gospel. So Paul’s “Bible college” in Ephesus became a center for evangelizing the whole province.
5. The Jewish men in Ephesus who tried to cast out demons in the name of Jesus failed, because they were not true believers. So the evil spirits did not obey them. The seven sons of Sceva were even attacked and beaten by an evil spirit.
6. Many valuable books were burned in Ephesus by sorcerers who had accepted the gospel. They did not want have their books with magical formulas any longer, so they burned them publicly.

Think and discuss

1. This passage can be structured like this:
   * + Paul and the twelve men from Ephesus, v 1–7
     + Paul discussing and teaching in Ephesus, v 8–10
     + God performing miracles through Paul, v 11–12
     + The seven sons of Sceva, v 13–16
     + People, even sorcerers, turning to God in Ephesus; scrolls with magical formulas burned, v 17–19
     + Summary of the expansion of the ministry, v 20
2. I think that the twelve men that Paul met when he came to Ephesus were believers. There are two reasons for my standpoint:
   * Luke calls them “disciples” (v 1). He only uses this word about people who believe in Jesus.
   * Paul asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So Paul obviously considered them to be believers.

But the story also shows that their understanding of Jesus and the Christian faith was very limited and that Paul questioned the kind of faith they had.

John Stott and some other Bible scholars are of a different opinion: They think that the twelve from Ephesus were only disciples of John’s and not “believers in Jesus,” even if they claimed to be that.

1. The twelve men had already been baptized with the “baptism of John the Baptist”. But John’s baptism was not a “Christian baptism.” It was only a preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Those baptized by John had repented from their old life and made themselves ready to receive the Messiah. So Paul must have explained to the twelve men from Ephesus that – now that Jesus the Messiah had come – they had not only to believe in him but also to accept his forgiveness and be baptized in (or into) his name, burying their old life and rising up from the water to a new life with Christ. So Paul did not “re-baptize” these men. They were now baptized as Christian believers for the first time.
2. I do not agree with non-Pentecostal Bible scholars (such as F.F. Bruce and John Stott) who claim that the story about the Holy Spirit coming on the twelve men from Ephesus proves that “baptism with the Holy Spirit” is not a “second experience” but something you get when you accept Jesus as your personal savior.

I think that the role of the Holy Spirit in this story is best understood in this way:

* + - When Paul came to Ephesus he met twelve men who claimed to be believers. Luke even calls them “disciples.” So we have to accept that they – at least to some extent – were believers in Jesus. But Paul had doubts about them. Perhaps he did not see any evidence of the Holy Spirit working in their lives. So he asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” I think that we should understand his question like this: “Are you really born again believers? Have you truly accepted Jesus as your personal savior? Are you really born by the Spirit? Your lives don’t show that the Holy Spirit is really living in you!” Their answer (“We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit”) revealed to Paul their total confusion. So he asks them a second question, “Then what baptism did you receive?” I think that we should understand Paul’s question like this: “You call yourselves believers and disciples! But have you been baptized? And did you receive any instruction about Jesus and his salvation before you were baptized?” They answered him, “Of course, we are baptized! We have been baptized with John the Baptist’s baptism!” Then Paul taught them about Jesus and his salvation. As a result they were born again, they were “born by the Spirit,” and Paul baptized them into Jesus, his salvation and his Kingdom (“into the Name of the Lord Jesus”). This was the “first experience” that the twelve men from Ephesus had with the Holy Spirit. Now they had “received the Holy Spirit” into their lives. Now they were truly saved.
    - Then Paul placed his hands on the twelve men. He prayed that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, that they would be clothed with the power from on high, that they would receive the anointing of Holy Spirit for service. And the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. This was the “second experience” that the twelve men from Ephesus had with the Holy Spirit. Now they had received (the power of) the Holy Spirit into their lives. They had been baptized with the Spirit.
    - But I also think that the twelve men had a “third experience” with the Holy Spirit: the experience of walking in the Spirit and seeing the fruit of the Holy Spirit flow through their lives. This aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in this story, but it is something that should be evidence in the lives of all true believers!

1. In this text (v 5) Paul baptized the twelve men “into the name of the Lord Jesus.” As a matter of fact, Luke only uses the shorter baptism formula in the book of Acts (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). The longer formula is only used once in the New Testament – by Jesus in the great commission (Matt 28:19). So does this support the “Jesus only” view? Most probably both formulas were used during New Testament times. I suggest that we follow Jesus’ words and baptize people “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

The main problem with the “Jesus Only Movement” (“Oneness Pentecostals” or “The United Pentecostal Church”) is not the shorter baptism formula, but the theological doctrine behind their use of it. They reject the main Christian doctrine of God as “Three Persons in One” and claim that God is only “One Person,” whose correct and entire name is “Jesus.” This is a heresy! Their practice of re-baptizing persons who have previously been baptized with the longer formula is also wrong.

1. Acts 19:11–12 (which is about Paul’s ministry in Ephesus) is strikingly similar to Acts 5:15–16 (which is about Peter’ ministry in Jerusalem). I think that Luke has purposely written like this to emphasize the parallelism between the ministries of these two great apostles. For a more detailed comparison between Peter and Paul see the reference article The Structure of Acts. ([Go to the article](#TheStructureOfActs))
2. Verse 20 concludes the fifth picture that Luke paints of the glorious expansion of the gospel.
   * + Luke started painting this fifth picture in Acts 16:6.
     + In this fifth picture Luke has told his readers about how the gospel was carried further into the Gentile world, westward into Europe. In his sixth and last picture, Luke will describe the events that took Paul and the gospel to Rome.

([Go to Unit 6](#Unit6))

Unit 6 answers

### Answers 52. Riot in Ephesus, 19:21–41

Text questions

1. –
2. Demetrius was a silversmith in Ephesus. He was probably the chairman for the silversmiths’ association for that year.
3. The people got furious as Demetrius convinced them that Paul and the other believers were bringing disgrace to their goddess Artemis by preaching the gospel. That is why they shouted, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesian!”
4. Paul wanted to go to the theatre to defend himself before the crowd, but his friends (both the believers and some important Gentile officials) persuaded him not to take such a risk.

Think and discuss

1. These were the arguments that Demetrius used when he accused Paul:
   * + Paul was turning people away from worshiping Artemis by saying that idols are not gods at all.
     + This would bring disrespect to both to Artemis and to her temple, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and an important tourist and pilgrimage centre.
     + Then people would stop buying silver shrines and silver statues of Artemis – and the silversmiths and the other craftsmen would lose their profitable business.
2. I think that Demetrius’s accusations were justified on all three points:
   * + When people accept the gospel they turn away from idol worship. Instead they worship the only true God. Idols are really no gods at all! Paul must have claimed this.
     + When people accept the gospel they no longer have and respect for their old religious practices, idols or temples.
     + When people no longer follow their old religious practices they will not spend money on pilgrimages and buying idols.

But even if Demetrius was speaking the truth, he was wrong in making the crowd upset and thereby starting a riot.

1. The city clerk used the following arguments to make the crowd quiet:
   * + Everybody knows that Ephesus is the city with the world-famous Artemis temple and wonderful statue of the goddess. Nobody is denying that fact.
     + So there is no reason for the crowd to riot and create problems.
     + Paul and his followers are not temple robbers or blasphemers of our goddess.
     + Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen can file a case in court if they have any complaint against anybody.
2. I think that the city clerk’s arguments were more or less correct:
   * + His first two arguments were correct.
     + His third argument avoided the accusation that Paul had spoken against idol worship. It was correct that Paul hadn’t robbed any temple. And I don’t think that Paul had blasphemed the goddess Artemis, even if he must have said in a more general way that idols are not real gods, and that there is only one true and living God.
     + His last argument was very wise. Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia and a very important city in the Roman empire. Rioting was not acceptable. There were courts to deal with complaints and accusations against wrongdoers.
3. Paul plays only a minor roll in this story. He is mentioned as the cause for the rioting. But he does not get involved in the happenings. When he plans to go to the theatre to face the crowd there, he is persuaded not to do so by his friends, as the situation is too dangerous. I think Paul does the right thing. God has given his servants common sense, and it would have been stupid of Paul to try to calm down the rioting mob in Ephesus.

([Go to Study 53](#Study53))

### Answers 53. Macedonia and Greece, 20:1–6

Text questions

1. –
2. As Paul travelled through Macedonia he visited the churches that he had planted a few years earlier during his second missionary journey. He spoke to the believers, strengthening and encouraging them. Compare Acts 14:21–23, where Paul and Barnabas at the end of the first missionary journey revisited the churches they had established in order to strengthen and encourage the believers and to appoint elders in each church.
3. Paul had originally planned to sail straight from Corinth to Syria (back to his home church in Antioch). But the Jews had made a plot against him. So he decided to travel over land back through Macedonia (v 3).
4. Luke’s name is not mentioned at all in this passage. But he travelled by ship with Paul from Philippi (or rather Neapolis) to Troas (v 6, note the “we”).

Think and discuss

1. Paul probably wrote Galatians abd 1 and Corinthians from Ephesus.
2. Paul probably wrote 2 Corintians during his journey through Macedonia and Romans during his winter stay in Corinth.
3. Paul’s revisits during his third missionary journey:

* According to Acts 16–17, Paul ministered at these three places in Macedonia during his second missionary journey: Philippi (16:12–40), Thessalonica (17:1–9) and Berea (17:10–14).
* According to Acts 17–18, Paul ministered at these two places in Achaia during his second missionary journey: Athens (17:15–18:1) and Corinth (18:1–18).

1. The person is Titus. During Paul’s third missionary journey Titus was sent to Corinth to solve the growing problems there (1 Cor 1-6; 2 Cor 2:13; 7:5-16) and to find financial help for the poor believers in the Jerusalem church (2 Cor 8).

([Go to Study 54](#Study54))

### Answers 54. Troas, 20:7–12

Text questions

1. –
2. The church in Troas must have celebrated at least this Sunday service in the evening, as the lamps were lit and Paul spoke until midnight. Perhaps the believers had to go to work during the day and were free only in the evenings.
3. Eutychus fell asleep as Paul was speaking. He fell out of the third story window and died when he hit the ground.

Think and discuss

1. The contradiction between Luke’s statement that Eutychus was picked up dead (v 9) and Paul’s statement that he was alive (v 10) does not have to be a contradiction at all. Eutychus died as he hit the ground and came back to life as Paul put his arms around him. So both Luke and Paul are correct in their statements.
2. Luke draws several parallels between Peter’s ministry and Paul’s ministry in Acts. In this story Paul raised a young man from the dead at Troas. In 9:40 Peter raised a woman called Tabitha from the dead at Joppa. So both Peter and Paul raised at least one person from the dead during their ministry. For a more detailed comparison between Peter and Paul see the reference article The Structure of Acts. ([Go to this article](#TheStructureOfActs))
3. We can learn at least the following things from this story about a Sunday service during New Testament times:

* The believers had their services on Sundays. This day was also called the Lord’s Day, because Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday. The Jews celebrated Saturday as their holiday.
* The believers gathered at a suitable time of the day. In Troas they had an evening service, probably because the believers could not get away from work during the day.
* A service had two important components (in addition to songs and prayers, which Luke does not mention in this story):
  + - A sermon, which in this story was a very long one. The Greek word used in verse 9 indicates that Paul was not only preaching to the people. But he also discussed and debated with them.
    - The Lord’s Supper (or the Breaking of Bread), which seems to have been celebrated each week in the early church.
* The believers did not have any church buildings. At Troas they seemed to have gathered in a home situated on the third floor.

([Go to Study 55](#Study55))

### Answers 55. Paul and the Ephesian elders, 20:13–38

Text questions

1. –
2. Paul decided not to visit Ephesus this time, because he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem with the collection for the poor believers in the church there. If possible, he wanted to be in Jerusalem before the Day of Pentecost (v 16).
3. In Miletus Paul met the elders/overseers/shepherds/pastors from the church in Ephesus (v 17, 28).
4. The Holy Spirit warned Paul in every city that he would be facing prison and hardships in Jerusalem (v 23).
5. Paul’s attitude to money and clothes in a few points:
   1. He did not covet anyone’s silver or gold or clothing (v 33).
   2. He supplied his own needs by the work of his hands (v 34). So by working as a tentmaker he earned enough money to buy food and clothes and other necessities.
   3. He even supplied all the needs of his co-workers by the work of his hands (v 34).
   4. He was an example to the believers in Ephesus to work hard and to remember Jesus’ words that it is a greater blessing to give than to receive (v 35).

Think and discuss

1. These are the points in Paul’s testimony in v 18–21, 24, 27, 33–36:
   1. He had lived an open and transparent life (v 18).
   2. He had served the Lord in great humility and with tears (v 19).
   3. He had been severely tested by enemies (persecution and plots against his life) (v 19).
   4. He had been bold in teaching God’s word (v 20, 26, 31) and in presenting the gospel (v 21, 24).
   5. He had taken every opportunity to teach God’s word (v 20) and to present the gospel (v 21).
   6. He had maintained the right priorities (v 24):
      * Focusing on the ministry and not on his own needs
      * Running to finish his race and striving to complete his task
   7. He had not asked for money or clothes from the believers (v 33).
   8. He had supported himself and his co-workers and helped the poor and needy (v 34–35).
2. These are the points in Paul’s address to the Ephesian pastors in v 28–31:
   1. They should watch over themselves (v 28).
   2. They should also keep watch over the whole flock (that is all the members of the church) (v 28) and be on guard (v 31).
   3. The Holy Spirit had called them to be overseers of the flock (that is the church) (v 28).
   4. They should be shepherds (that is pastors) over the church (v 28).
   5. It is God’s church (v 28), so the church does not belong to the pastors.
   6. “Savage wolves” (that is false, dangerous and selfish teachers) would come from outside of the church circle and attack the flock (the believers) (v 29).
   7. But “savage wolves” (that is false, dangerous and selfish teachers) would also come from within the church leadership and confuse the believers and split the church (v 30).
3. As Paul was heading towards Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit had forewarned him (probably through prophecies) in city after city that prison and hardships would face him there (v 23). God the Holy Spirit knows the future, and in this case he had revealed the future to Paul. Paul felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem (v 22). God the Holy Spirit had called Paul to service. This calling on Paul’s life was stronger than any danger or persecution that he could face.

So the same Holy Spirit who forewarned Paul about difficulties and dangers also compelled him to carry on the work that God had called him to do in Jerusalem. There is no contradiction in this, but it shows us what a great servant of God Paul was!

([Go to Study 56](#Study56))

### Answers 56. Journey to Jerusalem, 21:1–16

Text questions

1. –
2. Paul and his companions stayed seven days in Tyre. These things happened there: (v 3–6):
   * + The ship they were sailing with had to unload its cargo (and then probably load new cargo). This might have taken seven days. Then their “time was up”.
     + Paul and his companions stayed with the believers, who had a prophetic message for Paul.
     + The believers accompanied the travelers to the beach, where they prayed together before Paul and his friends boarded the ship.
3. Some of the believers from Caesarea accompanied Paul and his travel companions (including Luke) on the two-day journey to Jerusalem (v 16).

Think and discuss

1. The simple explanation for the difference between Paul’s hurry in Asia in 20:16 and his lack of hurry when he had reached Syria (Tyre) in 21:4 and Judea (Caesarea) in 21:10 is this:
   * + It was difficult for Paul to know how long time it would take for him to travel from Asia to Syria. Perhaps he would need to wait several days for a ship that could accommodate him and his travel companions. Perhaps the ship would have to wait several days for suitable winds. Perhaps they would encounter storms and other problems on the long voyage across the Mediterranean. These uncertainties would explain Paul’s hurry in 20:16.
     + But once Paul had reached Tyre in Syria, he knew that he would have plenty of time to get to Jerusalem before Pentecost. This knowledge would explain Paul’s lack of hurry in 21:4 and 10.
2. When we compare 20:22 and 21:4 there seems to be a contradiction in what the Holy Spirit tells Paul to do about going to Jerusalem. In 20:22 Paul testifies that he is compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. In 21:4 Luke writes that the believers in Tyre urged Paul through the Spirit not to go on to Jerusalem.

This is how we should handle the apparent contradiction:

* + Luke has written both these texts, so we cannot expect to find any real contradiction between these two verses.
  + The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, so we cannot expect to find any real contradiction between these two verses.
  + So there cannot be any real contradiction between these to verses. But how do we solve the apparent contradiction? I agree with John Stott that we should understand 21:4 as Luke’s way of summarizing two statements into one sentence:
    - The Holy Spirit warned Paul through the believers about what would happen to him in Jerusalem (he would be imprisoned, compare 20:23).
    - When the believers delivered this prediction to Paul, they themselves urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem (compare 21:12).

([Go to Study 57](#Study57))

### Answers 57. Paul arrives at Jerusalem, 21:17–26

Text questions

1. Paul reported to James (the brother of Jesus) and all the elders about his work among the Gentiles.
2. The leaders of the Jerusalem church praised God when they heard what God had done among the Gentiles through Paul’s ministry.
3. We learn two things about the Jewish converts in Jerusalem in v 20:
   * + They were very many. The Greek word actually means tens of thousand, perhaps including all Judea.
     + They were all very zealous for the Law of Moses. This means that they still kept all the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament and that they were still following Jewish customs.
4. Paul went to the temple the day after James had talked to him. He took the four men with him, and they all purified themselves. Then Paul set the date for the end of the purification period and arranged for the necessary sacrifices.

Think and discuss

1. I think that there were at least two reasons why the church in Jerusalem received Paul and his travel companions so gladly (v 17):
   * The church in Jerusalem was really happy to see them. It recognized them as fellow-believers and members of the universal church.
   * The church in Jerusalem was really grateful for the money for the poor and suffering believers in Jerusalem and Judea that Paul and his companions brought with them from the Gentile churches. Note that Paul is referring to this collection later in this speech before governor Felix (24:17).
2. The Jewish converts accused Paul of telling the diaspora Jews not to follow the Law of Moses and that it was not necessary circumcise their boys and to follow other Jewish customs (v 21).

There was no real truth in their accusation:

* + 1. Paul clearly taught that the moral laws of the Old Testament were still valid – for both Jewish and Gentile converts. So all believers should live holy lives pleasing to a Holy God.
    2. Paul clearly taught that salvation was not through keeping the Law of Moses. There is only one way to salvation – by God’s grace in Jesus Christ. This also applied to Jewish converts.
    3. Paul clearly taught that there was no need for Gentile converts to be circumcised and to keep the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament.
    4. Paul’s teaching that no salvation could be found through circumcision could have been misunderstood as “Jews should not be circumcised and keep other Jewish customs”. But Paul never prohibited Jewish converts to continue with circumcision or to follow other Jewish customs.
    5. Paul himself may not have kept all the ceremonial laws (for example food laws) that the more traditional Jews in Judea followed. This was probably the reason why Paul had to undergo purification ceremonies before he could enter the temple in Jerusalem.

1. James asked Paul to join the four men in their purification rites so that everybody would know that the reports about Paul were not true and that he did not oppose Jewish customs.
2. Paul agreed to do as James asked him, as he was anxious to pacify the Jewish Christian community. He was willing to undergo the purification rites and to pay a lot of money for the purification sacrifices in order to avoid hurting the feelings of the Jewish Christians.

([Go to Study 58](#Study58))

### Answers 58. Paul is arrested, 21:27–36

Text questions

1. Those who stirred up the crowd and seized Paul at the temple were Jews from the Roman province of Asia, where Ephesus was the capital (27).
2. The Roman commander arrested Paul as he was being beaten and killed by the Jewish mob. Then he tried to find our what Paul had done. But he could not get any clear answer from the screaming crowd, so he had Paul taken to the barracks (the Tower of Antonia, which was connected to the temple area by two flights of steps), where the Roman troops were stationed.

Think and discuss

1. The Jews from Asia had come to Jerusalem in connection with the Feast of Pentecost.
2. There were two accusations against Paul:
   * Paul had spoken everywhere against the Jewsa, the law of Moses, and the Jerusalem temple (v 28).
   * Paul had brought a Gentile (Trophimus from Ephesus) into the temple and thereby defiled it (v 29).
3. The two accusations against Paul:
   * The first accusation was a misunderstanding. Paul (and Stephen before him) had only repeated what Jesus had taught about himself: Jesus was the fulfilment of the temple, the people and the law. Paul had not spoken against these things. He had just explained the true meaning of them.
   * The second accusation was a lie.

([Go to Study 59](#Study59))

### Answers 59. Paul defends himself, 21:37–22:21

Text questions

1. When Paul asked for permission to speak to the crowd, the commander was surprised, because Paul spoke in the Greek language (v 37).
2. The commander had thought that Paul was an Egyptian rebel and terrorist – who did not know Greek (v 38).
3. This is how Paul described Ananias (v 12):
   * + Ananias was a devout observer of the law. This means that he kept all the Jewish traditions.
     + Ananias was highly respected by all the Jews in Damascus. This means that he was a trustworthy man.
4. The Lord (referring to the Lord Jesus) told Paul in the Jerusalem temple to leave Jerusalem immediately as the people there would not accept Paul’s testimony about Jesus.

Think and discuss

1. Paul gave this information about his family background to the Roman commander:
   * + He was a Jew. This information told the commander that Paul had a right to visit the temple.
     + He was from Tarsus in Cilicia and a citizen of that famous city. Now the commander knew that Paul was a man of importance in the capital city of a Roman province. The commander already knew that Paul could speak Greek.

This is the information about his family background that Paul gave to the crowd:

* + - He was a Jew. Same as above!
    - He was from Tarsus. So Paul was a Jew from the diaspora.
    - But he was brought up in Jerusalem and trained under Gamaliel. Now the Jewish crowd knew that Paul had a background in the Pharisee party, which followed every detail of the law.
    - He was as zealous for God as any Jew. This told the crowd that Paul had not been a lukewarm Pharisee, but a fanatical supporter of Jewish faith and culture.

The mentioning of Paul’s citizenship in Tarsus to the commander emphasized Paul’s position in the Greek and Roman society. The mentioning of his religious training under Gamaliel and his zeal for God emphasized Paul’s position in the Jewish society.

1. When we give our personal testimonies, we usually adjust what we say (and how we say it) to our audience. We can see that Paul adapted his testimony to the Jewish crowd in the temple courtyard in this way:
   * + He spoke about his Jewish background and his religious schooling under Gamaliel (v 3).
     + He particularly mentioned his zeal for God and how he had been a persecutor of the “followers of this Way,” and he was authorized by the Sanhedrin (v 3–4).
     + He pointed out that his conversion was not his own initiative but the result of divine revelation (v 6–8).
     + He described Ananias as a devout Jew and a man of good reputation (v 12).
     + He specifically mentioned the temple as the place where the Lord gave him a vision and told him to leave Jerusalem (v 17–18).
2. The two stories in Acts about Paul’s first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion (see v 17–18 and 9:26–30) are very different:
   * + The story in chapter 9 is much more detailed. It focuses on Paul’s relationship to the Jerusalem church: How he tried to join the believers but they were afraid of him. How Barnabas took care of him and introduced him to the apostles and told them about Paul’s dramatic conversion and how he had fearlessly shared the gospel in Damascus. How Paul spoke boldly in the name of the Lord in different places in Jerusalem, particularly debating with the Greek-speaking Jews. How the Jews tried to kill him, and how the believers sent Paul away from Jerusalem in order to save his life. Nothing is mentioned about the vision in the temple.
     + In chapter 22 Paul focuses on his vision in the temple and on his “debate” with the Lord about his ministry – should he stay in Jerusalem and preach to the Jews there, or or should he go to the Gentiles far away?
     + The reason why these two accounts of the same period in Paul’s life are so different is that they serve different purposes. In Acts 9, Luke tells Paul’s story in the context of his acceptance by the Jerusalem church and its leadership. In Acts 22, Paul gives his testimony in the context of a furious Jewish mob questioning his Jewish loyalties.

([Go to Study 60](#Study60))

### Answers 60. Paul a citizen of Rome, 22:22–29

Text questions

1. The commander ordered Paul to be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the Jewish crowd was shouting at Paul. The commander was Greek, and he probably did not understand what Paul had said in Aramaic to the crowd.
2. As soon as the centurion found that Paul was a Roman citizen, he went with that information to the commander.

Think and discuss

1. The Jewish crowd were furious when they heard Paul’s testimony, and they shouted, “Rid the earth of this man, for he is not fit to live!” It was the word “Gentiles” that triggered their strong reaction. It was offensive to them that Paul claimed that he had been given a divine commission to offer salvation to the Gentiles without they first submitting to the Law of Moses. Now the Jews had proof that there was truth in the accusation against Paul: He had taught against the Jews, the Lay of Moses, and the Jerusalem temple (21:28)!
2. Paul did not inform the commander right away that he was a Roman citizen. Luke does not tell us why. You may remember that the same thing happened in Philippi (16:35–39).

Perhaps Paul did not want to take advantage of the fact that he was a Roman citizen – except when there was an absolute need to do so.

([Go to Study 61](#Study61))

### Answers 61. Paul and the Sanhedrin, 22:30–23:11

Text questions

1. The commander brought Paul before the chief priest and all the Sanhedrin in order to find out exactly what the Jews accused Paul of (v 30). This was his third attempt to find out the truth about Paul. The first attempt was when he asked the crowd, and some people shouted one thing and other people shouted something else (21:33–34). The second attempt was when he planned to get the truth out of Paul by flogging and questioning him (22:24). But this attempt also failed, when Paul informed the officer in charge that he was a Roman citizen.
2. Luke seems to suggest that Paul purposely caused the fight between the Pharisees and the Sadducees by claiming to be a Pharisee and mentioning his hope in the resurrection of the dead (v 6).
3. Jesus told Paul in the vision the following night to take courage. He also said that Paul would proclaim the gospel in Rome (v 11). Paul’s ministry was not over!

Think and discuss

1. What probably made Ananias so angry was that he interpreted Paul’s words about having served God with a good conscience his whole life (both before and after his conversion) as blasphemy (or at least arrogance). So he ordered the bystanders to strike Paul on the mouth!
2. I first thought that it was very strange of Paul to call himself a Pharisee (v 6), now that he had become a believer. But on the other hand, what Paul said was true:
   * + He came from a family of Pharisees. He was himself educated in the Pharisaic tradition and he had been a very zealous Pharisee before his conversion. So it was not wrong of him to say, “I am a Pharisee.” I have heard believers in Karnataka say, “I am a Lingayat!” even if there is not caste system in the Kingdom of God! It also reminds me of some Indian believers that I have heard say, “I am not a Christian, I am a Hindu” – meaning that they were saved from a Hindu family background – which sounds very strange to an outsider!
     + The doctrine of resurrection was very central to Paul’s faith, so he could truthfully say that he shared with the Pharisees the truth and hope of resurrection. Luke’s report in this passage is, of course, only a summary of what was said. Paul must have shared his testimony about his conversion – meeting the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus (this we can conclude from what the Pharisees said in v 9). The whole Christian faith hinges on the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Jesus – and as a consequence the hope and the truth of the bodily resurrection of the believers. So what Paul said (“I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead,” v 6) was very true.
3. I think that Paul must have felt really depressed, when the commander took him back to the barracks. He had experienced a lot of violence during the past two days. The Jews were really upset with him and wanted him dead. He must be wondering if he had any chance to escape from Jerusalem alive. And what would happen with his plan to go to Rome? So Jesus’ words to Paul in the vision must have been a great comfort to him!

([Go to Study 62](#Study62))

### Answers 62. A plot against Paul’s life, 23:12–22

Text questions

1. The plot to kill Paul was hatched by a group of over 40 Jewish fanatics (v 13). Then they went to the chief priests and elders (perhaps the Sadducee group of the Sanhedrin) and got them involved in the execution of the plot (v 14–15).
2. Their plot was like this:
   * + The chief priests and the elders would request the Roman commander to have Paul taken to them for further questioning (v 15).
     + Somewhere along the narrow lanes between the Roman barracks (at the northwest corner of the temple area) and the hall of the Sanhedrin (at the southwest corner of the temple area) the conspirators would wait in ambush, attack the group of Romans soldiers that guarded Paul, and kill Paul (v 16).
3. The plot was going to be carried out the following day (v 20).

Think and discuss

1. Luke does not write how Paul’s nephew heard about the plot, so we can only guess.
   * + One possibility is that the conspirators met in Paul’s sister’s house, and that the young man overheard their plotting. Perhaps his father was one of the men who took the oath. We just don’t know.
     + It is less likely that the young man heard about the plot through the chief priests and the elders. We know that Paul’s family had links with the Pharisees. The Jewish leaders that the conspirators included in their plot were probably Sadducees, as the high priest was a Sadducee and as the Sadducees had stronger reason to kill Paul than the Pharisees.
2. –
3. There were probably two reasons why the commander told Paul’s nephew not to tell anyone about his report:
   * The young man’s life would be in danger, if the conspirators found out that he had disclosed their secret plan.
   * The attempt to move Paul away from Jerusalem during the night (see v 23) would be put at risk.

([Go to Study 63](#Study63))

### Answers 63. Paul moved to Caesarea, 23:23–35

Text questions

1. This is the size of the military unit that took Paul away from Jerusalem during the night according to Luke’s text:
   * + Two centurions
     + Two hundred soldiers
     + Seventy horsemen
     + Two hundred spearmen
2. Claudius Lysias refers to himself at least nine times in the original Greek text.
3. This is what you learn about Felix and his headquarters from the comments:
   * + About Felix: slave background, his brother favorite minister under emperor Claudius, his brother arranged for him to be appointed as governor of Judea in AD 52, a cruel and immoral person, seduced and married queen Drusilla who was partly Jewish, learnt about Jewish life and customs from her.
     + About his headquarters: Caesarea (on the Mediterranean Sea) was his capital, Herod’s palace was his office and residence. For more details about Caesarea see 8:40.

Think and discuss

1. I think the Roman commander sent such a large military unit with Paul, because he wanted to be absolutely sure that Paul would be safe from the more than 40 Jewish conspirators who had taken an oath to kill him.

Not all the 472 men went with Paul the whole way to Caesarea. When they arrived at Antipatris, all the soldiers and the spearmen returned to Jerusalem. Only the 70 horsemen continued the journey with Paul to Caesarea (v 31–33). By that time the Romans could be sure that the conspirators had been left far behind. In addition, it was now daylight and the road from Antipatris to Caesarea was through open country.

1. A comparison between Claudius Lysias’s letter (v 25–30) and the actual events in 21:30–23:22 shows that he has made two main adaptions of the truth (but otherwise he has given a reasonably accurate presentation of the case):
   * + He writes that he discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen before he rescued him from the mob. In reality he only got to know this fact later.
     + He mentions nothing about arresting Paul, putting him in chains and arranging for him to be tortured.
     + In his letter he also includes the information that he had told Paul’s Jewish accusers to bring their case to governor Felix. Luke will tell us about this in the following chapter.

The reason why Claudius Lysias wrote his letter like this must have been to show himself in the most favorable light to the Roman governor in Caesarea, who was his superior and a very powerful person.

He also wanted to give the governor the impression that he had treated Paul, the Roman citizen, in the best possible way.

([Go to Study 64](#Study64))

### Answers 64. Paul before Felix, 24:1–27

Text questions

1. These were the three charges against Paul that Tertullus presented to governor Felix:

* Paul was a troublemaker (the Greek word means “a plague, a pest”). This accusation was serious, as it implied agitation against the Roman empire, which could be labelled as treason against the emperor.
* Paul was a ringleader of the Nazarene sect. This accusation implied that Paul was a leader of a new religion that was not recognized by the Roman empire and thereby was illegal.
* Paul had tried to desecrate the temple. This was a dangerous accusation, because the Romans allowed the Jewish leaders to deal with matters concerning the temple themselves, and desecration of the temple carried death sentence according to Jewish law.

1. In his defense speech Paul mentioned these reasons for his visit to Jerusalem:
   * + He had gone there to worship (v 11).
     + He had gone there to deliver gifts for the poor among his people (v 17).
     + He had gone there to present offerings (v 17).
2. The reason Felix gave for postponing his decision on Paul’s case was that he first wanted to meet Lysias, the Roman commander in Jerusalem (v 22).

Think and discuss

1. This is the structure of Paul’s defense speech:
2. Paul’s opening: It is short and truthful, flatter is avoided (v 10).
3. Paul gives his reason for visiting Jerusalem (which happened only twelve days earlier) – to worship (v 10). Thereby he had actually answered all three accusations:
   * + The charge of treason: He had come to worship – not to start a revolt!
     + The charge of being a leader for an illegal religion: His worship was in the Jewish tradition – not something new and illegal!
     + The charge of desecrating the temple: He had come to worship – not to desecrate!
4. Then Paul elaborates on the first accusation: His accusers had not found him arguing with anybody, or stirring up a crowd (v 12).
5. Next Paul elaborates on his worship: He worships the God of his forefathers, as a follower of the Way. His accusers wrongly call this a sect. But Paul – just like they do – believes in the Old Testament scriptures and in the resurrection (v 14–15).
6. Then Paul elaborates on his reasons for visiting Jerusalem: to bring money and to present offerings (v 17). Thereby he has again answered two of the accusations:
   * + In the temple he was ceremonially clean – no desecration (v 18)!
     + There was no crowd with Paul, and no disturbance - no rioting (v 18)!
7. Paul’s conclusions:
   * + If the Jews from Asia had anything against him, they should have been present.
     + His present accusers (Ananias and the elders) should report the result of the Sanhedrin hearings: Had the Sanhedrin found Paul guilty of any crime? Thereby Paul implied: No, they hadn’t! The only issue had been the resurrection of the dead.
8. I think there were three reasons why Felix kept Paul in prison for two years:

* He and his wife Drusilla seemed to be interested in hearing Paul explain the Christian faith – although they were afraid of his words about righteousness, self-control and judgment. Their own lives were unrighteous and lacked self-control. So they were afraid of God’s future judgment.
* He was expecting bribes. Paul had brought money to Jerusalem from the Gentile churches, and Felix might have thought that Paul had access to more money.
* He wanted to avoid confrontation with the Jewish leaders. They would keep quiet as long as Felix didn’t release Paul.

([Go to Study 65](#Study65))

### Answers 65. Paul before Festus, 25:1–12

Text questions

1. As soon as Festus reached Jerusalem the chief priests and Jewish leaders (that is the Sanhedrin) requested him to have Paul transferred from Caesarea to Jerusalem. The reason for this request was that they wanted to ambush and kill Paul as he was taken from Caesarea to Jerusalem (v 2–3).
2. The trial against Paul took place in Caesarea as soon as governor Festus had returned there from Jerusalem (v 6). This was a secular trial before the Roman governor who represented the Roman emperor.
3. Festus wanted to please the Jewish leaders, so he asked Paul if he would be willing to be tried in Jerusalem (v 9).

Think and discuss

1. Festus had taken charge as governor of a predominantly Jewish province. So he must have felt the need to meet the Jewish religious leaders as soon as possible. They were in Jerusalem. So Festus went to Jerusalem to meet the Jewish leaders there only three days after he had arrived in Caesarea and taken charge of the province of Judea.
2. As soon as Festus reached Jerusalem the Jewish leaders presented their charges against Paul. From this fact we can learn that they hadn’t forgotten about Paul’s case although two years had passed since the previous trial during the rule of Felix. The Jewish leaders must have considered Paul – and the Christian faith that he represented – a very serious threat against the Jewish establishment.
3. There was probably more than one reason why Paul refused to accept Festus’s suggestion that he be tried in Jerusalem:
   * + Paul must have realized the danger in connection with moving him from Caesarea to Jerusalem. He may have heard about the plan to ambush and kill him.
     + Paul must have suspected that he might not get a fair trial in Jerusalem with the strong presence of the Jewish leaders there. Festus would also have been tempted to hand Paul over to be judged by the Sanhedrin in a religious trial, or at least to have used the Sanhedrin as his legal advisers.
     + Paul was aware that he was already standing before a Roman civil court in Caesarea. And as a Roman citizen he had the right to refuse to be taken to a lower local court anywhere else.
4. In this story we get the following picture of governor Festus:
   * + Festus wanted to get to know the situation in his province as soon as possible. That was why he went to Jerusalem to meet the Jewish leaders there (v 1–2).
     + Festus wanted to please the Jewish leaders. That was why he was willing to reopen the case against Paul and to allow the Jews to press charges against Paul (4–5). That was also why he suggested to Paul that his case be moved to a lower court in Jerusalem (v 9). And that was also why he was unwilling to have Paul acquitted, even when the charges against him could not be proved.
     + Festus wanted Paul to have a fair trial, but he didn’t have the courage to have Paul acquitted, which would have offended the Jews. Instead he took the easy way out: He accepted Paul’s appeal to the emperor (v 12).

([Go to Study 66](#Study66))

### Answers 66. Festus and king Agrippa, 25:13–22

Text questions

1. King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to pay their respects to governor Festus (v 13).
2. This is how Festus presented Paul’s case to king Agrippa:
   * + When Festus came to Jerusalem the Jewish leaders brought charges against Paul and asked that he be condemned (v 15).
     + Then Festus told them that he had to follow the Roman legal practices: An accused person could not be handed over until he had heard the charges against him and presented his defense (v 16).
     + Festus had been very prompt in handling Paul’s case: As soon as he had returned to Caesarea, he convened the court (v 17).
     + Paul’s case surprised Festus: The Jews had no criminal charges against Paul. It was only a matter of religious dispute (v 18–19).
     + Festus was not sure of how to proceed with Paul’s case, so he asked Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and face trial on the charges there (v 20).
     + But then Paul decided to appeal to the emperor, so Festus was now keeping him in custody until he could send him to Rome (v 21).
3. When Agrippa had heard Festus’s presentation of Paul’s case, he became curious about Paul and wanted to listen to him himself.

Think and discuss

1. These are the main differences between Luke’s account in the previous passage (v 1–12) and Festus’s presentation to Agrippa of Paul’s case (v 14–21):
   * + Festus makes sure that Agrippa realizes that he is careful about following Roman legal practices (v 16). Luke doesn’t mention this point (compare v 4). Of course, Festus knew that Agrippa was a close personal friend of the Roman emperor and that he could be accused of disloyalty to the Roman empire if he made mistakes.
     + Festus states that the Jews had no criminal charges against Paul. Instead he gives Agrippa the impression that the conflict between the Jewish leaders and Paul only concerns details about the Jewish religion (v 18–19). Luke writes that the Jews had many serious charges against Paul (v 7). This is also evident from Paul’s defense speech: He had done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews, the temple, or the emperor (v 8).
     + Festus asks Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial on these charges, referring to controversies over minor religious details (v 20). Luke’s account shows that the charges against Paul were very serious and that he could be sentenced to death if found guilty (v 11). Paul’s appeal to the emperor only makes sense if the charges against him were serious. Perhaps this discrepancy in Festus’s account was the reason why Agrippa got so curious about Paul’s case that he wanted to meet him personally (v 22).
2. I think there were two main reasons why Festus presented Paul’s case to Agrippa in this way:
   * + Festus wanted to make sure that Agrippa realized that he had handled Paul’s case in an efficient and correct way. He had followed Roman legal procedures, and the only reason why Paul was still in custody was that he had appealed to the emperor and that Festus was now waiting for a suitable ship that could take Paul to Rome.
     + Festus did not want Agrippa to question him about why he had not released Paul, even when there was no substance in the charges against him (compare v 7). Paul was innocent and should have been released, but Festus was not willing to face the displeasure of the Jewish leaders (compare v 9). Instead Festus claimed that it was a matter of minor religious controversies that should have been settled in Jerusalem. But Paul, a Roman citizen, had refused to be moved to Jerusalem. Instead he had appealed to the emperor.

If we, however, look at the next story (v 24–27), we find that Festus is modifying his story one more time: He had saved Paul’s life against the murderous accusations of the whole Jewish community. Paul had done nothing deserving death. But because of his appeal to the emperor, Festus has decided to send him to Rome. Now he is requesting Agrippa to help him write a suitable letter to the emperor explaining Paul’s case.

([Go to Study 67](#Study67))

### Answers 67. Paul before Agrippa, 25:23–26:32

Text questions

1. Festus introduced Paul to the audience as a man whom all the Jews (both in Jerusalem and Caesarea) wanted to have killed, but who according to Festus didn’t deserve the death sentence.
2. In his speech Paul addressed king Agrippa (v 2). But later he also turns to all those who were present (v 8).
3. Paul travelled to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests (v 12). Perhaps he was leading an official delegation from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.
4. Paul’s commission is described like this in v 17–18:
   * + Paul would be sent to both his own people and to the Gentiles (v 17).
     + He would open their eyes (v 18).
     + He would turn them from darkness to light (v 18).
     + He would turn them from the power of Satan to God – and as a result they would receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified in Christ (v 18).
5. By “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision” (v 19) Paul meant that he really had fulfilled the commission as described in v 17–18: He had preached the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles.
6. Governor Festus interrupted Paul’s speech, as he thought that Paul was speaking nonsense. So Festus announced in a loud voice that Paul’s studies had made him mad. Not only Paul’s talk of a resurrection, but his suggestion that Jesus, whom Festus described as a dead man (25:19), should bring light and life to others was, he thought, the product of a disturbed mind.
7. Agrippa’s conclusion was that Paul was innocent of the charges against him, and that he could have been set free if he had not appealed to the emperor (v 31–32).

Think and discuss

1. There seems that have been two reasons why Festus arranged a hearing of Paul’s case before king Agrippa:
   * Agrippa was curious about Paul and wanted to hear him speak (25: 22).
   * Festus was confused about Paul’s case and didn’t know what to write to the emperor about it, so he was hoping to get some help from Agrippa, who was considered an expert on Jewish matters (25: 20, 26, 27).

These were the circumstances around Paul’s hearing: It was a very pompous and festive occasion with all the important people in Caesarea present (25:23). But it was not an official trial, as Festus had tried Paul’s case earlier and reached the decision that he should be sent to Rome for a hearing before the emperor (25:10–12, 21, 25).

1. Paul motioned with his hand before he began his speech in order to get everybody’s attention. This was the custom of orators in those days.
2. Paul’s speech in v 2–23 can be structured like this:
   * 1. Introductory compliment to king Agrippa, v 2–3
     2. Paul’s background in Judaism and his hope in God’s promises, v 4–7
     3. Paul’s question to the audience about God’s ability to raise the dead, v 8
     4. Paul the persecutor, v 9–11
     5. Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus, v 12–14
     6. Paul’s call to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, v 15–18
     7. Paul’s obedience to the call, v 19–21
     8. Paul’s arrest and his present situation, v 21–23
3. Paul’s purpose in stating he had lived for a long time as a Pharisee, after the strictest sect of the Jewish religion was to establish his credentials as a Jew (which were clearly of the highest standards) and then to suggest that there was no discontinuity between his Jewish upbringing and his present belief. The hope introduced by his Jewish background had been fulfilled by his present Christian faith. It was a strange irony, therefore, that he should now be on trial (by “trial” Paul refers to the whole process over the past two years) for the very hope that he shared with the Jews.
4. There are several minor differences between Paul’s testimonies in 22:3–16 and 26:2–23 (where for example nothing is said about Paul being blinded). But I want to mention only three important differences – and point out that Paul (and Luke) had very good reasons for making these differences:
   * Ananias and how God used him is not mentioned in chapter 26. The reason for this is that in chapter 22 Paul gives his testimony before a Jewish crowd, so he wants to emphasize the role of Ananias , a devout man according to the law, highly respected by all the Jews who lived in Damascus (22:12). There is no need to include this information in chapter 26, where Paul has another kind of audience.
   * “Gentiles” are not mentioned in chapter 22 in connection with Paul’s conversion, only later when Jesus speaks to him in the Jerusalem temple. But in chapter 26 “Gentiles” are mentioned three times (v 17, 20, 23) in the context of 7 verses. The reason for this is that Paul is speaking before the topmost leaders of the Roman province of Judea (even Agrippa’s kingship was totally dependent on the Roman authorities), and he wants to emphasize that Jesus had called him to preach the gospel in the Gentile world.
   * Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem is only mentioned in chapter 26. The reason for this is, of course, that Paul’s arrest was the situation of chapter 22, so there was not need for him to mention it there. But in chapter 26, Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem forms the background to why he is now – two years later – standing before king Agrippa.
5. Agrippa’s words to Paul, “Do you believe that you can so quickly convince me to become a Christian?” (v 28) can be understood in different ways:
   * + Agrippa is trying to hide his embarrassment by by asking this superficial and arrogant rhetorical question.
     + Agrippa was using gentle irony, pointing out to Paul that it was not so simple a matter to become a Christian even if one did believe the prophets.
     + Agrippa was expressing his orthodox Jewish (and Sadducean) stand-point and coldly rejecting Paul’s gospel message.

I think the first point makes most sense in the context of the story. Agrippa was troubled by Paul’s speech, and he felt that the message was touching him in a personal and uncomfortable way. So he tried to get out of the embarrassing situation by asking this question – instead of giving an answer to Paul’s question if he believed the prophets.

([Go to Study 68](#Study68))

### Answers 68. Paul sails for Rome, 27:1–12

Text questions

1. –
2. A Roman centurion called Julius was in charge of taking Paul and the other prisoners to Rome. He could decide how they should travel and which route they should take. A group of soldiers assisted him.
3. When they reached Sidon, Paul was allowed to visit the believers there. They were able to provide for his needs – perhaps food and other gifts for the journey. Paul was, of course, escorted by a soldier.
4. The travelers changed to another ship when they came to Myra in Lycia. There, Julius found a grain-ship from Alexandria bound directly for Rome.

Think and discuss

1. In verse 9 Luke writes that sailing had already become dangerous. The reason was that the navigational season (which lasted from May/June and ended in September/October) was nearing its end. Soon the winter storms would make all sailing across the Mediterranean impossible or at least extremely dangerous.
2. The Roman centurion Julius was in charge of the prisoners and he decided how the party should travel to Rome. When they arrived in Crete at the beginning of October, he had to make the decision whether to stay there over winter or to continue the journey. He decided to follow the advice of the pilot and the owner of the ship instead of listening to Paul’s advice. Perhaps Julius thought that they had more sailing experience than Paul, who was just a Bible teacher. Also, as a Gentile, Julius probably didn’t understand that Paul was a man of God who could have received some divine revelation.

([Go to Study 69](#Study69))

### Answers 69. The storm, 27:13–26

Text questions

1. When they came to the small island of Cauda they found some lee, they were able to secure the lifeboat and hoist it aboard. They also passed ropes under the ship to hold it together in the storm.
2. Paul could be certain that all the people on the ship would be saved, because an angel had told him during the night that God had graciously given Paul the lives of all the people on board.

Think and discuss

1. The navigational implication of the information that Luke gives in v 20 (“neither sun nor stars shone on us for many days and no small storm continued raging”) would be that they had no way of knowing where they were. Only when the sailors could see the sun or the stars, did they have any means of estimating their position or even of determining with any certainty their direction (for they had no compasses in those days). As one day stretched into another all hope of deliverance was taken away from them. Passengers and crew ended up in a state of hopelessness.
2. There seems to be a discrepancy between what Paul said in 27:10 and what the angel told to Paul in 27:24: When the ship was anchored at Fair Havens, Paul warned the sailors and the soldiers that their voyage would be disastrous even to their own lives (27:10). Now, as they had been tossed around by the storm for many days and everybody thinks that they are going to die, an angel appears to Paul with the information that all their lives would be saved.

How should we explain this discrepancy? I think that Paul is speaking from his own personal experience of many dangerous sea voyages in 27:10 (the books of Acts records 11 sea voyages that Paul undertook before this journey): Considering the kind of ship they were travelling with, and the time of year with all the winter storms, and the long distance of open sea that they had to cross to get from Crete to Italy, Paul could “see” (he realized and understood) that their voyage would end in disaster and that men would be lost. But 27:24 shows that Paul was wrong. God had other plans for the lives of the men on board the ship: They would all be saved.

([Go to Study 70](#Study70))

### Answers 70. The shipwreck, 27:27–44

Text questions

1. –
2. The storm lasted fourteen days. On the fourteenth night they were still being driven across the sea (v 27), and they hadn’t eaten since the storm started soon after they left Fair Havens fourteen days earlier (v 33).
3. The sailors lowered the ship’s boat into the sea, as they wanted to escape from the ship. They pretended that they were going to use the lifeboat to lower some more anchors, but they were actually planning to desert the soldiers and the prisoners (v 30).
4. Before Paul ate the bread he gave thanks to God in front of all the people (v 35).
5. They threw the grain into the sea, because they wanted to make the ship lighter. This would make it possible for them to take the ship closer to the shore.
6. All the people on the ship were saved. Those who could swim swam ashore. The others got there on planks and other pieces of the ship.

Think and discuss

1. The soldiers cut the rope that held the lifeboat and let it drift away, because Paul had told them that unless the sailors stayed on board they couldn’t be saved. The sailors were planning to escape from the sinking boat in the lifeboat, but with the lifeboat gone they couldn’t leave the ship (v 30–31).
2. The centurion told the soldiers not to kill the prisoners, because he wanted to save Paul’s life (v 43). This shows that the centurion was willing to take a great personal risk by trusting Paul and the other prisoners. If they escaped, his commanding officer could have him executed.

([Go to Study 71](#Study71))

### Answers 71. On the island of Malta, 28:1–10

Text questions

1. –
2. The islanders thought that Paul was a murderer because a poisonous snake caught on to his hand as he was putting wood on the fire. They thought that the godess of justice would not allow him to escape alive – even if he had survived the shipwreck.
3. But the islanders later changed their mind and said that Paul was a god when he didn’t swell up and fall down dead.
4. Publius’s father was suffering from fever and dysentery. This has been a common disease on Malta throughout the centuries, and it is called Malta fever.

Think and discuss

1. Luke does not write that Paul was bitten by the snake, only that it fastened itself on his hand. It was the islanders that assumed that Paul had been bitten. So we don’t know if Paul was bitten or not. Consequently, the story about Paul and the snake can be understood in three different ways:
   * Paul was bitten, and God miraculously protected (or healed) him from the deadly effects of the poison.
   * God miraculously protected Paul, so that the snake never bit him.
   * Paul wasn’t bitten by the snake. Sometimes people are bitten by snakes, at other times they are not. That’s how it is in life.

I don’t think that there is any way for us to know what really happened, as Luke hasn’t bothered to tell us. Luke’s point in the story is to record how – and why – the islanders changed their mind about Paul. Perhaps it was this change of mind that made the islanders show the shipwrecked travelers the way to Publius, an important person on the island.

1. We learn this about Publius in this story:
   * + His name is Roman. So most probably he wasn’t a native of Malta, but had settled there from Italy.
     + He was the leading manof the island. So most probably he lived on Malta in an official capacity, appointed by the Roman administration.
     + He was able to entertain a very large group of people for three days. So he must have been a wealthy man. But he was also a generous and hospitable man.
     + His father was seriously ill, suffering from Malta fever. But through the power of God Paul healed him.
2. The islanders treated the shipwrecked visitors very well after Paul had healed the rest of the sick on the island. Luke writes that they were honored in many ways. Also they provided them with everything they needed (probably food and clothes) when they were ready to continue their journey three months later.

([Go to Study 72](#Study72))

### Answers 72. Paul arrives in Rome, 28:11–16

Text questions

1. –
2. Syracuse was situated on the island of Sicily. Rhegium, Puteoli, Forum of Appius, Three Taverns and Rome were situated on the Italian peninsula.
3. When Paul came to Puteoli he was allowed to spend one week with the believers there. It must have been a great encouragement for Paul, Luke and Aristarchus to be able to participate in at least one Sunday worship service. And it must have been exciting for the local believers to hear Paul preach the word of God to them.
4. The total distance that Paul had to travel from Malta to Rome was 570 km.

Think and discuss

1. Paul and his fellow travelers had to spend three months on Malta, as it was impossible to travel by ship during the winter season. Malta is an island and the only way you could travel to and from Malta in those days was by ship. So Julius and his soldiers had to wait till the middle of February, before they could continue their journey to Rome.
2. Luke does not mention how the Christians in Rome found out that Paul had reached the last stretch on his journey to Rome. There are different possibilities:
   * + Paul could have sent a letter from Puteoli with Julius’s messenger (see comment to v 13).
     + Julius’s messenger could have met some Christian friend (or somebody who had contacts with the church) in Rome and told him that Paul had arrived at Puteoli and would soon continue his journey to Rome.
     + Paul could have sent his own messenger from Puteoli.
     + Some travelling believer who had seen Paul in Puteoli could have reported to his friends in Rome that Paul was on his way.

Anyhow, the Christian leaders in Rome would have been very excited to get the news that Paul was on his way. So they sent groups of believers to meet him at the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns. When Paul saw the Roman Christians he thanked God and was encouraged.

([Go to Study 73](#Study73))

### Answers 73. Paul preaches in Rome, 28:17–31

Text questions

1. Paul told the Jewish leaders in Rome that he had been compelled to appeal to the emperor, because the Jews in Judea had objected when the Roman governors realized that he was innocent of the charges and wanted to release him (v 18–19).
2. When Paul received the Jewish leaders in Rome, he was staying in his own rented accommodation (v 16, 30), but he had a soldier who guarded him (v 16). His right hand was chained to the soldier (v 20, and historical information about prisoners in Rome).
3. As usual, the Jews reacted to Paul’s presentation of the gospel in two opposite ways. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe (v 24).
4. Paul told the Jews that the Gentiles would listen to the message about God’s salvation (v 28).
5. In verse 30 it says that Paul presented the gospel to all who came to see him during his two-year imprisonment in Rome. “All” must refer to both Jews and Gentiles.

Think and discuss

1. This passage can be structured in different ways. Here is one way of doing it:
   * + Paul explains his case to the leaders of the Jews in Rome, v 17–22
     + Paul presents the gospel to a larger number of Jews in Rome, v 23–24
     + Paul turns to the Gentiles, v 25–29
     + Paul preaches the gospel during his two-year imprisonment in Rome, boldly and without hinderance, v 30–31
2. Paul’s reason for calling the leaders of the Jews was to explain why he had been sent as a prisoner to Rome. He must have been eager to present his side of the story to them as soon as possible and before they received any false information about him from the Jewish leaders in Judea.

Paul had three points:

* + - He had done nothing against his own people (the Jews) and their customs (v 17).
    - He had been arrested and handed over to the Romans, who had found him innocent (v 17–18).
    - He had been forced to appeal to the emperor, when the Jews objected to his release (v 19).

So, Paul had done nothing against the Jews, the Romans had no charges against him, and the reason why he was in chains was the hope of Israel, the Messiah (v 20).

1. I think Paul did at least these six things during his two-year imprisonment in Rome:
   * 1. He presented the gospel to all who came to visit him, both Jews and Gentiles (v 30).
     2. He worked with his own hands as a tentmaker to support himself (compare 1 Cor 4:12; Eph 4:28; Acts 18:3; 20:34).
     3. He prayed for the churches and for their life and ministry (see Eph 1:16–18; Phil 1:3–11; Col 1:3; 9–14)
     4. He prayed to God and spent much time thinking about theological and ethical issues.
     5. He wrote letters to churches reflecting his concern for them and sharing his theological understanding about the sovereignty and lordship of Jesus and his salvation, and about Christian living: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. He also wrote a letter to an individual: Philemon.
     6. He met visitors from churches and shared his concern for the churches with them: Tychicus (Eph 6:21, Col 4:7–8), Epaphroditus (Phil 4:18), Epaphras (Col 4:12).

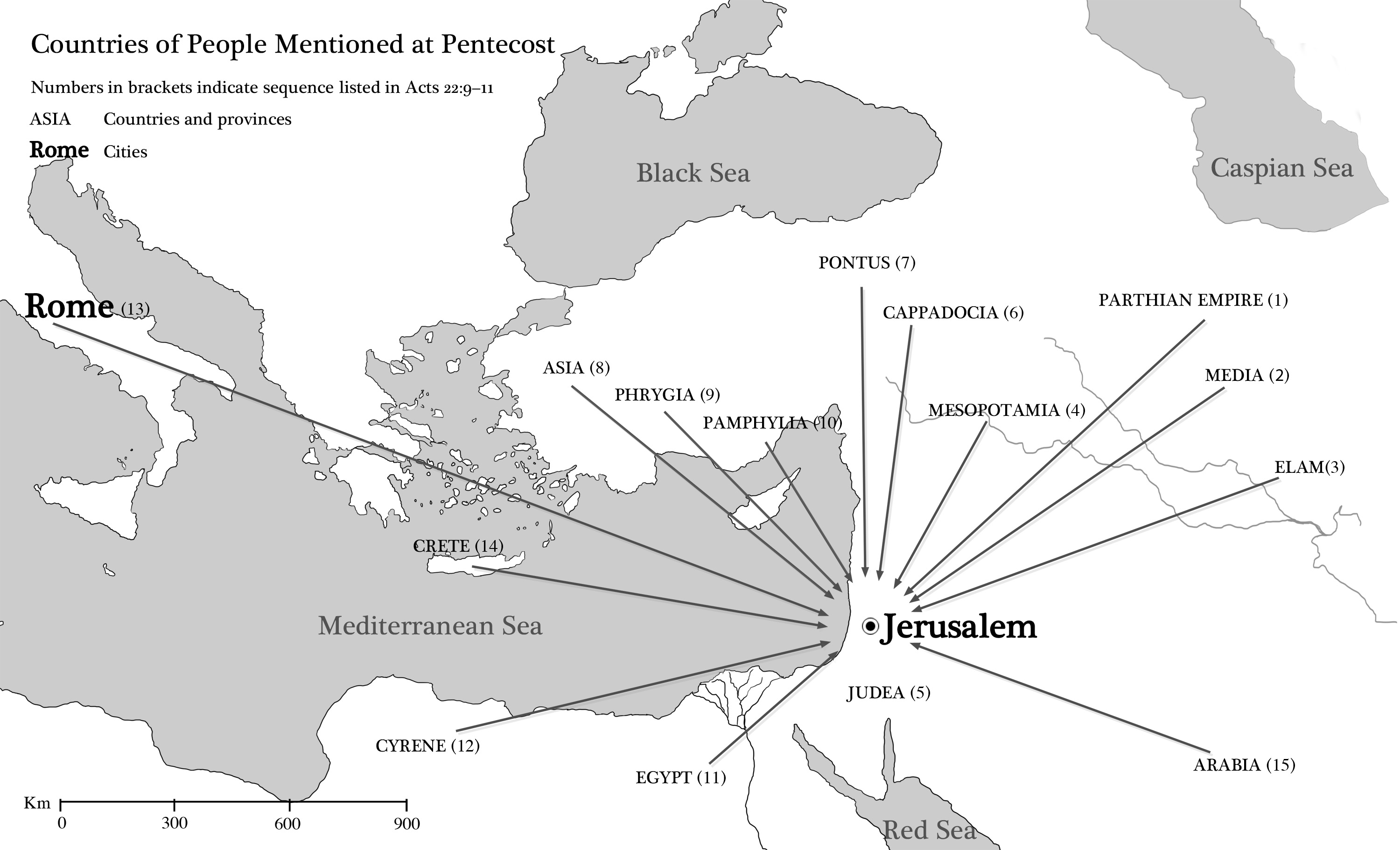
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Reference: Maps and articles

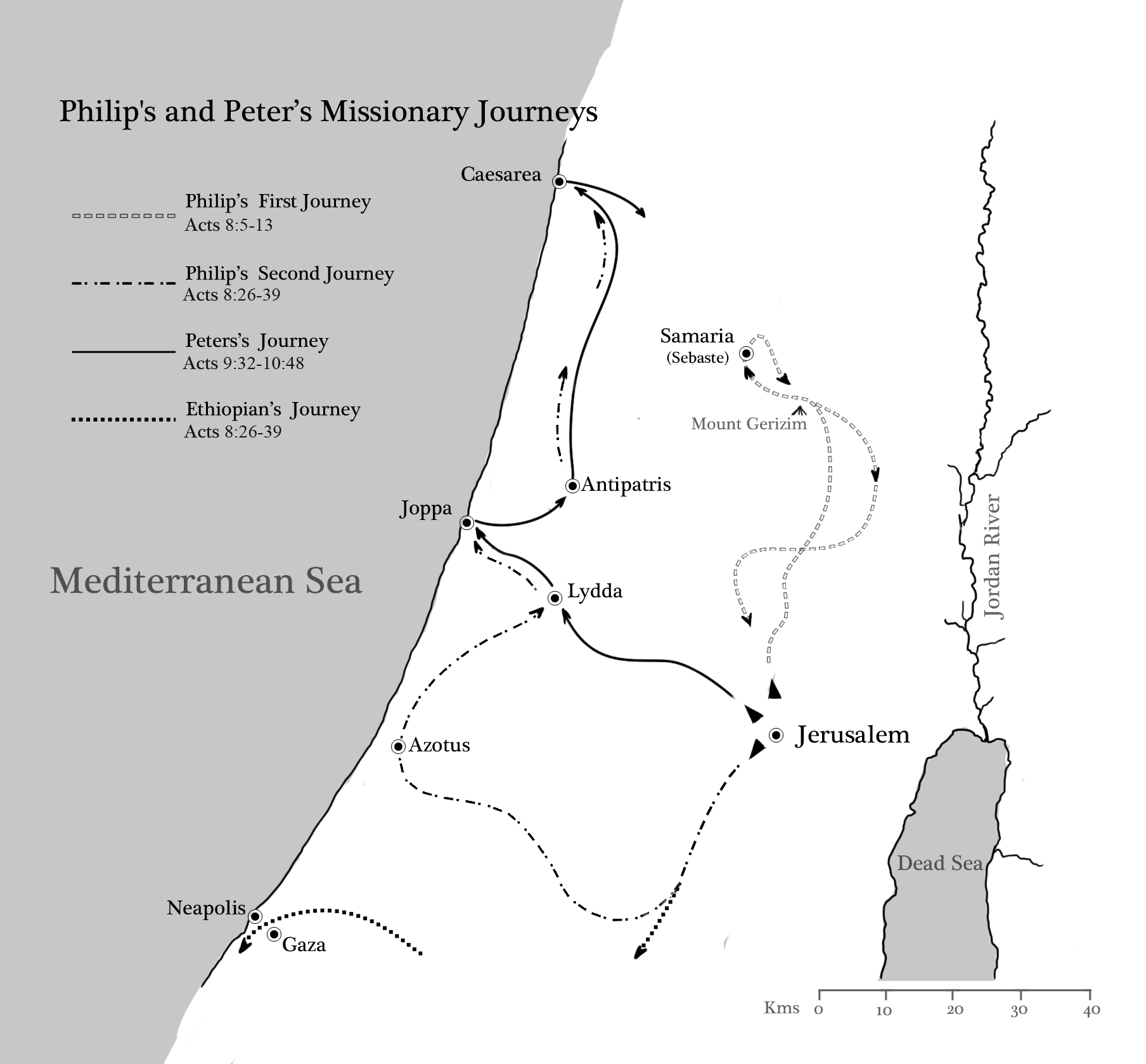
### Map 1: The Roman province of Judaea

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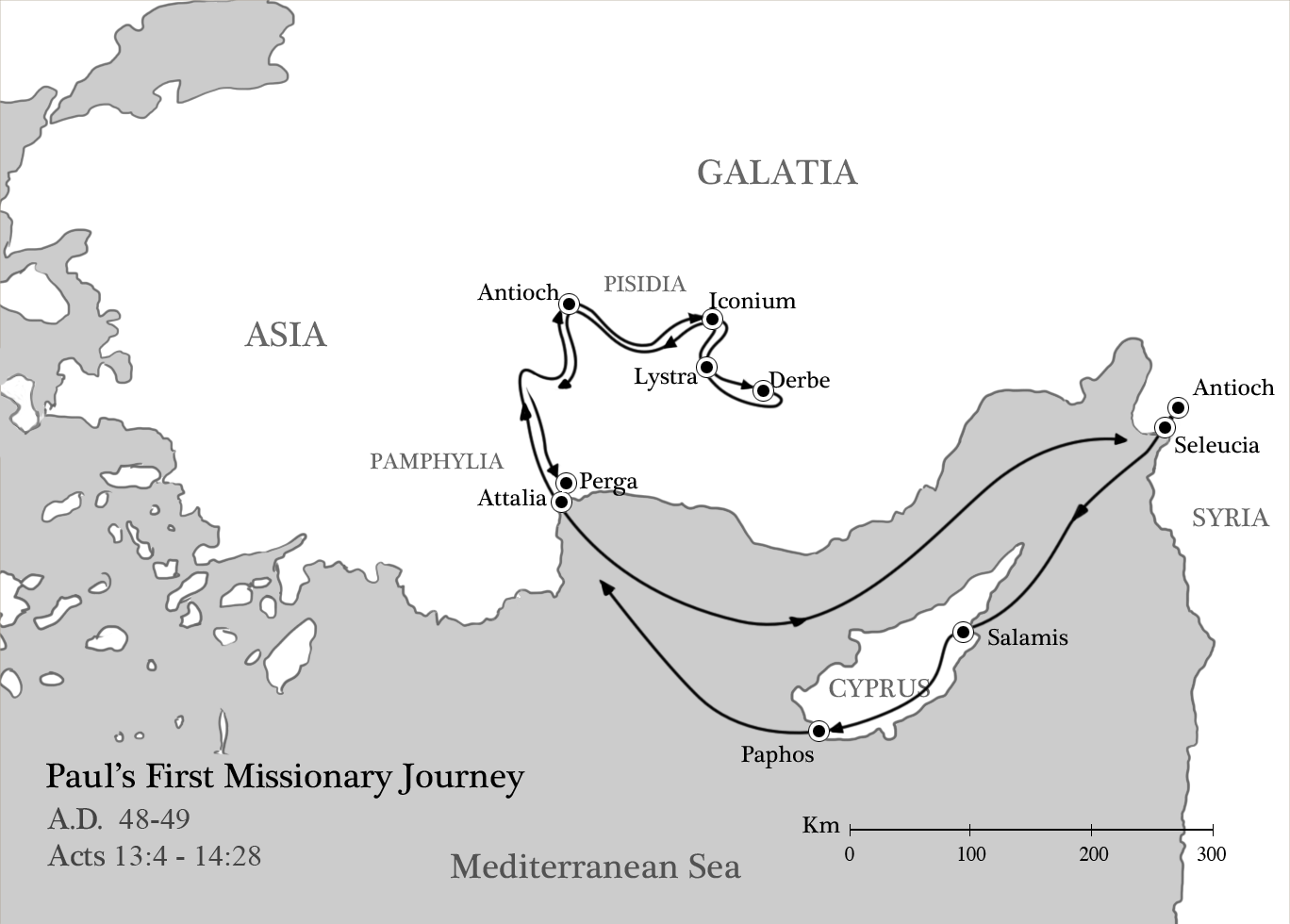
### Map 2: Countries of people at Pentecost

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### Map 3: Philip's and Peter's missionary journeys

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### Map 4: Paul's first missionary journey

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### Map 5: Paul's second missionary journey

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### Map 6: Paul's third missionary journey

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark16)) 

### Map 7: Paul's journey to Rome

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### Luke, the author of Acts

The author of Acts does not mention his own name anywhere in the book. He just begins by referring to himself as I:

The first book I wrote, Theophilus, concerned all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which he was received up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen (1:1–2).

Here we see that Acts is the second volume of a larger literary work addressed to a man called Theophilus, and that the first volume is about Jesus, his life and teaching. This first volume is the gospel of Luke, which starts like this:

Since many have undertaken to set in order an account concerning those matters that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write to you in order, most excellent Theophilus; that you might know the certainty concerning the things in which you were instructed (Luke 1:1–4).

A problem for us is that even in the gospel of Luke, the author does not mention his name. We must also understand that the title that the third gospel has in our Bibles – where we of course find the name Luke – is not part of the original text.

So how do we know that it was Luke who wrote these two New Testament books? Well, we cannot know for sure. But there are three good reasons why we can be fairly certain that Luke is the author of these two New Testament books.

1. Early church traditions linked Luke to these two books. This is the reason why Luke’s gospel bears Luke’s name in our Bibles. These traditions are very old and seem to be reliable.
2. The book of Acts has four passages (16:10–17; 20:5-15; 21:1–18 and 27:1–28:16) where the author uses “we,” which indicates that he was travelling with Paul on these occasions. This means that the author must be a friend, a fellow-traveler and a co-worker of Paul’s. It also means that he is a person who joined Paul at Troas (16:10) during the second missionary journey. The only person that seems to fit this description is Luke.
3. The expression in Acts 1:19 (“in their language”) reveals that the author of Acts was a non-Jew. Paul mentions “my dear doctor Luke” in his letter to the Colossians (4:14 ), and the context of that passage indicates that Luke was a Gentile (Col 4:11). This means that Luke was with Paul during his imprisonment in Rome when Paul wrote Colossians and his other so called prison letters. We also know that he had travelled with Paul from Caesarea to Rome (Acts 27:1–28:16). When we combine these references, we find that Luke is the only Gentile co-worker of Paul’s who could have written the book of Acts.

It is clear from the opening verses in Luke’s gospel that Luke was not himself an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus. Instead he had interviewed eyewitnesses and collected detailed information, which he used in his gospel.

So when did Luke have the opportunity to collect the information that he included in his two books? Acts reveals that he had plenty of time to do this:

* + - He had travelled with Paul to Jerusalem at the end of the third missionary journey (21:17–18).
    - In Jerusalem Paul was arrested and then taken to Caesarea, the capital of the Roman province of Judea, where he was kept in prison for two years. During those two years Luke would have been free to travel around in Judea and Samaria to gather information and to interview the apostles, Mary the mother of Jesus, Philip the evangelist and other key persons.
    - He might also have paid a visit to Rome to present Paul's case to influen-tial people there – and there made friends with Theophilus. This would explain why he addressed this books to the “most excellent Theo-philus” (Luk 1:3).
    - We know that Luke was back in Palestine in time to accompany Paul when he transferred as a prisoner from Caesarea to Rome (27:1).

Luke is the only Gentile author in the New Testament. He has a Greek name, and his command of the Greek language is excellent. He presents his material - in the gospel as well as in Acts – from a Gentile perspective. The main theme of his two books is the expansion of the good news about Jesus Christ beyond the boundaries of the Jewish nation. A suitable subtitle of Luke's gospel would be “Jesus Christ – the Savior of the Whole World.” And a good subtitle of Acts could be “The Gospel about Jesus Christ to the Ends of the Earth.”

It is also fascinating to note that Luke's gospel and Acts add up to more New Testament text than even Paul's thirteen letters put together. So from that point of view we can say that a Gentile, Paul's dear friend doctor Luke, is the “biggest” writer in the New Testament! And Luke the Gentile wrote to the Gentiles – to people like you and me!

([Go to questions on this article](#LukeTheAuthorOfActs2))

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### The message of Acts

The gospel of Luke and the book of Acts belong together. They are part of the same main story. The gospel is about “Jesus, the Savior of the world” (Luk 2:30–32; 3:6). And the book of Acts is about how this gospel about salvation through Jesus is taken “to the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8), represented by Rome, the Gentile capital of the Roman empire.

Both Luke’s gospel and Acts are addressed to a person called Theophilus. We do not know much about him, as he is only mentioned in the introductory verses to Luke's gospel and the book of Acts. His name is Greek. Luke’s phrase “so that you may know the truth of the things you have been instructed” (Luk 1:4) indicate that he was a Gentile convert to the Christian faith. Also, Luke addresses him with the words “most excellent,” which shows that he must have been a man of high position and authority.

Luke states that his purpose with his gospel was to present what had been fulfilled through the life and ministry of Jesus in an orderly and convincing way. We can assume that the purpose that Luke has with his gospel is also carried over to the book of Acts: this is a book that presents the life and expansion of the early church in an orderly and convincing way. But we must also note Luke's phrase about his gospel in Acts 1:1: “what Jesus began both to do and to teach.” In Luke's gospel Jesus began his ministry. So in the book of Acts, Jesus continues his ministry, performing the signs of the Kingdom of God and teaching the good news about the Kingdom of God. But he is not doing it directly. Instead he is now working – doing and teaching – through his apostles, whom he had chosen and given instructions to, Acts 1:2, and through his church.

But how does Jesus continue his work here on earth through his apostles and his church? It is done through the power of the Holy Spirit. In Acts the Holy Spirit plays a more prominent role than in any other book in the Bible. Some Bible scholars even describe the book as “The Acts of the Holy Spirit,”, instead of the “Acts of the Apostles.”

So the book of Acts is about Jesus continuing his ministry on this earth through his Spirit-filled apostles and through his Spirit-filled church.

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### The genre of Acts

The label that readers put on Acts is that it is a historical book, the genre is “history.” This is correct – as long as we keep in mind that it is not “history” in the modern sense of the word: it is not an objective and reasonably complete study of past events, as for example a modern historian would write if he produced a book called “The history of the early church.” No, instead it is “history” in the ancient and Biblical sense of the word. Luke wrote during the Hellenistic period, and in addition he wrote in the tradition of the Old Testament. This means that we have to understand Acts in the light of first century Greek-Roman history writing, but also in the light of Old Testament history writing:

1. Most Bible scholars see Acts as an excellent example of historical writing in the style of the first century Greek-Roman culture. Such history was not only written to document past events. No, it was written to convey a message based on these past events. So Luke must have had a message with his book.
2. In addition, Luke was influenced by the Old Testament historical narratives, where God is in control of history. They did not write “secular” history. No, they wrote history from a divine perspective. So Luke's perspective is that God is at work throughout the story that he presents.

Consequently, Luke selects and shapes his historical material so that his message becomes clear. Acts is the story about how the Holy Spirit transforms the gospel from its Jerusalem-based and Jewish beginning to a worldwide and Gentile-predominant movement.

This means that church history as such was not Luke’s reason for writing his book, something that becomes very clear, when we note what he does not write about. He does not write complete histories of the apostles. Most of the apostles are not even mentioned. The last time Peter is mentioned is at the Jerusalem council, when he gives his support to the mission to the Gentiles with these words: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe" (15:7). Even Paul is mainly presented in the light of the Gentile mission.

Luke also does not write a complete mission history about how the gospel spread to the various parts of the Roman empire. There is nothing about how the gospel came to Crete (compare Titus 1:5), to Illyricum (compare Rom 15:19), or to Pontus, Cappadocia and Bithynia (compare 1 Pet 1:1), or about how the gospel spread east to Mesopotamia or south to Egypt.

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### The dating of Acts

Bible scholars have debated when the book of Acts was written. But they all agree on one point: It must have been written after the gospel of Luke.

There are some strong reasons (based on the book of Acts itself) to date the book to AD 62, soon after the conclusion of the story about Paul’s two-year imprison-ment in Rome:

1. It would explain why the book ends quite suddenly, without mentioning the martyrdoms of Paul and Peter which happened only a few years later, around AD 65, during the persecutions under emperor Nero.
2. It would explain why Luke does not mention the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, even though the fulfillment of prophecies is a theme in Luke's gospel and Acts (Luk 4:20, 24:25, Acts 2:16, 3:18, 3:21, 3:24, 7:42, 10:43, 13:27) and even though Luke emphasizes the fulfillment of Agabus’s prophecies in 11:20–30 (about the famine) and in 21:10–11 (about the imprisonment of Paul in Jerusalem).
3. It would explain the description that Luke gives of the Jewish people having a strong religious and political influence in the Roman empire. This influence was much less after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70.
4. It would explain why Luke does not mention any of Paul’s letters to the churches. We know that these letters were widely spread and used in the churches later during the first century AD.
5. It would explain why Luke presents such a positive picture of the Roman authorities. Roman officers and officials come to faith and are baptized, and the Roman proconsul Gallio allows Paul to continue his ministry in Corinth. Even the end of the book is on a very positive note: “Paul preached the kingdom of God boldly and without hindrance and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ” (28:31). Only a few years later emperor Nero initiated a terrible persecution against the Christians. Could Luke have written so positively then?

One interesting thought which brings together the three issues of purpose, date and genre of the books of Luke's gospel and Acts is that Luke wrote them as “defense documents” to be used when Paul’s case was taken before the emperor in Rome, and that Theophilus was a key official in the trial against Paul. Luke must have understood that Paul would end up before the emperor in Rome already at the trial before governor Festus, when Paul finished his speech by appealing to Caesar, and Festus declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!” (25:11–12). Also, Jesus had revealed to Paul in a vision already at the time of his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 23:11) that he would come to Rome and testify about Jesus there. During the intervening two years, Luke could have written his books (all of the gospel and most of Acts) and paid a visit to Rome to prepare Paul's defense and to find a highly placed believer, Theophilus, to speak on behalf of Paul before the emperor. Then we can picture in our minds how Luke and Paul brought the books with them to Theophilus as they travelled to Rome facing the winter storms AD 59–60. Luke could have done the final editing of Acts later, while he was with Paul in Rome during his two years of house arrest.

Luke's gospel and Acts not only explain and present the Christian faith, the gospel and the church. Through these books Luke also showed that the Roman authorities had no reason to feel threatened by the Christians. It was not on their agenda to overthrow the Roman empire. No, the Christians were harmless people, who were not breaking the Roman laws. Instead they were good people, who had a healthy influence on society. Paul as a leading representative of this Christian movement was innocent of the charges that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had against him.

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### The structure of Acts

The two most common ways of understanding the structure of Acts have been:

1. Basing the structure on the apostle who is the main character

We find that Peter is the main character in the first part of the book (chapters 1–12), and Paul the the main character in the second part of the book (chapters 13–28).

As we compare the stories about Peter and Paul, we will also find many parallels between them:

* + - both ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit (4:8 and 13:9),
    - both preached the word of God with boldness (4:31 and 9:28),
    - both healed a man crippled from birth (3:1–10 and 14:8–10),
    - both confronted a sorcerer (8:18–23 and 13:8–11),
    - both ministered to Gentiles (9:23–48 and 13:46 et cetera),
    - both refused to be worshipped by Gentiles (10:25–26 and 14:13–15),
    - both received visions that guided their mission work (10:9–20 and 16:9–10),
    - both were imprisoned and miraculously delivered (12:3–10 and 16:23–28),
    - both delivered people from evil spirits (5:26 and 16:18),
    - both had extraordinary miraculous powers (5:15 and 9:12),
    - both raised a person from the dead (9:40–41 and 20:9–12).

The point Luke is making through this parallel structure is that both Peter and Paul are apostles with the same commission, the same gospel and the same authority.

1. Basing the structure on Jesus' words in 1:8

Jesus said: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

* + - The first seven chapters of Acts take place in Jerusalem.
    - Then the gospel spreads to Samaria and Judea (chapters 8–12).
    - The rest of the book describes how the gospel reaches out into the Gentile world of that time. In the final chapter Paul reaches Rome, the center of world in those days.

But there is also a third way of understanding the structure of Acts:

1. Basing it on six key verses

An overview, but careful ,reading of the whole book of Acts reveals six key verses that summarize what Luke has described in the previous chapters. These key verses are also points from which the narrative and the proclaiming of the gospel take off into a new direction. In this way, Luke has painted six wonderful pictures of the joyful expansion of the gospel:

1. The first church in Jerusalem in its totally Jewish setting (1:1–6:7): “The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied exceedingly. And many of the the priests were obedient to the faith” (6:7).
2. The first geographical expansion carried out by the Greek-speaking Jewish believers, including Paul’s conversion (6:8–9:31): “So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up. It grew in numbers. Comforted by the Holy Spirit, it walked in the fear of the Lord” (9:31).
3. The first expansion to Gentile people (9:32–12:24): “But the word of God continued to spread and grow” (12:24).
4. The first geographical expansion to Gentile countries (12:25–16:5): “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily” (16:5).
5. The further geographical expansion into the Gentile world, westward into Europe (16:6–19:20): “So the word of the Lord spread widely and grew mightily” (19:20).
6. A description of the events that take Paul and the gospel to Rome (19:21–28:31): “Paul preached the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hinderance” (28:31).

This textbook follows this third structure. It has six units. Each unit contains one of Luke's six pictures of the gospel expanding in a new direction, to new areas and to new people. But our Bibles with their chapter and passage divisions do not take this structure into consideration at all. That is the reason why it is so hard even for experienced Bible readers to discover it. But once you have seen it, it really makes sense!

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### The chronology of Acts

In the book of Acts we find some important general historical events mentioned, which can be fixed in time through various historical sources. These are:

* + - The death of king Herod Agrippa I (12:23) – AD 44
    - Emperor Claudius’s expulsion of the Jews from Rome (18:1-2) – AD 49
    - Gallio becomes proconsul in Corinth (18:12) – AD 51
    - Felix term as governor in Caesarea comes to an end, and Festus becomes governor after him (24:27) – AD 59

With the help of these fixed dates we can make a chronology of the events of the book of Acts. It must, however, be pointed out that all Bible scholars do not agree with each detail of the chronology given below. The NIV Study Bible, for example, presents a different chronology of Paul's life than the one we follow in this textbook.

AD 30

Jesus dies, rises from the dead and shows himself to his disciples before his ascension to heaven (Luk 24; Acts 1:1–11). The first day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–41).

AD 30–34

The first fellowship of believers develops among the Jewish people (Acts 2:42–47)). Conflict between the believers and the Jewish leaders. Stephen is stoned, and the church is scattered (Acts 3–8:3). So the gospel about Jesus is preached also outside of Jerusalem. Philip ministers in Samaria and other places (Acts 8:4–40).

AD 34 or 35

Paul is authorized by the Jewish leaders to try to destroy the church (Acts 8:3; 9:1–2). Jesus meets Paul on the road to Damascus and appoints him apostle (Acts 9:1–22).

AD 35–37

Paul in Damascus, Arabia and again in Damascus (Acts 9:23–25; Gal 1:13–17).

AD 37–47

The church in Jerusalem sends Paul to his hometown Tarsus (Acts 9:30; Gal 1:21), where he ministers.

AD 37–47

Peter is involved in spectacular ministry along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in Lydda, Joppa and Caesarea (Cornelius’s house) – a ministry that causes debate in the Jerusalem church (Acts 9:31–11:18).

AD 43

The church in Antioch in Syria is established (Acts 11:19–24).

AD 43–44

James, the brother of John, is killed and Peter put in jail by king Herod Agrippa I. The king dies as a consequence of his pride (Acts 12:1–23).

AD 44

Agabus prophesies about the famine that would come during the reign of emperor Claudius (Acts 11:27–28). Famine in Judea AD 46–48.

AD 47–48

Barnabas brings Paul from Tarsus to help in the ministry. Together they minister in Antioch for one year (Acts 11:25–26).

AD 48–49

Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–14:28). He is accompanied by Barnabas and (partly) by John Mark. Churches are founded in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch in Syria.

AD 49

Paul and Barnabas attend the first church council in Jerusalem (Acts 15). The same year emperor Claudius expels all Jews from Rome. As a consequence of this Aquila and Priscilla arrive in Corinth (Acts 18:1–2).

AD 50–52

Paul’s second missionary journey, this time together with Silas. Timothy joins them in Lystra, and Luke joins them in Troas. Churches are established in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth (where they spend a long time). Paul is brought to court in Corinth before proconsul Gallio (Acts 18:12–17) in AD 51. They return to Antioch (Acts 15:36–18:23).

AD 53–57

Paul’s third missionary journey. Travel though Galatia to Ephesus, where they stay a long time. Then they go to Corinth. The journey ends in Jerusalem (Acts 18:23–21:26).

AD 57–59

Uproar in Jerusalem. Paul arrested. Plot to kill Paul. Paul transferred to Caesarea (Acts 21:27–23:35). Trial before governor Felix (Acts 24). Paul in prison in Caesarea for two years during the time of governor Felix (Acts 24:27). Festus becomes governor in AD 59. Paul is tried before Festus and stands before king Agrippa (Acts 25–26).

AD 59–60

Paul, who has appealed to the emperor in Rome, is transferred by ship to Italy. On the voyage (Luke and others travel with him) there is a shipwreck at Malta. Paul reaches Rome probably in February AD 60 (Acts 27:1–28:16).

AD 60–62

Paul spends two years in house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:17–31).

([Go to questions on this reference article](#TheChronologyOfActs2))

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### Acts and Paul's letters

It is quite remarkable that Luke mentions nothing in Acts about Paul writing letters. One reason could be that Luke wrote Acts quite early in the history of the church and that Paul had not yet become famous for his letters.

But we know from Paul's own writings that – during the 14 years recorded by Luke from the time Paul left Antioch together with Barnabas on his first missionary journey until the book of Acts ends with his first imprisonment in Rome – Paul not only travelled and taught in the Jewish synagogues and preached the gospel to the Gentiles and spent years in prison in Caesarea and Rome. He also wrote most of his letters during these 14 years.

The chronology of Acts is fairly certain, and Bible scholars more or less agree on the main points. But there is less agreement on where to place Paul's letters in this chronology. The reason for this is, of course, that Paul's letters are not mentioned in Acts.

The biggest controversy is the dating of Galatians: was it written from Antioch in Syria before the Jerusalem council in AD 49, or from Corinth during Paul's long stay there during his second missionary journey AD 50–52, or from Ephesus during Paul's long stay there AD 53–55 during his third missionary journey?

I suggest the following chronology for Paul's letters:

Letters written during Paul's second missionary journey AD 50–52:

1. First Thessalonians from Corinth (or perhaps Athens)
2. Second Thessalonians from Corinth

Letters written during Paul's third missionary journey AD 53–57:

1. Galatians from Ephesus
2. First Corinthians from Ephesus
3. Second Corinthians from Macedonia
4. Romans from Corinth

Letters written during Paul's first imprisonment i Rome AD 60–62:

1. Colossians
2. Philemon
3. Ephesians
4. Philippians

Letters written during Paul's fourth missionary journey AD 62–65:

1. First Timothy from Macedonia
2. Titus from Nicopolis

Letter written during Paul's second imprisonment in Rome AD 65–66:

1. Second Timothy

([Go to questions on this reference article](#ActsAndPaulsLetters2))

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### Paul's life after Acts

Acts ends with Paul in house arrest in Rome for a period of two years (AD 60–62). But we know from Paul's later letters that this was not the end of Paul's life. His ministry continued for some more years after that. But the information about the last period of Paul's life is not very complete or clear.

According to early church history Paul's was martyred under emperor Nero in Rome. In AD 64 much of Rome was destroyed by a raging fire. There were rumors that Nero himself had started the fire. To divert attention from himself Nero put the blame on the Christians and started a persecution against them. Both Peter and Paul were martyred during this persecution, probably around AD 66. Tradition claims that Peter was crucified upside down (at his own request) and Paul, who was a Roman citizen and had the right not to be crucified, was beheaded.

Many Bible scholars have called the period AD 62–65 “Paul's fourth missionary journey.” This is the period between Paul's first imprisonment (or house arrest) in Rome and his second imprisonment in Rome (AD 65–66) before his death. Paul must have written his last letter, Second Timothy, just before he was executed.

Paul must have travelled widely during his fourth missionary journey. Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia, is mentioned in 1 Tim 1:3. First Timothy was probably written from Macedonia (1 Tim 1:3) and Titus from Nicopolis in Greece (Tit 3:12). Perhaps his desire to visit Spain (Rom 15:24, 28) was also fulfilled.

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### Three text versions of Acts

In no case has the original manuscript of a New Testament book survived to our days. So what we have are handwritten copies of other handwritten copies. There are many old such manuscript copies of Acts for modern Bible scholars to study and compare.

Bible scholars divide the manuscripts of Acts into three main groups:

1. The Byzantine text

This text-type can only be found in later manuscripts (from around AD 400 and later). The language is more polished than in the other two text-types. This indicates that it is later and that Luke's original text has been edited and improved upon. The English translation King James Version is based on this text.

1. The Alexandrian text

This text-type has the shortest text, and most Bible scholars consider it the oldest and historically most reliable text. So it is probably the text-type that is closest to Luke's original manuscript. The English translation New International Version and most other modern translations are based on this text.

1. The Western text

This text-type is ten percent longer than the Alexandrian text. But it does not contain any additional stories. The additions are extra words and phrases (sometimes whole sentences), which add details or comments. One example of this is Acts 20:13, where Luke's name is mentioned: “I, Luke, and those that were with me went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos”.

([Go to questions on this reference article](#ThreeTextVersionsOfActs2))

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### Hellenism

Alexander was very young when he became king after his father Philip of Macedonia. At that time Philip was the undisputed ruler over the whole Greek peninsula. Within 13 years Alexander had conquered all the countries between Greece and India. This is the area, which we nowadays call the Middle East. So at his death in 323 BC, Alexander ruled over one of the largest empires in ancient history. No wonder he was called Alexander the Great!

Alexander firmly believed in the superiority of his own Greek culture and language. So one of the main purposes with his conquests was to spread Greek language, Greek culture and Greek philosophy to all the countries and peoples that he conquered. But as the Greek culture and way of life spread, it blended with the local cultures. From this blend of cultures a new culture arose. This new culture is called Hellenism.

Hellenism became a tool for unifying Alexander's vast and diversified empire. It introduced the Greek language, which became the common language of this huge geographical area during the following centuries. It also introduced Greek philosophy and the Greek way of life.

Hundreds of city-states and military garrisons were founded throughout Asia Minor, Syria-Palestine, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. They were populated with soldiers and civilians from the Greek world. These Greek immigrants became a cultural elite, who regarded their language and way of life as superior to those of the local people. The Greek institutions founded in each city included at least an acropolis (a fort or a castle), city walls, a market place, temples, a theatre and a gymnasium (a sports hall).

The people who had been conquered reacted in two different ways:

* Some adapted to the changed conditions and accepted the superiority of Greek language and culture and the inferiority of their own.
* For others, Hellenism constituted a threat to their traditional way of life and values, which they resisted in a variety of ways.

Also in Palestine the Jewish population reacted in these opposite ways, some became “Hellenists,” others kept their Jewish religious traditions.

Hellenism was a precondition for the New Testament. Without Hellenism we would not have a New Testament. Greece gave the New Testament the language in which it is written. Greece also gave the New Testament its way of thought. The Greeks had a long tradition of reasoning, questioning and speculating. Paul, Stephen, Philip, Barnabas and many other New Testament personalities were the heirs of both Hellenism and Judaism, not only in their use of the Greek language but also in the way in which they expressed the Christian faith.

([Go to questions on this reference article](#Hellenism2))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark27))

### The Jewish dispersion (the diaspora)

At the time of the early church the number of Jews living in dispersion spread out all over the Roman empire were many times more than those living in Palestine. Most large cities had a Jewish population organized in a synagogue fellowship.

The diaspora Jews did not keep their Jewish faith to themselves. Instead they were actively involved in spreading it to the Gentile people they came in touch with. The Jewish faith had a great attraction on the Gentiles in the Roman empire. This can be seen in the stories of the book of Acts. As Paul preached in the Jewish synagogues, many of the listeners were God-fearing Gentiles, who received the gospel positively. There were two main reasons for this attraction:

1. The Jewish (and later the Christian) faith was clearly monotheistic – in contrast to the polytheistic and syncretistic religions of the time.
2. The Jewish (and later the Christian) faith taught high ethical standards and encouraged its followers to lead good and respectable lives.

Most of these Gentiles were not “proselytes.” So they had not yet officially converted to the Jewish faith by being circumcised. Instead they thought that it was enough to be “devout” or “God-fearers,” which meant that they regularly attended the synagogue services, believed in the God of Israel and followed the moral and ethical teachings of the Jews.

The synagogues helped greatly in the spread of Christianity, for Paul invariably went to them in every city he visited. The Jews in the diaspora spoke Greek and used Greek in the synagogue services. They had their own Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, which is the text version that the New Testament writers quote and refer to most of the time. The Septuagint translation was made in Alexandra in Egypt, which was perhaps the most important center for the diaspora Jews during New Testament times.

The diaspora Jews kept in touch with Palestine and sometimes travelled to Jerusalem for the big festivals. So most of the people listening to Peter’s sermon on the first day of Pentecost were probably Greek-speaking Jews. The Greek language was also widely understood and used in Palestine.

([Go to questions on this reference article](#TheJewishDispersion2))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark28))

### The Roman empire

Politically and historically the whole New Testament takes place within the Roman empire. The Roman government was strong and centralized. The result of this was the Roman Peace, which characterized the Mediterranean world for centuries. The centralized government and the Roman Peace were factors that promoted the rapid expansion of the Christian faith.

Increasing urbanization was one characteristic of the first century of the Roman empire. There were around 1000 cities both small and big. Most cities had a population of 10 to 15 thousand. Medium-sized cities like Pergamum had a population of about 50 thousand. And the large cities like Antioch in Syria and Alexandria had populations of hundreds of thousand. Rome, which was the largest city of the empire, probably had a million inhabitants. The entire population of the Mediterranean world during the reign of Augustus is estimated at 50 to 80 million. At least 20 percent of the population were slaves, close to 10 percent were Jews. In spite of all the cities, the economy of the Roman empire was based on agriculture, and 90 percent lived in the countryside.

In Acts we come across the names of several Roman provinces, for example Judea, Syria, Cilicia, Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia. The provinces were integrated into the structure of the empire in several different ways:

1. Construction of a network of roads. This made it possible for the apostles to travel so widely from province to province and from city to city.
2. Introduction of consistent provincial administration. As a consequence there was law and order throughout the empire. The apostles could freely travel all over the Roman empire. There was no need for passports and visas!
3. Admission of people from the provinces into Roman military service.
4. Extension of Roman citizenship to people from the provinces. This was particularly significant, and during Paul’s time there were about 60 lakhs Roman citizens. Paul and Silas were Roman citizens.
5. The process of urbanization. One example is the many new colonies that were established. These were cities where retired Roman soldiers settled, for example Philippi (Acts 16:12). Such colonies had special rights, such as self-government and exemption from land taxes.
6. Trade and commerce with ships crisscrossing the Mediterranean Sea. Paul and his companions often travelled by ship.

The provinces were ruled by governors, procurators or proconsuls, who were accountable to Rome. Some are mentioned by name in Acts: Sergius Paulus in Cyprus, Gallio in Achaia, Felix and Porcius Festus in Judea.

Augustus, who ruled during the time when Jesus was born, was the first Roman emperor. He was succeeded by Tiberius, who ruled at the time of Jesus’ ministry and the early church. After him came Caligula, Claudius (who expelled the Jews from Rome, Acts 18:2) and Nero, who initiated the first organized persecution against the Christians starting in AD 64. During this persecution both Peter and Paul were martyred according to early church traditions. These were the five Roman emperors during New Testament times:

1. Augustus 31 BC – AD 14: He is mentioned in Luke 2:1 in connection with the birth of Jesus.
2. Tiberius AD 14–37: He was emperor when John the Baptist and Jesus started their ministries (Luk 3:1).
3. Gaius Caligula AD 37–41: His name is not mentioned in the New Testament.
4. Claudius AD 41–54: He is mentioned twice in Acts. He ruled at the time of the famine that Agabus prophesied about (Acts 11:28). He was the emperor, who ordered all Jews to leave Rome (Acts 18:2), which resulted in Aquila and Priscilla meeting Paul in Corinth.
5. Nero AD 54–68: His name is not mentioned in the New Testament. But he was the emperor, who ruled during Paul's first and second imprisonment in Rome. He is the Caesar that Paul appealed to (Acts 25:11).

In Rome some of the dead emperors were given divine status and worshipped. In the eastern provinces emperor worship was much stronger, and sometimes the emperors were given divine worship while they were still alive. This had both political and religious significance.

Religion in the Roman empire consisted of a mixture of different traditions. The pantheons of the Greek and Roman gods were still worshipped to some extent, especially in the provinces. In Acts chapter 14, the Lycaonians tried to worship Barnabas and Paul as Zeus and Hermes. Ephesus was very famous for its temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis (Acts 19). Corinth and Athens also had famous temples. Philosophical schools and their popularized teachings were another aspect of the religious life of those days. In Athens, Paul came across philosophers belonging to the Stoic and the Epicurean schools. Mystery religions and Gnosticism were other very popular religious expressions.

During the time of Acts, religion in the eastern part of the Roman empire had become very individualistic. People could follow one or several religions or philosophies according to their wishes and fancies. These religions and philosophies strongly affected the life of their followers. Many of them led to immoral practices.

Latin was the language of Rome. But Greek had a very strong position as the cultural language of the Roman empire. Greek slaves were used as private teachers for Roman children, who studied the Greek poets, the Greek historians and the Greek philosophers. In the eastern part of the Roman empire – where Paul's three missionary journeys took place – Greek was the common language among all levels of society. But Paul, who was a Roman citizen, must have known Latin as well as Greek.

([Go to questions on this reference article](#TheRomanEmpire2))

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### Palestine

In the church

The church started within the traditional Jewish culture of Palestine. All Jesus’ disciples were Jews. The apostles in Jerusalem went to the temple regularly, celebrated the Jewish festivals and attended the synagogue services. They had Aramaic as their mother tongue, and they followed the Jewish customs, including circumcision. Their life and behaviour were accepted by the Jewish authorities, as long as they did not speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

But in Jerusalem there were also some Greek-speaking Jews who had come from the dispersion, settled in Jerusalem and attended their own synagogue. They were also called Hellenist. Some of them had accepted the gospel message and become believers. The first conflict in the early church was between these two Jewish-background believers – the Aramaic-speaking and the Greek-speaking.

Politics and administration

Politically, Palestine was part of the Roman empire during the time of the early church. This meant that the political and administrative power was with Rome during the whole New Testament period. It was a so called “Imperial province”, which meant that it came directly under the emperor in Rome and not under the Roman Senate.

But the Roman emperors allowed king Herod the Great and his successors to rule as tributary kings over Palestine (or part of it) and over some of the neighbouring areas – as long as they acknowledged the sovereignty of Rome. Herod Agrippa I was tributary king under Rome until his death in AD 44 (Acts 12:21–23).

His son Herod Agrippa II was not king over Palestine geographically, but he was given control over the temple in Jerusalem and the right to appoint high priests. So he became the contact person between the Jews and the Roman governors of the province of Judea, and was in that capacity involved in the case against Paul in Caesarea (Acts 25:13). See also the following chapter King Herod's Family.

During periods when the emperors did not trust Herod's family to rule Judea, Samaria and Galilee, they appointed procurators (called “governors” in the NIV translation) who ruled on behalf of the Roman emperor. The “First procuratorship” (consisting only of Judea) lasted from AD 6 to AD 41 and the “Second procuratorship” (consisting of Judea, Samaria and most of Galilee) lasted from AD 44 to AD 66.

Three Roman governors of Palestine are mentioned in the New Testament: Pontius Pilate (AD 26–36) was procurator of Judea. Felix (AD 52–60) and Porcius Festus (AD 60–62) were procurators of Judea, Samaria and most of Galilee. The governors were responsible for maintaining law and general security and were accountable directly to the emperor in Rome. Their official residence was Caesarea, which was situated on the Mediterranean Sea.

As Palestine was considered a sensitive area with constant opposition from some of the Jewish religious leaders and with frequent revolts threatening the political stability, Roman military units were stationed in Jerusalem and Caesarea.

Jewish groups

As in other countries in the Greek-Roman world, there were different responses or reactions to the impact of Hellenistic culture and Roman political administra-tion. During New Testament times there were four religious Jewish groups that illustrate this:

The Sadducees were generally accepting of these foreign influences. They promoted the Hellenizing movement that began with Alexander the Great. They were also the political party of the Jewish aristocratic priesthood. The high priests belonged to the Sadducean party and controlled the Sanhedrin. But they did not have much support from people in general. Under the Romans they became the party that supported the foreign rulers. The Sadducees actively opposed the early church. They arrested Peter and John and put them in prison. A little later they arrested all the apostles and planned to kill them (Acts 5:17, 33). With the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Sadducean party disappeared.

The Pharisees opposed Hellenistic influences and foreign political rule. They were Jewish nationalists and they cultivated a strong national and religious consciousness among the people. They only numbered a few thousand during New Testament times, but they were very popular and influential as the religious leaders of the Jews. Through them the Jewish Law and the synagogue life became the cornerstones of Judaism. The Pharisees passionately opposed all secularization of Judaism by Hellenistic and Roman influences. They separated themselves from other people and obeyed their traditions to the smallest detail. In the Sanhedrin they strongly opposed the Sadducean party.

The Zealots were a Jewish patriotic party. It was started with the specific objective to actively resist the Roman occupation of Palestine. Some of the Zealots were like guerrilla warriors: they even resorted to assassination of Jews who supported the Romans.

The Essenes are not mentioned in the New Testament. They had a few thousand followers during the time of Christ. Their response to Hellenism and Roman occupation was to keep away from all outside influences. They lived a simple life of sharing everything in common. They practiced strict rules of conduct and were mostly unmarried. The majority of them lived together in settlements. The monastery at Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were written could have belonged to the Essenes or a similar group of people.

A majority of the people did not belong to any of these groups, even if they were in favor of some of their ideas.

([Go to questions on this reference article](#Palestine2))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark30))

### King Herod's family

Four generations of kings and other family members of king Herod's family are mentioned in the New Testament. Some of them have the same or very similar name. Another problem is that the areas – parts of Palestine and neighbouring kingdoms – that these kings ruled over changed considerably over time. In addition, some of the names of these areas or kingdoms are unfamiliar to us. All this may cause considerable confusion for us Bible readers.

Herod's family was not of Jewish origin. They came from Idumea, a country situated south of Judea. Herod's grandfather converted to Judaism, so during New Testament times the family belonged to the Jewish faith, but they were never accepted by the Jewish leaders because of their non-Israelite background. The family, which belonged to the aristocracy, had close links with the Roman emperors and received the power to rule from the Romans.

Herod was the founder of the dynasty and he ruled over all Palestine. He was called Herod the Great and was famous for his many building projects, among them the temple in Jerusalem. He was married five times and had ten children.

After the death of Herod the Great, his kingdom was divided into four parts. Each part was ruled by a tetrarch (Matt 14:1; Luk 3:1). In the third generation, Herod Agrippa I was made ruler over a kingdom, which was almost as large as that of his grandfather Herod the Great. In the fourth generation, Herod Agrippa II (the king mentioned in Acts in connection with Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea) ruled over a smaller area around the Sea of Galilee.

These are the smaller kingdoms, countries or areas mentioned in connection with the kings below:

* + - Perea: situated east of the Dead Sea and the Jordan river
    - Iturea: situated north of Palestine
    - Trachonitis: situated northeast of the Sea of Galilee
    - Idumea: situated south of Palestine

The first generation of Herod's dynasty

Herod the Great

He was king of Judea, Galilee, Iturea, Traconitis from 37 BC to 4 BC. He is mentioned in Luk 1:5 in the passage “Birth of John the Baptist foretold”, and he ruled when Jesus was born (Matt 2:1–19).

The second generation of Herod's dynasty

Herod Philip II

He became tetrarch of Ituria and Trachonitis at the death of his father in 4 BC and ruled until AD 34. He is called Philip the tetrarch in Luk 3:1 in the passage “Call of John the Baptist”.

Archelaus

He became governor of Judea, Idumea and Samaria at the death of his father in 4 BC and ruled until AD 6. He is mentioned in Matt 2:19–23, where it says that Joseph “heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod”, so he was afraid to go there. Instead he settled his family in Galilee.

Aristobolus

He is not mentioned in the Bible., but he was the father of two famous persons in the next generation: Herod Agrippa I and Herodias.

Herod Antipas (the second husband of Herod's granddaughter Herodias)

He became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea at the death of his father in 4 BC and ruled until AD 39. In the gospels he is sometimes called Herod the tetrarch. He ruled when John the Baptist and Jesus started their ministries (Luk 3:1), and he was the king who had John the Baptist beheaded (Matt 14:1–12). He is sometimes called only Herod, and he was the king to whom Pilate sent Jesus (Luk 23:7).

Herod Philip I

He did not rule. He was the first husband of Herodias (granddaughter of Herod the Great) and is mentioned in the gospels in the story about the beheading of John the Baptist (Matt 14:3, Mark 6:17).

The third generation of Herod's dynasty

Herod Agrippa I

He was king of Judea from AD 37 to AD 44. He is called king Herod in Acts 12:1–24. He was the one who killed James (the disciple of Jesus) and put Peter into prison. Then he was struck down by an angel.

Herodias

She was Aristobulus’s daughter and was married to two of her uncles: first to Herod Philip I and then to Herod Antipas. She is mentioned in the gospels in the story about the beheading of John the Baptist (Matt 14:3, Mark 6:17).

The fourth generation of Herod's dynasty

Drusilla

She was married to Felix, governor of Judea from AD 52 to AD 69. Together with her husband she listened to Paul's testimony during his imprisonment in Caesarea (Acts 24:24, where Luke mentions that she was a Jewess).

Herod Agrippa II

He was king over parts of Galilee and over Trachonitis and Perea. Luke calls him king Agrippa (Acts 25:13–26:32, where he listened to Paul's testimony in Caesarea).

Bernice

Luke also mentions Bernice in Acts 25:13–26:32. She was with her brother Herod Agrippa II in Caesarea and listened to Paul's testimony there.

Salome

She was the daughter of Herodias and Herod Philip I (who was not king). Her name is not mentioned in the gospels, but it was her dance that caused her mother's second husband king Herod Antipas to have John the Baptist beheaded (Matt 14:1–12, Mark 6:14–29).

([Go to questions on this reference article](#KingHerodsFamily2))

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Questions and answers to the reference unit

These questions will help the teacher make sure that his students understand the text. They can also be used by the students (and the general reader) to reinforce learning and to review the contents of the reference unit.

I have also provided my answers – just as a matter of convenience for the user. Please understand that these answers may not be exactly like yours. If you are in doubt, please read the relevant passage in the textbook again. You will find all you need there.

There are no questions to the maps. Instead there are several map questions included in the lessons.

### Luke, the author of Acts

1. Where do we find Luke’s name in Acts?

Answer: Nowhere!

1. How do we know that Luke’s gospel and Acts are written by the same person?

Answer: Acts begins with a reference to an earlier book written by the same author (who is unnamed in both books) to the same person, Theophilus.

1. What are the reasons for us to believe that it was Luke, the doctor and Paul’s travelling companion, who wrote Luke’s gospel and Acts?

Answer: The author of Acts must have been a Gentile, and Luke is the only Gentile person that fits the bill.

1. When did Luke, most probably, gather his information and have the time to write his two books?

Answer: During the two years that Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea. Then Luke finished Acts during Paul’s imprisonment in Rome.

([Go to the reference article](#LukeTheAuthorOfActs))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark32))

### The message of Acts

1. What do we know about Theophilus, the recipient of Acts?

Answer: He was probably a Gentile convert (his name is Greek) of high position and authority.

1. How does Jesus continue his work here on earth through his apostles and his church?

Answer: He does so through the Holy Spirit.

([Go to the reference article](#TheMessageOfActs))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark33))

### The genre of Acts

1. Explain what it means that Acts is “history” in the ancient and Biblical sense of the word.

Answer:

* + Acts is not an objective and reasonably complete study of the early church.
  + It is written from a divine perspective and it is therefore a book with a message: It is the story about how the Holy Spirit transforms the gospel from its Jerusalem-based and Jewish beginning to a worldwide and Gentile-predominant movement.

1. Give examples of historical material that a modern reader would expect from a “history of the early church” but which Luke does not include in Acts!

Answer:

* + More complete histories of the apostles: their lives and ministries
  + Some information about how the gospel came to Crete, Illyricum and other places mentioned in the epistles
  + Accounts of how the gospel spread east to Mesopotamia and south to Egypt

([Go to the reference article](#TheGenreOfActs))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark34))

### The dating of Acts

1. Explain some of the reasons why Luke probably finished writing Acts soon after Paul’s imprisonment in Rome AD 60–62!

Answer: See the five points in the refernce article The dating of Acts

1. Describe the theory that Acts was a “defense document” prepared for Theophilus in connection with Paul’s trial in Rome!

Answer: See the explanation in the reference article The dating of Acts

1. How does Luke present the church in relation to the Roman authorities?

Answer: The church was a peaceful movement that did not threaten the stability of the Roman government.

([Go to the reference article](#TheDatingOfActs))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark35))

### The structure of Acts

1. List some of the parallels between Peter and Paul that can be found in Acts.

Answer: See the list in the reference article The structure of Acts

1. How can Acts be structured in three parts based on Jesus’ words in 1:8?

Answer: See the three points in the reference article The structure of Acts

1. Try to memorize the six pictures that Luke paints of the joyful expansion of the gospel. Then describe these pictures in our own words.

([Go to the reference article](#TheStructureOfActs))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark36))

### The chronology of Acts

1. Why is the mentioning of proconsul Gallio’s name in 18:12 so important for establishing a chronology of the events in Acts?

Answer: From Roman historical sources we know that Gallio became proconsul in Corinth in AD 51. This fact provides a fixed date, which Bible scholars can use to date earlier and later events in the book.

1. Try to memorize the years for the main events in Acts. Then retell briefly some of these events in your own words! As you do that, date these events.

([Go to the reference article](#TheChronologyOfActs))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark37))

### Acts and Paul’s letters

1. Which of Paul’s letters do Bible scholars find most difficult to date?

Answer: Galatians

1. Six of Paul’s letters were written during Paul’s second and third missionary journeys. Which?

Answer: First and Second Thessalonians, Galatians, First and Second Corinthians and Romans.

1. Four of Paul’s letters were written during his first imprisonment in Rome AD 60–62. Which?

Answer: Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians. These letters are often called Paul’s prison letters.

1. Three of Paul’s letters were written after his first imprisoment in Rome AD 60–62. Which?

Answer: First Timothy, Titus and Second Timothy. These letters are often called the Pastoral letters.

([Go to the reference article](#ActsAndPaulsLetters))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark38))

### Paul’s life after Acts

How do we know that Paul survived the two years in Rome (AD 60–62), with which Acts ends?

Answer:

* + He wrote three letters that must have been written after the accounts in Acts had taken place.
  + Early church history claims that he was martyred (probably around AD 66) in the persecutions that took place later in emperor Nero’s reign.

([Go to the reference article](#PaulsLifeAfterActs))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark39))

### Three text versions of Acts

Which are the three main text versions of Acts and how do they differ?

Answer:

* + The Byzantine text: later, more polished, used by the King James translation
  + The Alexandrian text: the shortest, the oldest, the most reliable, used by the NIV translation
  + The Western text: the longest

([Go to the reference article](#ThreeTextVersionsOfActs))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark40))

### Hellenism

1. What is Alexander the Great famous for?

Answer:

* + He was a great general and he conquered Asia all the way to India within 13 years.
  + He believed in the superiority of Greek language and culture and spread them to the areas he had conquered.
  + He became the “father” of a new blend of cultures called Hellenism.

1. Who lived in the cities that Alexander founded during his conquests?

Answer: Soldiers and civilians from the Greek nations, who became the cultural elite.

1. How did the people who had been conquered by the Greeks react?

Answer:

They basically reacted in two different ways:

* + Some adapted Hellenism.
  + Others resisted Hellenism.

1. How was Hellenism a precondition for the New Testament?

Answer:

* + The Greek language was the language used by the New Testament writers.
  + The Greek way of thinking, discussing, speaking and writing was to some extent adopted by the New Testament writers, especially Paul.

([Go to the reference article](#Hellenism))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark41))

### The Jewish dispersion (the diaspora)

1. How did the Jews in dispersion interact with the Gentile people they came in contact with?

Answer: They spread their Jewish faith to them. But at the same time they themselves were faithful to their Jewish faith and its high ethical standards.

1. Why were so many Gentiles attracted to Judaism?

Answer: They were attracted by the monotheism of the Jews and by the good moral lives of the Jewish people.

1. What is the Septuagint and why was it so widely used by the Jews in dispersion?

Answer: The Septuagint is a translation of the Jewish Scriptures (what we called the Old Testament) into Greek. The Jews in dispersion used the Greek language for their daily lives but also in the synagogue services. So they really needed to have this Greek translation of their holy books.

1. In what way did the Jews in dispersion keep in touch with Palestine?

Answer: They sometimes went there to celebrate the big festivals.

([Go to the reference article](#TheJewishDispersion))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark42))

### The Roman empire

1. List some aspects of the Roman empire that contributed to the spreading of the gospel during New Testament times.

Answer:

* + The Roman Peace and the good law and order situation
  + The centralized government and the good administration of the provinces
  + The many cities where people from all over the empire came in contact with each other
  + The network of good roads
  + Trade and commerce crisscrossing the Mediterranean
  + The social mobility: people from the provinces could join the Roman military; Roman citizenship was granted to many from the provinces.
  + The cultural dominance of the Greek language

1. Learn the names of the four Roman emperors that are referred to in the New Testament. How are they connected with the New Testament events?

Answer:

* 1. Augustus: the birth of Jesus
  2. Tiberius: the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus
  3. Claudius: the ordering of all Jews (probably including Jewish background believers) to leave Rome
  4. Nero: not mentioned by name, but the was the Caesar that Paul appealed to and later stood before in Rome.

1. What were the main forms of religion that Gentiles followed in the Roman empire?

Answer:

* + Worship of the traditional Greek and Roman gods
  + Philosophies such as those of the Stoic and Epicurean schools, and Gnosticism
  + Mystery religions of different kinds

1. Which were the two main languages in the Roman empire, and how were they used?
   * Latin: the official language of Rome
   * Greek: the cultural language of the whole empire

([Go to the reference article](#TheRomanEmpire))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark43))

### Palestine

1. How “Jewish” was the church in Jerusalem? Make a list of some important points!

Answer:

* + The believers went to the temple regularly.
  + They celebrated the Jewish festivals.
  + They attended the synagogue services.
  + They spoke Aramaic, the language of the Palestine Jews.
  + They followed Jewish customs (including circumcision).

1. Who were the Hellenists?

Answer: They were Greek-speaking Jews from the dispersion who had settled in Palestine.

1. What was the implication of the fact that Palestine was an “Imperial province”?

Answer: It meant that the Roman governors (or procurators) who ruled Palestine were answerable to the emperor in Rome (and not to the Senate).

1. Explain why there were kings in Palestine when it was actually a part of the Roman empire!

Answer: King Herod and his successors were so called tributary kings over Palestine (or parts of the country) under the Roman emperor. So these kings had to acknowledge the sovereignty of the emperor.

1. Why was king Agrippa II consulted by governor Porcius Festus about Paul’s case, although he did not rule over Judea?

Answer: The Roman emperor had given king Agrippa II authority over the temple in Jerusalem and other religious matters. So it was in that capacity that Porcius Festus consulted him about what to do with Paul.

1. What were the responsibilities of the Roman governors?

Answer: They had to maintain law and order – and general security – in the country.

1. Why were Roman military units stationed in Palestine?

Answer: Palestine had a bad reputation in Rome for conflicts and revolts.

1. What were the main differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees?

Answer:

* + Foreign influences, Hellenism: the Sadducees were positive; the Pharisees were negative.
  + Social and political position: the Sadducees were high-class people in control of the temple and the Sanhedrin and had close contacts with the Roman rulers; the Pharisees were scribes and men of law and had less influence on political life.
  + Religious life: the Sadducees were priests, but they were not condsidered to be very spiritual; the Pharisees followed all the details of the law and their own religious traditions, they were teachers of the law and had strong links with the synagogues.
  + Popularity: the Sadducces were not very popular with the common people; the Pharisees were highly respected by the people.
  + In the Sanhedrin the Pharisees strongly opposed the Sadducees.

1. Who were the Zealots and the Essenes?

Answer:

* + The Zealots were patriots who actively opposed the Roman occupation of Palestine, and some of them even fought the Romans with weapons.
  + The Essenes (who are not mentioned in the Bible) kept away from all Hellenistic influence. Most of them lived together in closed communities in order to be isolated from foreign influence.

([Go to the reference article](#Palestine))

([Go to Table of contents](#bookmark44))

### King Herod’s family

1. What was the background of Herod’s family?

Answer: They came from Idumea in the south and belonged to an aristocratic family. So their background was not Jewish. But they had accepted the Jewish faith during the time of Herod’s grandfather.

1. Which are the five Herodian kings mentioned in the New Testament? And what events are they connected with?

Answer:

* 1. Herod the Great (called Herod in the Bible, ruled the whole of Palestine): Birth of Jesus
  2. Herod Philip II (called Philip the tetrarch in the Bible, ruled Iturea and Trachonitis): The beginning of John the Baptist’s ministry
  3. Herod Antipas (called Herod the tetrarch or only Herod in the Bible, ruled Galilee and Perea): The beginning of the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, had John beheaded, mocked Jesus and sent him back to Pilate
  4. Herod Agrippa I (called Herod in the Bible, ruled Judea): The martyrdom of James (the disciple of Jesus)
  5. Herod Agrippa II (called Agrippa”in the Bible, ruled parts of Galilee and Trachonitis): Paul’s imprisonment in Caesarea

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For the teacher

### About this textbook

This textbook as been written with five student goals in mind

1. Reading and understanding: The students are expected to improve their reading skills, and to improve their understanding of what they read.
2. Thinking: The students should constantly be encouraged to think about what they have read and to draw conclusions from what they have understood.
3. Knowing: The students should get to know the book of Acts well: events, stories, persons, institutions, and practices. They should also learn more about its historical and cultural setting, a knowledge which they should be able to apply to their study of the other New Testament books.
4. Applying: The students should be encouraged to apply the contents of the books of Acts to their own situation. To see their own lives and the life of their churches in the light of what happened and was done during the time of Acts. They should also be encouraged to reflect on events, practices and institutions of the early church as portrayed in Acts in the light of their own South-Indian situation and practices.
5. Using: The students must be inspired and encouraged to use texts from the book of Acts in their own lives and ministries: for devotions (personal as well as public), for Bible studies and sermons.

A future resource

This textbook is also written so that it can be used as a future resource for the students. They may not be able to cover – or to digest – all that it contains during a four or five week course at a Bible college. But in the future, as they work as evangelists and pastors, they will be able to return to the lessons in this book and make use of the material for their own personal edification as well as in their various ministries.

The comprehensive table of contents at the beginning of the book will help the reader to orient himself about its layout and contents and enable him to easily find the story/passage he is looking for. I also hope that the detailed index at the end of the book will prove useful.

The structure of this textbook is based on Luke’s six pictures of the triumphant and expanding church of those early days. My sincere prayer to God is that these pictures of the New Testament church would inspire the church in India today to be joyful and forward moving, as the gospel is proclaimed in ever-expanding circles and to new people groups.

### How to use this textbook

Remember

* 1. This textbook must, of course, be used together with the Bible text.
  2. The students must be encouraged to make frequent use of the maps provided in the beginning of the textbook.
  3. This textbook is based on the 73 passages (or studies) that the book of Acts can conveniently be divided into. Answers to the questions are found in the unit that follows the studies. Each lesson consists of up to six parts: a summary of the passage, comments, text questions, questions for thinking and discussion, sharing and application, and outlines for Bible studies and sermons based on the passage.
  4. Before you start using this textbook for your class, you must give time for your students to read through the book of Acts (all 28 chapters!) in one or two sessions. Let them do it in groups of two or three, taking turns reading aloud. They don’t have to be in the classroom to do this. To make the reading more interesting, the students should make two lists as they read: one list of stories/passages that they think are very important to study during the course; another list of stories/passages that they find particularly fascinating or difficult to understand. Later you can make use of these lists to prioritize, if you find that you won’t have time to cover all the 73 lessons during the allotted course time.

This is how you can organize your normal lesson

* 1. Introduction: Use The passage for this. It can be done in different ways: It can be read aloud by you or one of the students. Or the students can be asked to read it quietly on their own. Or you yourself can retell the contents of it in your own words.
  2. Read the Bible passage that the lesson is based on (see the reference in the lesson heading). This can be done quietly individually, or aloud in the class.
  3. Explain names and expressions: Use Comments for that. Instead of you explaining, you can tell the students to read the comments quietly on their own and afterwards ask you for clarifications, if they need any.
  4. Split up the class into smaller groups (3–5 persons in each). Make sure that each group consists of both strong and weak students.
  5. Small groups: Let the groups work through Text questions (most of which are very easy) and Think and discuss (some of which can be difficult). If time is limited you can tell the students which questions to prioritize. If the students are weak, you can omit the most difficult questions. Be flexible! It is not necessary for all the groups to finish all the questions!
  6. Have the students regroup into the whole class. Or have the students stay in their small groups but turn towards the teacher.
  7. Check answers: Don’t spend too much time on this. Be flexible. But make sure that the students have come up with reasonable answers. Also make sure that the students don’t leave the lesson with misconceptions. Answers to all the questions are found in the answer section of this book. You don’t have to agree with all my answers under Think and discuss.
  8. Sharing and application: If you still have lesson time, you can tell the students to return to their groups and work with the questions in Sharing and application. If there is not enough time, the students can do this (either individually, in twos, or in their groups) during library/homework time.
  9. Teach and preach: The last part of the lesson (the outlines or sermon suggestions under Teach and preach) can be used separately, either for students to work through on their own during available library/homework time or for students to make use of for class devotions, personal devotions, or for ministry assignments. It will also be a resource for them in their future ministries.
  10. Follow-up: It is important that the teacher allows class time (perhaps the next time you meet the class) for follow-up discussion and clarifications on Sharing and application. It is also essential that the teacher gives time for other questions and clarifications.

Remember

* 1. Most lessons (especially the easier or the shorter ones) can be covered by the students on their own during library/homework time. But it is absolutely essential that you, afterwards, allow class time for questions and clarifications. Perhaps also the more difficult questions need to be dealt with in the class. You can also let the students check their own answers with mine in the answer section of this book.
  2. Some lessons can be omitted. If you find that your course time is not enough to cover all 73 lessons, you can select the lessons that you (or the students) feel are most important to take up together in a class situation. The remaining lessons can be left for the students to use during their personal devotion time (remind them that there are answers to the questions in the book, if they run into difficulties). Don’t see it as a disaster, if you have to omit some of the lessons altogether!

What about the remaining parts of the book?

The chapter called Introduction to the book of Acts

This chapter contains material that all the students should know. But be careful not to scare the students off at the beginning of the course. I suggest the following plan of action:

* Before you start the first lesson: just casually mention to the students a few of the most important things from this chapter, only things that you feel the students really need to know. Don’t study it or teach it.
* When you have done the first ten or twenty lessons, you can let the students study the whole chapter as it is written.
* After another ten or twenty lessons, you can test how much the students know/remember. At that time you can use the Questions and Answers to ‘Introduction’”.
* You can also make use of these questions for a test (or for the easiest part of an exam) at the end of the whole course.

The unit called Reference

This unit contains seven maps and fourteen articles with background material on the book of Acts and on New Testament times in general. These articles should primarily be used as reference material. But you can also include some of them (or parts of them) in your course, if you and the students think so. Note that questions and answers have been provided to the maps as well as the reference articles.

### What you need to know to become a better teacher

1. Adult learners are different

Don’t forget that adult students are different from younger students! How are they different?

* 1. They have lots of previous experience that can be used in the class.
  2. They have established values, beliefs and opinions. They have pride.
  3. Many of them have a problem-centered orientation of learning. Many of them want to influence the way things are done in the class.
  4. Most of them are not used to studying and may have problems sitting still in a classroom for a long time.

Don’t ever treat your students as children. Always treat them with respect.

2. There are different learning styles

There are three main ways in which people learn:

* + By listening
  + By seeing and watching
  + By doing

What can the teacher do to reinforce learning by listening?

* + Have things read out aloud (texts, notes on the black board, notes from notebooks)
  + Let students repeat information to each other (in a buzz sessions)
  + Let the students explain points and issues to each other (in a buzz sessions)

What can the teacher do to reinforce learning by seeing and watching?

* + Write information on the black board
  + Make sure that the students have enough time to write down things in their notebooks
  + Give opportunity to the students to review their notes during class time
  + Illustrate your lesson by using pictures, charts, and timelines

What can the teacher do to reinforce learning by doing?

* + Let the students write down key information
  + Have activities in class where students move around in the classroom or outside (and don’t be embarrassed about it!)
  + Let the students go and find information in reference books, and on maps
  + Let the students produce things (charts, timelines, models, exhibitions, skits)

Vary your lesson activities! That will help more students learn more!

3. There are different levels of learning

As a teacher you need to know that there are different levels of learning:

* 1. Remembering is the lowest level
     + You remember previously learnt material.
     + You know dates, events, places, ideas, subjects, methods, procedures, principles.
  2. Understanding is the next level
     + You have the ability to understand/grasp/comprehend the meaning of what you have learnt.
     + You understand facts and principles; you can explain what you have read, retell it in your own words, summarize it, paraphrase it, translate it to another language; you can generalize; you can interpret charts and graphs and predict consequences; you can order and group facts; you can interpret facts and compare and contrast them.
  3. Application is the third level
     + You have the ability to use learned material in new and concrete situations.
     + You can apply rules, methods, concepts, laws and theories to new situations; you can apply principles to new situations; you can use information; you can construct graphs and charts; you can demonstrate the correct use of a method or procedure; you can solve problems using material that you have learnt.
  4. On the fourth level you have analysis, evaluation and synthesis/creation
  5. Analysis
     + You are able to break down material into its components so that its structure may be understood.
     + You can identify the different parts/components and analyze the relationship between the parts/components; you can also recognize the organizational principles involved; you can distinguish between facts and inferences/conclusions; you can recognize hidden meanings; you can evaluate if data/information is relevant; you can draw conclusion by identifying motives or causes; you can find evidence to support generalizations; you can analyze the organizational structure of a work (a passage in Paul’s letters, a poem, a story); you can see patterns.
  6. Evaluation
     + You can judge the value of material (a statement, a poem, a research report) based on definite criteria.
     + You can judge the logical consistency of written material; you can judge the adequacy with which conclusions are supported by data; you can judge the value of a work (art, music, writing) by the use of internal criteria or by the use of external standards of excellence; you can assess the validity of theories; you can make choices based on logical arguments; you can verify the value of evidence; you can recognize subjectivity; you can select the most effective solution; you can hire the most qualified candidate; you can explain and justify a new budget
  7. Synthesis/creation
     + You are able to put parts together to form a new whole
     + You can prepare a well organized speech or a sermon; you can propose a plan for an experiment; you can integrate learning from different areas into a plan for solving problems; you can use old ideas to create new ones; you can make use of different sources to make a new course for a college.

4. Questions from students are important

Encourage questions. Don’t ridicule those who ask. Don’t “misunderstand” the question.

Make sure you understand the question. Don’t interrupt the student. Ask the student – in a nice way – to clarify/elaborate his question, if you don’t understand what he means.

Address the whole class with your answer – not only the student who asked the question.

Don’t allow questions from students to disrupt you lesson. Deal with the question in one of the following ways, depending on what type of question it is:

* + It is short and can be answered quickly – and you know the answer to it: Answer right away!
  + It is short – but you don’t know the answer: Tell the students that you don’t know and that you will find the answer and tell them later. Don’t forget to tell them!
  + It is a question that needs a long or complicated answer – and the question is relevant to your subject: Tell the students that you cannot give an answer now, as you need time to research and think in order to give them a good answer. But you will answer this question later. And don’t forget to do so!
  + It is a question that needs a long or complicated answer – but the question is not relevant to your subject: Tell the students that the question does not belong to your subject and that it will be dealt with later by some other teacher.

Don’t be afraid! Let the students ask their questions!

5. Questions to the students are also important

It is important that the teacher makes use of questions. Why?

* + - Students are activated
    - The teacher gets feedback from the students.

Simple questions are questions that only require a short answer: yes or no or a one word answer (for example a name or a year). When to use simple questions:

* + - Orally in the class to see if students remember – as a feedback to the teacher
    - In “mini-test” to check if students know important facts
    - Never for group discussions!

More complex questions are questions that require a longer answer. They often start with Why? How? Explain! or Compare! They fall into three categories:

* + Questions that check if the students have understood a point or a lesson, for example: How did Paul’s background prepare him for his missionary work?
  + Questions that help the students think deeper about (or analyze) an issue or a question, for example: Compare the church in Antioch with the church in Jerusalem? Similarities? Differences? Which church would you have preferred to be a member of? (Good questions after you have studied the first 13 chapters of Acts).
  + Questions that make the students apply issues to their own experience, for example: Why don’t our churches baptize people as soon as they have accepted Jesus (compare Paul and the Roman jailer in Acts 16)?

Only complex questions should be used for group discussions.

6. Group activities are essential for teaching and learning

There are the two basic kinds of group activities:

1. Buzz sessions

How?

* + - Small groups (2–3 persons) as the students are seated in their desks
    - Simple questions, reviews, summaries
    - Short time (1-2 minutes), no need to report back in the class, but good if the teacher checks that answers are correct or OK

Why?

* + - Everybody participates, everybody gets a chance to think and express.
    - Changes the rhythm of the lesson, provides a break in the monotony of a lecture.
    - Gives the teacher an opportunity to check if the students have understood the point, how much the students remember, how much the students knew before.

1. Groups during class time (or during library/homework time)

How?

* + - Usually in the classroom (or some other suitable place nearby), 3-5 persons in each group, mixed groups (weak and strong students, men and women)
    - A little more complicated tasks, but they must be “doable”, 15-20 minutes; appoint a “chairman” to lead the discussion and a “secretary” to takes notes and report
    - Supervise the groups (everybody must participate!); stop when they seem to be done
    - Don’t spend much time on the reporting! But you must be alert and correct mistakes and misunderstandings – otherwise the students will learn the wrong things!

Why?

* + Strengthens the learning process, makes use of various learning styles
  + Provides variety and breaks the monotony of a lecture
  + Involves more students
  + Makes use of the experience of the students

Don’t make group work boring! Don’t waste the students’ time!

7. Who is a good teacher?

To be a good teacher you need some personal qualities, such as:

* 1. Scholarship
     + Do you have a habit of curiosity, wanting to know more and to learn more?
     + Do you have a respect for evidence and logic?
     + Do you have an ability to see things in context, relate details to general principles; relate facts to theories/theories to facts?
  2. Integrity
     + Are you honest, fair and upright, not twisting facts, not being narrow-minded?
     + Are you in control of yourself, not over-reacting, not blaming others?
  3. Communication
     + Are you able to explain and help students to understand?
     + Are you willing to face – and encourage – questions from the students?
     + Are you able to encourage, stimulate and bring the best out of a student?
     + Are you willing to listen and understand, to have sympathy for the students, to treat them with dignity?

So are you a good teacher?

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