



FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

YEAR 3

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WELCOME TO *Generations of Grace*



This curriculum has been designed to deepen your own study of God's word so that you might be able to properly understand and accurately teach each lesson. It's our prayer that this curriculum would be a blessing to your ministry and home as God uses it to encourage your family.



Share the Lesson

- **Five-Day Devotionals** – Guides the family through the Generations of Grace lesson, a cross-reference passage, and a passage about Christ to lead the family through the whole counsel of God.
- **Generations of Grace Passages** – Reinforces the lesson that your child learned in Sunday School.
- **Cross-Reference Passage** – Points to another passage that reinforces the central truth of each week's lesson.
- **Christ-Centered Passage** – Connects each week's lesson to Jesus Christ and to the gospel.
- **Explain** – Communicates the truth of each day to the parent's heart and mind to prepare them to lead their child through the passage.
- **Ask** – Foster greater interaction between parent and children whether they're 3 years old or 11 years old.
- **Discuss** – Enable the conversation about the truth to progress to a deeper level.

Additional Resources

Use these additional resources to help support your lessons and to knit together the church and the home, ensuring that what is taught on Sunday matches what is learned throughout the week.

- **Coloring Book**
- **Student Journal**
- **Craft Book**
- **Teacher Book**
- **Activity Book**

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SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON

WEEK 25

Jesus returns to heaven

Acts 1:1-11



DAY 1

Jesus taught the apostles to witness • Acts 1:1-3

READ

Acts 1:1-11

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 1:1-3

The book of Acts is about the actions that Jesus did through His apostles by the power of the Holy Spirit. For the apostles to continue Jesus' work and teaching, they needed several things. First, they needed to be the right kind of people. Jesus had already taken care of that. Relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21-22; 4:18-19), Jesus had chosen these key men to go and bear much fruit (John 15:16). Second, they needed unshakable confidence, so Jesus kept appearing to them over the course of forty days, proving that He was alive and validating His message (1 Cor 15:5-7, 14). Third, they needed to know what to say and do, so Jesus taught them about the **kingdom of God**, which is the realm of God's rule over those who belong to Him. This applied to the apostles' mission in two ways. First, their mission was to extend God's kingdom by calling all people to submit to Jesus as Lord (Acts 2:36). Second, their mission was to make God's kingdom visible on earth by teaching His people to live as His loyal subjects (2:42; 5:29).

ASK

1. What is the book of Acts about?
It is about what Jesus continued to say and do through His apostles by the Spirit.
2. How did Jesus give the apostles confidence to speak and act?
He appeared to them many times.
3. How long did Jesus keep appearing to the disciples?
For 40 days.
4. What did Jesus teach the apostles about?
God's kingdom: the realm of God's rule over His people.

DISCUSS

1. What can you do to become the right kind of person, experience Jesus' presence, and learn what to say and do?
2. How can we know that our work for Jesus is not in vain (1 Cor 15:20, 58)?

DAY 2

Jesus ordered the apostles to wait for the Holy Spirit • Acts 1:4–7

READ

Acts 1:1–11

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 1:4–7

This is no easy mission! Israel had failed at this same mission (Exod 19:6; Isa 43:10), so not even the apostles were able to do it by their own strength. They needed to wait in Jerusalem until the Father sent the Holy Spirit to work more directly, more permanently, and in more people than ever before (Isa 32:15; Ezek 36:27; Joel 2:28). Jesus called this a “baptism” because just as John baptized people by immersing them in water (Matt 3:11), so *baptism in the Spirit* would happen when Jesus pours out the Spirit over believers (Acts 2:33). All this talk of the Spirit sounded to the apostles like the prophecies about Israel’s restoration (Isa 32:15–18; Ezek 36:27–38), so it’s no surprise they thought Jesus’ earthly kingdom might soon be established. In response, Jesus did not correct their grasp of the kingdom itself. But He did rebuke them for asking about the kingdom’s timing. When Israel rejected their King, Jesus taught that His kingdom on earth was delayed until His return (Luke 19:11; Matt 19:28), but the time of His return is not for us to know (Matt 24:36–42).

ASK

1. Who did Jesus say would come and give them power?
The Holy Spirit.
2. What did the Father promise even back in the Old Testament?
He promised to pour out His Holy Spirit to give cleansing and power.
3. What did the apostles think might soon be established?
Jesus’ earthly kingdom.

DISCUSS

1. Why would the apostles be unable to accomplish their mission in their own strength (2 Cor 10:3–4; Eph 6:12)?
2. Whose strength have you been relying on? How can you rely on the Holy Spirit?

DAY 3

The Holy Spirit would empower the apostles to witness • Acts 1:8

READ

Acts 1:1–11

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 1:8

The Holy Spirit did not come to help us do whatever we want. He came to empower people to witness about Jesus. Just as Jesus came to tell the truth about the Father (John 1:18; 18:37), so the apostles were to continue that mission by telling the truth about Jesus. Since they were continuing Jesus’ mission, they needed to be empowered by the Spirit just like Jesus was (Luke 3:21–22; 4:1). The apostles were appointed

to found the church (Eph 2:20) and to write Scripture (John 14:26; 16:13), so the Spirit also gave them power to do miracles to prove that their testimony was true (Heb 2:2–4). The rest of Acts records the result: they successfully witnessed in Jerusalem (Acts 1–7), in Judea and Samaria (8:1–11:18), and beyond as far as Rome (11:19–28:31). Now that the Spirit has come, all believers are baptized in the Spirit at the moment of conversion (1 Cor 12:13; Rom 8:9). Although the miraculous gifts applied only to the time of the apostles, all believers continue to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to grow Christ’s church (1 Cor 12:7, 11).

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. What did the Holy Spirit give them power to do?
Be Jesus' witnesses.
2. Where were the apostles supposed to be witnesses about Jesus?
In Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
3. Now that the Holy Spirit has come, when are Christians baptized with the Holy Spirit?
At the moment of conversion.
4. How can you experience the Holy Spirit's power?
By being born again through faith and repentance, then submitting to the Spirit by trusting His power and obeying God's Word.

DISCUSS 

1. Are all Christians supposed to be Jesus' witnesses, or is that something that only pastors and missionaries do?
2. When was the last time you told someone about Jesus? How can you be Jesus' witness today?

DAY 4*Jesus' ascension motivated the apostles to witness • Acts 1:9–11***READ** 

Acts 1:1–11

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 1:9–11**

After giving His apostles final instructions, Jesus ascended. Since Jesus went up into the sky, it's no surprise that He became hidden in a cloud. But this cloud was also a final proof that Jesus is the God of glory. It was like the cloud that hid Him during His transfiguration (Luke 9:34–36), and like the bright cloud of God's presence that had appeared at the Red Sea (Exod 14:19–20), on Mt Sinai (24:16–19), in the tabernacle (40:34), and in the temple (1 Kgs 8:10–11). When the apostles saw Jesus "taken up in glory" (1 Tim 3:16), it gave them confidence that He is even now seated at God's right hand (1 Pet 3:22). He is Lord, reigning from heaven and giving His church authority and power to accomplish its mission (Acts 2:33–36). But at that moment, the apostles kept looking, perhaps wondering if the cloud would go away and Jesus would reappear as He had during His transfiguration. Instead, angels gave them one final encouragement: the glorious cloud of Jesus' ascension is a clear sign that He will one day return in an even greater cloud of glory (Luke 21:27).

ASK 

1. After Jesus said all this, where did He go?
Up into a cloud to heaven.
2. How did the angels encourage the apostles?
By telling them that Jesus will one day return in an even greater cloud of glory.
3. How does Jesus' ascension encourage us to be His witnesses?
It shows us His glory as the true God, He is in heaven and can be with us spiritually always, and He will one day come back in a cloud of glory.

DISCUSS 

1. At this point, could there be any doubt in the apostles' minds that Jesus was exactly who He said He was?
2. Since Jesus will return to earth in the same way, how should we use our time while He is away?

DAY 5

Be filled with the Holy Spirit • Ephesians 5:18

READ

Ephesians 5:15–6:4

EXPLAIN

The truth of Ephesians 5:18

Now that the Holy Spirit has come, every Christian is indwelt and baptized by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation (Rom 8:9–11; 1 Cor 12:13). But that does not mean that every Christian enjoys the blessing and power of the Spirit's ministry. We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, showing that it is something we may be lacking. To experience the Holy Spirit's power, we must not grieve the Spirit by our sin (Eph 4:30). Instead, we must allow the Spirit to have control in our lives (5:18). We do this by obeying the Spirit-inspired Word of God (Col 3:16), confessing sin, and surrendering to God's will. When we do this, the Spirit will work through us more powerfully than we thought possible (Eph 3:16, 20). After all, this is the same Spirit that empowered Jesus for ministry on earth! As we walk in the Spirit, He will produce the fruit of righteousness in our lives (Gal 5:16–23). And one day, by the Spirit's power, the church will finish what the apostles began, spreading the news of Jesus to every nation.

ASK

1. Why are we commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
Because we forfeit the Spirit's ministry when we grieve Him.
2. How are we filled by the Spirit?
By obeying the Spirit-inspired Word of God, confessing sin, and surrendering to God's will.
3. Was Jesus filled with the Spirit while on earth?
Yes!
4. What does the Spirit do as we walk with Him?
He produces the fruit of righteousness in our lives.

DISCUSS

1. What do you do each day in order to obey God's command to be filled with the Spirit?
2. The "filling of the Spirit" (Eph 5:18) and the "word of Christ" (Col 3:16) produce the same results. What are these results?

NEXT WEEK

The Holy Spirit arrives

Acts 2:1–47



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON

WEEK 26

The Holy Spirit arrives

Acts 2:1-47



DAY 1

The Spirit came on Pentecost • Acts 2:1-3

READ

Acts 2:1-3

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 2:1-3

It was Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus had risen from the dead. For 40 days He had appeared and taught His disciples to continue His work on earth (1:3, 8b). But how were so few going to be able to do the work of the Son of God? Only by the coming power of the Holy Spirit (1:5, 8a). So about 10 days after Jesus ascended, the Spirit rushed upon the disciples, proving that Jesus is Lord and giving believers power to call all people to Him. The Spirit came like wind and fire. The Spirit is more than wind, since the wind was supernatural, coming from heaven. But the Spirit is like wind because you can sense His life-giving power even though you cannot see Him (John 3:8). Like God's breath, He breathes life into lifeless people (Ezek 37:9-14). So like a mighty rushing wind, He comes with unstoppable power. He also appeared as fire, because when He is present, God is present (Exod 3:2-5). Just as He promised, Jesus was powerfully present with His disciples through the Holy Spirit..

ASK

1. How were so few disciples going to be able to accomplish God's work?
By the coming power of the Holy Spirit.
2. What day was it when the Spirit came?
He came on Pentecost—the 50th day from the Sunday after Passover.
3. What did the Holy Spirit sound like when He came?
Like a loud, rushing wind from heaven.
4. What appeared above the disciples?
Tongues as of fire.

DISCUSS

1. Why is the Holy Spirit described as "breath" or "wind"?
2. Does the Holy Spirit always come like wind and fire?

DAY 2

The Spirit came with power • Acts 2:4–13

READ

Acts 2:4–13

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 2:4–13

The wind and flames show that the 120 disciples (Acts 1:15) were each **baptized in the Spirit**, *immersed in the Spirit poured out by Jesus* (1:5; Matt 3:11). The disciples had to wait until the day of Pentecost to receive this baptism, but now that the Spirit has come, this baptism happens as soon as a person becomes a Christian (1 Cor 12:13). Now all His work of regenerating, indwelling, and sealing overflow from His baptizing presence. But when the disciples were baptized in the Spirit, they were also **filled with the Spirit**. Unlike baptism, filling is not permanent (4:8, 31; 6:5; 7:55). It is the Spirit's control and power in our lives that varies according to our dependence on Him and obedience to His Word (Eph 5:18; Col 3:16). The Spirit proved His power by causing Galileans to speak many languages that they did not understand (1 Cor 14:14). But the crowd understood! The people had come from hundreds of miles in every direction to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem (Num 28:26). They expected to communicate in Aramaic or Greek, but now they heard their own local languages!

ASK

1. What is it called when Jesus pours out His Spirit on believers?
Baptism in the Spirit.
2. How is this different from being filled with the Spirit?
The baptism of the Spirit is permanent and doesn't change; the filling of the Spirit varies.
3. What was strange about the way the disciples talked?
They were talking in languages they didn't even know.
4. How did the crowd of Jews know the disciples were speaking many different languages?
Because these Jews were visiting from many different nations with different languages.

DISCUSS

1. How did the Spirit begin to declare Jesus to the whole world at Pentecost?
2. How fully does the Holy Spirit fill your life? What can you do to let Him be more fully in control of your life?

DAY 3

The Spirit's coming was explained by Peter • Acts 2:14–36

READ

Acts 2:14–36

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 2:14–36

Peter explained that the Spirit's coming was pointing out a key time and person (1 Pet 1:10–11). As for the time, the Spirit's coming showed that the last days had begun. Even though most of Joel's prophecy hasn't happened yet (Joel 2:28–32), the last time period has begun (1 Pet 1:20). But Peter still included the future events to warn about judgment. The Spirit's coming shows that judgment may come at any time. Because

of this, it is urgent to turn to the Lord to be saved right away. But who is the Lord? The Spirit's coming pointed out the person who is Lord: Jesus. The coming of the Spirit shows that Jesus is even now ruling with the same authority as the Father, for only someone with God's power could pour out God's Holy Spirit. This leads to the shocking conclusion. Peter had just quoted Joel to urge people to call on the name of the Lord. The "**Lord**" that Joel was talking about was *Yahweh, the name of the true and only God*. Peter was saying that Jesus is Yahweh, and that He proved it by pouring out the Spirit!

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. What does the Spirit's coming show about the time we are living in?

It is the last times, when final judgment could come at any time.

2. What does the Spirit's coming show about who Jesus is?

It shows that Jesus really is alive and ruling as God in heaven right now.

3. What did Peter say the Men of Israel had done?

They had crucified Jesus.

4. What did Peter call Jesus?

Lord and Christs.

DISCUSS 

1. How does Peter's sermon illustrate the role of Scripture and the Spirit in preaching?
2. What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? Since judgment may come at any moment, have you called out to Jesus to be your Lord?

DAY 4

The Spirit convicted many of sin • Acts 2:37–41

READ 

Acts 2:37–41

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 2:37–41**

The Jews were *cut to the heart* after hearing that they had killed their Savior (Acts 2:23). They were experiencing *intense, sudden conviction* over their sin. But they had never responded to Jesus this way, so why do they respond to Peter? Because Jesus had poured out the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit was convicting the world of sin (John 16:8). After they were cut to the heart, they heard the good news: **forgiveness!** All their sins, including killing the Lord, could be *washed away*. God would *not hold any of it against them*. And if that weren't enough, the Lord was offering them the Holy Spirit too! And if that weren't enough, these blessings were also being offered to their children and to all the world! But forgiveness of sin can only be received by repenting and believing. The Jews also needed to be *baptized to publically side with Jesus, declare allegiance to Him as Messiah and God, and find their identity in Him*. This was a decisive act of faith, since they would now be cut off by their fellow Jews and give up their old way of life.

ASK 

1. Why were the Jews so broken-hearted when they heard this?
They realized they had crucified their Messiah and God.
2. What did Jesus offer these Jews instead of judgment?
He offered them forgiveness for all their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
3. What did the people need to do?
Repent and be baptized.
4. What did baptism show?
That the Jews had declared their allegiance to Jesus and found their identity in him.

DISCUSS 

1. What is the good news? Has this gospel message changed since Peter's first sermon?
2. Have you been baptized? Why or why not? What does baptism signify (Rom 6:3–4)?

DAY 5

The Spirit created an obedient, unified, and joyful church •
Acts 2:42–47

READ

Acts 2:42–47

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 2:42–47

The shocking message had a shocking result: about 3,000 people repented that day! The Holy Spirit used the disciples to do greater work than Jesus had done (John 14:12; 16:7). In the process, the Spirit created the church, and when the church is Spirit-led, it is a preview of God's perfect kingdom to come. The church is Spirit-led when believers obey His Word, when they choose to make the church their primary community by often gathering together, when they remember their salvation through Jesus in the Lord's Supper, when they live in awe of God and in dependence on Him through prayer, and when they selflessly serve each other because they love each other more than themselves. It is good to be humble and obedient like that, because that is how we find great joy, see how amazing God is, and show others that serving God is good. Not surprisingly, this church continued to grow as God caused the growth.

ASK

1. How many people were saved after Peter's sermon?
About 3,000.
2. How were the disciples able to do greater work than Jesus had done?
They were empowered by the Holy Spirit.
3. What was the early church like because of the Spirit?
It was obedient, united in Christ, united to each other, devoted to serving, delighting in how amazing God is, full of joy, and an attractive witness to unbelievers.
4. Did the church continue to grow?
Yes. The Lord added people to the church each day.

DISCUSS

1. What made the early church so special?
2. How does your church compare to the early church? How can you contribute to a joyful, God-honoring church?

NEXT WEEK

Peter and John preach the gospel

Acts 3:1–26



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON

WEEK 27

Peter and John preach the gospel

Acts 3:1-26



DAY 1

Jesus restored physical life • Acts 3:1-10

READ

Acts 3:1-10

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 3:1-10

Jesus restored life through men who responded with compassion, faith, and action. First, Peter and John showed compassion by looking at the cripple intently. Often people look away from those in need so that they won't feel guilty for not helping. Second, Peter acted in faith. Peter had nothing of his own to give, but he trusted in the power of Jesus and wanted to see Jesus honored above all. Third, Peter put compassion and faith into practical action. Following Jesus' example (John 13:1-13), he willingly served this cripple by lending a hand. The result was a true miracle. First, it was immediate. Muscles which had never been used grew instantly, and the skinny, curled legs thickened and straightened. Second, it was complete. For the first time in his life, the cripple stood. Amazed at what was happening, he went on to walk and even jump with joy. Third, it was a sign that glorified God through Jesus, for the cripple praised God. Fourth, it was obvious. The people knew this man was genuinely crippled from birth, and even the disciples' enemies could not deny that it was a miracle (Acts 4:16).

ASK

1. What was wrong with the man begging at the temple?
He was lame. He couldn't walk.
2. How did Peter and John act toward the crippled man?
They paid attention to him, introduced him to Jesus, and practically served Him.
3. In whose name did Peter heal the cripple?
In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.
4. Who really healed the man?
Jesus.

DISCUSS

1. What made this miracle undeniable? Is it like the so-called miracles of modern faith healers?
2. Why did Jesus give the disciples miraculous power to heal?

DAY 2

Jesus is the source of life • Acts 3:11–16

READ

Acts 3:11–16

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 3:11–16

Peter explained that restoring physical life was just a picture of Jesus' power to restore spiritual life. It showed that Jesus was the source of life. But could a crucified man really be the source of life? The kind of people who were crucified were sinners; how could a sinner be the source of life? Besides, how could a dead person be the source of life? The resurrection answers these questions. First, the resurrection proved that Jesus was not a sinful person. When God raised Jesus from the dead, it proved that God honored Him. Jesus died not as a criminal but as God's faithful servant (Isa 42:1). Instead of being a criminal, He was in fact *holy* (*set apart for God for a special mission*) and *righteous* (*innocent*). Second, the resurrection showed that Jesus was no longer dead. Eyewitnesses had seen Him alive (1 Cor 15:3–8), and His resurrection proved that He is in fact the "**Author**" of life (John 10:18), the *source* of life (John 1:4; 5:26; 14:6) and the *Lord in charge* of life. Now Jesus had proved His life-giving power once again by healing a life-long cripple.

ASK

1. When Peter explained what happened, what did he call Jesus?
The Author of life.
2. What two facts showed that Jesus was the source of life?
He rose from the dead, and He restored life to the crippled man's legs.
3. How could a crucified man be the source of life?
The resurrection proved that Jesus was sinless and alive.

DISCUSS

1. What matters most to you: your physical life or your spiritual life? How can you tell?
2. Does Jesus always heal physical problems? Why not (2 Cor 5:1–8)? Will He one day (Rev 21:4)?

DAY 3

Turn to Jesus for eternal life • Acts 3:17–19

READ

Acts 3:17–19

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 3:17–19

Imagine the shock! Many of the Jews listening now realized that they had caused the death of their very own source of life, none other than God Himself (Ps 36:9)! Was there any hope for them? Yes. First, they could have hope because they had acted in ignorance (Num 15:27–31). Since they had not understood who Jesus really was, they had not knowingly rejected the

Lord of life (Heb 6:4–6; 10:26–29). Second, they could have hope because God did something amazing. He used their ignorant sin to provide a perfect sacrifice for sin (Isa 53). Because the source of life died, it is possible for sinners to live. But this promise is only for sinners who respond. Just as the crippled man's body was made new through faith in Jesus (Acts 3:16), so a sinner's soul is made new through faith. But since *faith* is *clinging to Jesus*, it always comes with *repentance, a change of heart*, no longer rebelling and instead *turning back to Jesus*. If they would do that, their sins would be *forgiven, completely wiped away* (Isa 43:25).

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. Was there any hope for those that had killed their very own source of life?
Yes! Because the source of life died, it is possible for sinners to live.
2. How did God use the Jews' sin to do something good?
They caused Jesus to die, but God used that to provide the perfect sacrifice for sin.
3. What do you need to do so that Jesus' death can forgive your sins?
Believe and repent by turning to Jesus and trusting in Him.
4. How can Jesus heal you?
By forgiving my sins.

DISCUSS 

1. What is the real problem for which all humans need healing? Have you received this healing?
2. How does the word "turn" provide a picture of repentance? Have you done this?

DAY 4*Jesus will restore earthly life • Acts 3:20–26***READ** 

Acts 3:17–26

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 3:20–26**

Peter also urged the Jews to repent so that they could live in the new world. Since Jesus is the Lord of life, He will one day return and bring new life to earth (Matt 19:28). The prophets had eagerly looked forward to this day, when the Messiah would personally reign over a world full of peace and life (Isa 9:6–7; 11:6–10; 35:1–10; Zech 14:8–21). But that day will not come until the people of Israel return as a whole to their God (Matt 23:39). Until then, everyone who repents can begin to experience God's promised blessing. From Moses on, all the prophets had talked about the time when the Messiah would come, a time of great blessing. This blessing now reaches to all nations, but it was offered first to the Jews, since they were and always will be God's covenant people (Rom 1:16). But if anyone, Jew or Gentile, refuses to pay attention to the Messiah, they will be thrown out of the blessing. So Peter finished his sermon by urging once again: repent to receive the blessing from the living Messiah.

ASK 

1. What's another reason Peter urged the Jews to repent
So that they could live in a new world.
2. When will Jesus return and restore life on earth?
When the people of Israel repent.
3. What is life like when we live by faith in Jesus?
It is a life of blessing—we are full of joy no matter what troubles come in this life.
3. How did Peter finish his sermon?
By once again urging the people to repent.

DISCUSS 

1. What are some things that are wrong with the world? Why is the world broken (Gen 3:17–19)?
2. What do you do to be happy? How can you experience joy now no matter how broken the world is?

DAY 5

When God does not heal • James 1:2–4

READ

James 1:1–4

EXPLAIN

The truth of James 1:2–4

Should we expect miraculous healing today? Not usually. Today's so-called faith healers do not heal immediately, completely, or obviously, and they do so for their own gain and glory, not for God. Also, when the apostles finished their special mission, the purpose for miracles ended. Still, even without the gift of healing, God can heal as He pleases, whether supernaturally or naturally (1 Tim 5:23). But what about when healing doesn't come? Even when God does not heal, He is still at work. Although we will face many trials in this life, God has a purpose for each one: they are meant to produce spiritual endurance. They are designed to strengthen our faith. As we patiently and tenaciously endure great hardship, our faith is built up and refined. Over time this patient endurance "perfects" and "completes" us, leading to greater spiritual maturity. It does not make us sinless (cf. Jas 3:2), but it does teach us to rejoice more and more about what matters most—God's eternal kingdom. God may not heal, but He is at work for our good and His glory!

ASK

1. Should we expect miraculous healing today?
Not usually. God can heal, but God often allows sickness in order to strengthen our faith.
2. Is it likely that we'll experience many trials in this life?
Yes. James did not say "if" you experience trials, but "when" you experience trials.
3. Is God still at work, even when He does not heal us?
Yes. The testing of our faith produces spiritual endurance.

DISCUSS

1. What are some trials you face? Are they fun? Are they good for you?
2. Do you know someone who is joyful even though they have been through many troubles? What makes them so joyful?

NEXT WEEK

Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Holy Spirit

Acts 4:32–5:11

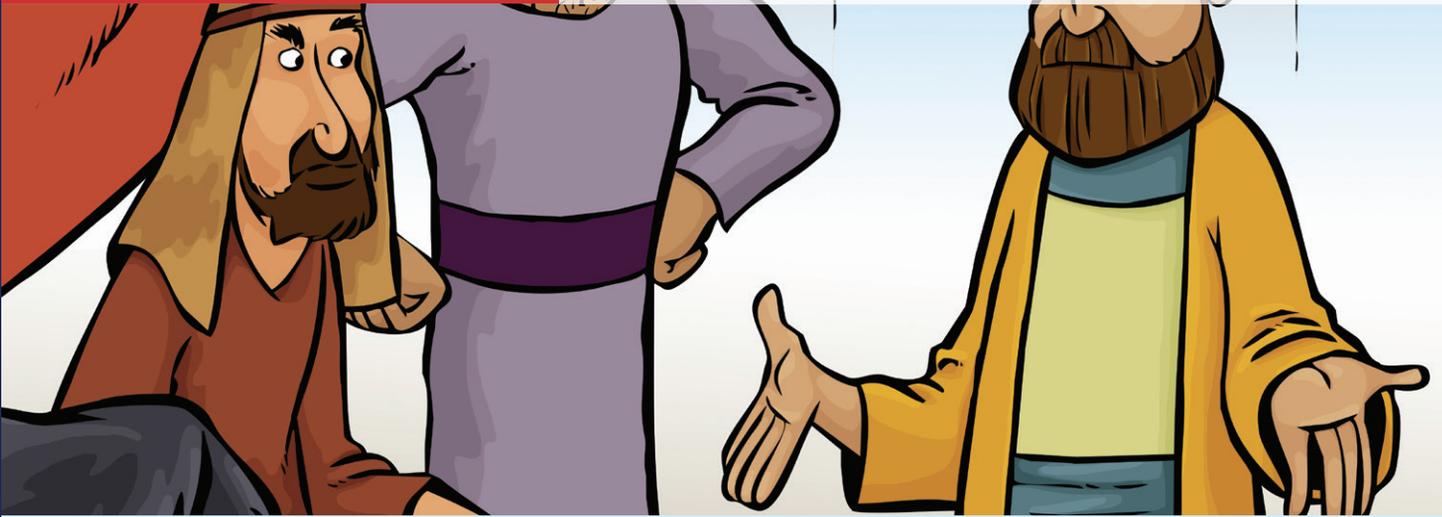


SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON

WEEK 28

Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Holy Spirit

Acts 4:32–5:11



DAY 1

The believers were united • Acts 4:32

READ

Acts 4:32–5:11

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 4:32

The believers were completely united. It was unity among the “full number of those who believed,” which by now was about 5,000 men—not even including women and children—from many different parts of the world (2:5; 4:4). So there were many different people joined as one, as a person’s body has many parts but is still one body (1 Cor 12:12). It was as if their hearts were beating together and their minds were thinking the same thoughts. Since they were like one body, each believer treated the things he owned as if they belonged to the others. What produced such unity? The Holy Spirit. The believers had just finished praying for boldness in the face of persecution (Acts 4:29), and in response to their prayer, they were filled by the Spirit (4:31). They were deeply controlled and empowered by the Spirit. People who are filled by the Spirit produce the fruit of the Spirit, which is summed up by love (Gal 5:22; Rom 13:9). A person loves when he cares more about others than about himself (Phil 2:3). These new believers were so united because the Spirit was filling them with love.

ASK

- How many Christians were there at this time?
About 5,000 men, not counting women and children.
- Why were the believers united?
They were filled with the Spirit.
- What kind of fruit did the Holy Spirit produce in them?
Love for one another—unity.
- How did the Christians show they loved each other?
They shared everything they had.

DISCUSS

- How does the human body show unity?
- Name someone you love a lot. What does that love look like? Do you want them to be happy even more than you want your own happiness?

DAY 2

The believers shared everything • Acts 4:33–37

READ

Acts 4:32–5:11

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 4:33–37

The believers were also “of one heart and soul” because they had the same purpose and passion: to honor and enjoy Jesus Christ. Even though the Jewish leaders had ordered the apostles to stop talking about Jesus, they couldn’t. What they had seen and heard was so amazing that they couldn’t stop talking about it (Acts 4:20). They especially kept talking about Christ’s resurrection, since that is the clearest proof that He is the living Lord and God, able to give life to those who trust Him. Since they received a generous and undeserved gift through Jesus, it is no wonder that they gave generously to one another. They were so generous that they even sold their houses and land to provide for those in need. Their generosity proved that their faith and love were genuine (Jas 2:15–16; 1 John 3:17). One man, Joseph from Cyprus (also called Barnabas), is an example of this. He sold a field and gave the money to the apostles to distribute as needed. Through the generosity of Barnabas and the others, the Holy Spirit continued to do His job—bringing honor and glory to Jesus Christ.

ASK

1. What purpose and passion did the people share?
Honoring and rejoicing in Jesus Christ.
2. How generous were the people?
Very generous, even selling houses and land to provide for those who were in need.
3. What did Joseph from Cyprus (Barnabas) do?
He sold a field and gave the money to the apostles.
4. Why did Joseph give the money to the apostles?
So they could distribute the money to those in need.

DISCUSS

1. Sharing with others shows love for them. What does the way you share (or don’t share) show about your love?
2. Why were the believers so generous toward one another (1 John 4:19)?

DAY 3

Ananias and Sapphira pretended to share everything • Acts 5:1–4

READ

Acts 4:32–5:11

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 5:1–4

Ananias and Sapphira pretended to do the same thing Barnabas did, but they were the opposite of Barnabas. He gave truthfully, but they gave deceitfully. He gave selflessly, but they gave selfishly. He gave for the good of others, but they gave to make themselves look good. He encouraged others, but they sought praise from others. He, in his humility, was filled and used by the Holy Spirit, but they, in their pride, were filled

and used by Satan (Jas 4:6–8). So while they looked the same on the outside, Ananias and Sapphira were hypocrites, people who pretend to be something they are not (Matt 23:27–28). Hypocrites don’t fool God. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 16:13), so He knows the truth, and He exposed the truth to Peter. The sin wasn’t about how much Ananias and Sapphira gave. Rather, the sin was the lie. And the lie was worse than Ananias thought. By lying to Peter, an apostle filled with the Spirit to lead the church of Christ, Ananias actually lied to the Holy Spirit. And by lying to the Holy Spirit, Ananias lied to God.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. How did Ananias and Sapphira pretend to be like Barnabas?
They pretended to give all the money from selling land.
2. What is someone who pretends to be something they're not?
A hypocrite.
3. Who lied to the Holy Spirit?
Ananias and Sapphira.
4. Who is the Holy Spirit?
The Holy Spirit is God.

DISCUSS 

1. How did Ananias and Sapphira sin? When was the last time you lied? How serious is lying (Prov 12:22)?
2. How were Ananias and Sapphira the opposite of Barnabas? When you do good, why do you do it?

DAY 4*Ananias and Sapphira were judged by God • Acts 5:5–11***READ** 

Acts 4:32–5:11

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 5:5–11**

Lying is bad, but does it really deserve instant death? And not just one death, but two? This swift and severe punishment shows how serious this sin was. First, it was the sin of hypocrisy, and Jesus spoke most harshly against hypocrites (Matt 23:13–36). Other sins dishonor God, but hypocrisy dishonors God while at the same time pretending to honor Him. In other words, a hypocrite tries to use God's own honor to honor himself. No wonder God hates hypocrisy. Second, it was a sin in the church and against the church. This is a deadly sin because the church is the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; 12:12). If allowed to fester, this sin pollutes the church and dishonors the name of Christ. When Ananias and Sapphira died, the whole church feared (Acts 5:11). This is a healthy, God-honoring fear that understands how dangerous sin is. Since we are all sinners, this warning is for all of us; everyone who claims to belong to Jesus must depart from a sinful way of life (2 Tim 2:19).

ASK 

1. What happened to them when they lied?
They died.
2. Why did they deserve instant death?
They dishonored God and His church.
3. How did their deaths affect the church?
It removed their sin from the church and gave everyone else a healthy fear of sin.

DISCUSS 

1. Who killed Ananias and Sapphira? Is the purity of the church important to God (1 Cor 11:30; Eph 5:27)?
2. Consider areas of your life that do not show a healthy fear of God or honor for His church. Confess, pray for help, and list some ideas for changing these sinful tendencies.

DAY 5

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! •
Matthew 23:13–36

READ

Matthew 23:13–36

EXPLAIN

The truth of Matthew 23:13–36

Ananias and Sapphira were hypocrites—people who pretend to be something they are not. While hypocrites may fool other people, they do not fool God or escape God’s judgment. In fact, Jesus reserved His harshest words for hypocrites. He pronounced seven woes on the scribes and Pharisees, whom He compared to “whitewashed tombs”: clean and beautiful on the outside, but full of bones and uncleanness on the inside. Like a cup that is clean on the outside but filthy on the inside, the scribes and Pharisees were consumed only with externals. They were obsessed with looking good, even if their goodness was only skin deep. They gave a tenth of every garden herb—perhaps even counting out individual seeds—but ignored the “weightier matters of the law,” the moral principles underlying the law. By neglecting the heart and soul of the law, the scribes and Pharisees showed that they really did not care about the law, or about God who gave the law. They cared only for themselves and what other people thought about them. Because they refused to give their hearts to God, they would suffer excruciating pain.

ASK

1. Against whom did Jesus speak most harshly?
The scribes and Pharisees.
2. How many woes did Jesus pronounce on the scribes and Pharisees?
Seven woes.
3. Why did Jesus call the scribes and Pharisees “whitewashed tombs”?
They looked good on the outside, but inside they were full of bones and uncleanness.
3. How did the scribes and Pharisees show that they really didn’t care about the law or God?
They neglected the moral principles of the law.

DISCUSS

1. Contrast pure motives for religious service with hypocritical motives. What are your motives?
2. Is it easier to spot hypocrisy in others or in yourself? Why?

NEXT WEEK

The Jews resist the Holy Spirit

Acts 6:1–7:60



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON
WEEK 29

The Jews resist the Holy Spirit

Acts 6:1–7:60



DAY 1

Stephen served full of the Holy Spirit • Acts 6:1–10

READ

Acts 6:1–10

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 6:1–10

The apostles needed spiritual men like Stephen to help them. There were probably more than 20,000 believers in Jerusalem now (Acts 4:4; 5:14), and they were from two different backgrounds: Hebraic Jews were from Judea and spoke Aramaic, and Hellenistic Jews were mostly from other countries and spoke Greek. With the large numbers and contrasting cultures, the 12 apostles could not meet everyone's needs. They could not take care of finances and also focus on prayer and preaching. They knew they needed men with three key qualities to handle finances with integrity. They needed men of "good repute," full of the Spirit, and full of wisdom. All seven men met these qualifications, but only Steven is again described as "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." Stephen and the other six served so well that the apostles were able to stay focused on preaching and bring many more, including many priests, to Jesus. Stephen also performed great miracles, and he defended the truth about Jesus so well that no one could prove him wrong. What gave him such success in living for Jesus? The Holy Spirit (6:10b).

ASK

1. Who was Stephen full of?
Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit.
2. What does it mean to be full of the Spirit?
To be full of the Spirit is to depend on the Spirit's power and obey the Spirit's will.
3. What character qualities did the Spirit produce in Stephen?
Trustworthiness, wisdom, graciousness, and boldness.
4. What did the Spirit give Stephen the power to do?
Power to do miracles. Power to speak about Jesus.

DISCUSS

1. What are the two highest priorities of church leaders (Acts 6:4)?
2. Do you desire to be a person of "good repute," full of the Spirit, and full of wisdom? How can you become this?

DAY 2

The Jews accused Stephen of blasphemy • Acts 6:11–15

READ

Acts 6:11–15

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 6:11–15

Unable to refute Stephen, the unbelieving Jews falsely accused him of **blasphemy**, *saying things that dishonor God*. They claimed he did this by speaking against two things they valued most: the temple and the Law. To them, having the temple in Jerusalem represented their unique access to God, almost as if they owned God. And the Law of Moses was less about Scripture and more about their own human traditions which they claimed came from Moses. Together, the temple and the Law gave them control. So when Stephen said Jesus surpassed the Law and the temple (cf. John 2:19–21), they put him on trial before their supreme court, the Sanhedrin. Stephen answered by the power of the Spirit. His face shined with the holiness and glory of God, showing that instead of opposing Moses, Stephen was speaking with God's approval as Moses had (Exod 34:27–35). Stephen got their attention by repeating Israel's history, something the Jews were very proud of. But as Stephen went on, he would use this history to gradually turn their two accusations against them, as well as adding a third one.

ASK

1. What did the Jews do when they were unable to refute Stephen?
They falsely accused him.
2. What did the Jews accuse Stephen of?
Blaspheming God by speaking against the temple and the Law of Moses.
3. What two things did the Jews value most?
The temple and the Law.
4. What happened to Stephen's face?
It shined with the holiness and glory of God.

DISCUSS

1. Why did Stephen's enemies resort to lies? How did Stephen use wisdom in the way he began his answer?
2. What are ways Christians sometimes treat God and the Bible like the unbelieving Jews did?

DAY 3

The Jews resisted the Holy Spirit • Acts 7:1–53

READ

Acts 7:1–53

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 7:1–53

Stephen used Israel's history to turn the Jews' two accusations against them. First, he said it was the Jews who violated the temple, because they were wrong to think they could tie God down to one place (Exod 20:24). Even when Solomon built the first temple, Solomon knew it could not contain God (1 Kgs 8:27; Isa 66:1–2a). Instead of humbly submitting to the Spirit, the Jews used the temple to try to control God

(Isa 66:2b). As a result, they rejected the presence of God in Jesus. Second, the Jews were the ones who were rejecting the Law. The Sanhedrin thought they were not like their ancestors (Matt 23:30), but by killing Jesus, they had illegally killed an innocent man. Even worse, by rejecting the one God sent, they had rebelled against God just like their ancestors. Then Stephen added a third and more severe accusation. The Sanhedrin had rejected the prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15; John 6:14). Israel had a history of rejecting the men God sent to save them, but the Sanhedrin had rejected not just a righteous man, but the one and only Righteous One.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. How did the Jews misunderstand the temple?
By focusing on the place, they failed to see that God can appear anywhere, so they failed to recognize Jesus when He came.
2. How were the Jews the ones violating the Law of Moses?
They rebelled against God by rejecting Jesus, and they broke the law by crucifying an innocent man.
3. When the Jews rejected Jesus, how were they like their ancestors?
They rejected Jesus just like their ancestors rejected Joseph and Moses.

DISCUSS 

1. Why couldn't the temple (or anything else) contain God (Isa 66:1-2a)?
2. If you resist God's Spirit, what will happen to your heart (Acts 28:25-26; Heb 3:7-19)?

DAY 4*Stephen died full of the Holy Spirit • Acts 7:54-60***READ** 

Acts 7:54-60

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 7:54-60**

While the Sanhedrin ground their teeth in fury, Stephen enjoyed the most beautiful sight ever: he saw Jesus in His glory. Peter had seen Jesus like this once, and it was so amazing that Peter thought heaven had come (Mark 9:1-5). But Stephen did not just see Jesus; he saw Him standing. Normally, Jesus is sitting (Matt 22:44; Acts 2:34; Heb 1:3), but here He stands to honor His faithful servant and welcome him home. Stephen called Him "the Son of Man," a title for the Lord of the universe (Dan 7:13-14). The Sanhedrin recognized the name, for they had sentenced Jesus to death when He had claimed to be the Son of Man, (Mark 14:62-64). Still refusing to admit the truth, they threw Stephen out of the city and began to stone him. In contrast to the shrieking mob, Stephen was so controlled by the Spirit that he became like Jesus. Like Jesus, He willingly gave up his life (Luke 23:46). Like Jesus, He prayed for his murderers to be forgiven (Luke 23:34). Then, as his killers raged, Stephen died as peacefully as one falling asleep.

ASK 

1. How did the Sanhedrin respond to Stephen?
They resisted the Spirit. They became so angry they lost control and illegally and unjustly stoned Stephen.
2. What did Stephen see before he died?
Jesus standing in heaven.
3. What did Stephen call Jesus?
Stephen called Him "the Son of Man," a title for the Lord of the universe.
4. How was Stephen like Jesus?
He willingly gave up his life, and he prayed for his murderers to be forgiven.

DISCUSS 

1. What makes heaven so good (Rev 21:23)?
2. Who won, Stephen or the Sanhedrin?

DAY 5

The prayer of a righteous person has great power • James 5:16b

READ

James 5:13–20

EXPLAIN

The truth of James 5:16b

In the end, the Sanhedrin did not listen and Stephen died, so what had the Spirit accomplished? Because Stephen was a righteous man, God used his prayer, like the prayers of Moses (Num 11:2) and Elijah (Jas 2:17–18), to accomplish much. Jesus answered Stephen's prayer by transforming one of the Jews there that day, Saul, from a prideful persecutor into a humble preacher (Acts 8:1; 9:1–20). Stephen had prayed for his murderers to be forgiven (Luke 23:34), and God granted his request. Because Stephen prayed, Saul (Paul) would one day spread the good news about Jesus all the way to Italy (Acts 28:14). And because Stephen prayed, God would direct Paul to write much of the New Testament. The prayer of a righteous person really does make a difference. So, like Stephen, depend on the Holy Spirit and allow Him to control your life. And, like Stephen, pray for God's will to be done, even if it comes at great personal cost. As you do, God will make you a faithful witness to Jesus, and one day He will bring you peacefully home to Jesus.

ASK

1. What did Stephen pray for the people stoning him?
He prayed that God would forgive them.
2. How did Jesus answer Stephen's prayer?
He saved Saul (Paul), who then wrote half of the New Testament and spread the gospel all the way to Rome.
3. Why was Stephen's prayer so powerful?
He was righteous.
4. Who else accomplished much by their prayers?
Moses and Elijah.

DISCUSS

1. Did God answer Stephen's prayer right away?
2. Is prayer the first thing you rely on or the last thing you try when nothing else works?

NEXT WEEK

The Church is persecuted and the gospel spreads

Acts 8:1–25



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON
WEEK 30

The Church is persecuted and the gospel spreads

Acts 8:1–25



DAY 1

Persecution spread the gospel to different places • Acts 8:1–4

READ 

Acts 8:1–4

EXPLAIN 

The truth of Acts 8:1–4

So far, the Holy Spirit had given the disciples incredible success sharing the gospel in Jerusalem. But now it was time for the next step (Acts 1:8). God used persecution to move the believers out from Jerusalem. This began the day Stephen was murdered. Jesus had told His disciples to expect to be treated badly for being a Christian (John 15:20; 16:2), but now it began at a furious pace. Saul was the fiercest of the persecutors. He really thought he was serving God by tearing the church apart (Acts 22:3–4). Ironically, God did use Saul's persecution! He used it to get Christians to do their job of spreading the gospel, the good news. It's not surprising they spread, but it is surprising they had "good news" to tell. They had lost friendships, possessions, and homes, and some lost mothers and fathers too. If that happened to you right now, would you go around saying you had good news? That is what the believers were doing, since "preaching the word" literally means "evangelizing" or "speaking good news." They knew it is good to have Jesus even if that means losing everything else.

ASK 

1. Why did Christians leave Jerusalem?
Because they were being persecuted.
2. When did the persecution begin?
The day Stephen was murdered.
3. Who was the fiercest persecutor of the Jerusalem church?
Saul.
4. How did God use persecution?
To spread Christians and their message out from Jerusalem.

DISCUSS 

1. How is "the blood of the martyrs the seed of the church"?
2. How good is the news of Jesus to you? What have you had to give up to have Jesus?

DAY 2

Philip spread the gospel to a different group of people • Acts 8:5–13

READ

Acts 8:5–13

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 8:5–13

One of the evangelizing believers was Philip. He went to Samaria, north of Judea. Since the Samaritans already looked forward to the Messiah (John 4:25), Philip announced that Jesus was the one. He proclaimed the “name of Jesus Christ,” teaching all about who Jesus is. He also preached about the kingdom of God, describing the blessing of God’s rule over saved people, both in this world and even more in the world to come. The Samaritans listened because Philip miraculously healed and cast out demons, confirming his message and his love for the Samaritans. The Samaritans received the message with joy, and through baptism they affirmed their loyal allegiance to Jesus. But Stephen wasn’t the only one doing signs in Samaria. Simon the sorcerer had already gained a reputation as “the Great Power of God,” a unique agent of divine power. Yet both Simon and the people realized that Philip’s power was greater. For some, this led them to fully receive Philip’s message. But it was also possible to interpret the gospel’s power as nothing more than an upgrade to Samaria’s traditional superstition. Time would tell what kind of belief each Samaritan had.

ASK

1. Who preached the gospel in Samaria?
Philip.
2. Why did the Samaritans listen to Philip?
Philip miraculously healed and cast out demons, confirming his message and his love for the Samaritans.
3. Who else was doing signs in Samaria?
Simon the sorcerer.
4. Whose power was greater?
Philip’s.

DISCUSS

1. Why must our gospel proclamations must be accompanied by genuine love?
2. How should Christians deal with Satan and demons today (Eph 6:10–18; Jas 4:6–10)?

DAY 3

There is one gospel for all kinds of people • Acts 8:14–17, 25

READ

Acts 8:14–25

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 8:14–17, 25

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the gospel, they sent Peter and John to investigate. It’s a good thing Peter and John came to help sort this out. They had two issues to deal with. First, they had to confirm that the gospel really is available to all people, even to strange and hostile people. They made this clear by visibly putting their

hands on the Samaritans so that they received the Spirit. Normally, believers receive the Holy Spirit the moment they believe (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:13). But this situation was unique: for the first time in history, people were welcomed into God’s family without having to become Jews. By delaying the Spirit, God showed that the Samaritans had the same Spirit and were under the same leadership of the apostles. Despite their differences, they were now “one body” sharing “one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Eph 4:4–5). When the apostles saw this, they also evangelized in Samaria.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. Who did the apostles send to Samaria?
Peter and John.
2. What did the Samaritans receive when the apostles came?
The Holy Spirit.
3. Why didn't the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit right when they believed?
To make it clear that the Samaritans were part of the same church as Jewish believers without first becoming Jews.

DISCUSS 

1. Are you willing to talk about Jesus to people you are not comfortable around?
2. Has the gospel message changed over time (Gen 15:6)?

DAY 4*The apostles guarded against a different gospel • Acts 8:18–24***READ** 

Acts 8:14–25

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 8:18–24**

The apostle's second job in Samaria was to guard the purity of the gospel. By trying to buy the power of conferring the Spirit, Simon twisted the gospel in three ways. First, Simon wanted to use the Holy Spirit for his own glory, not be used by the Holy Spirit for the glory of God (Eph 5:18). Second, Simon thought the gospel was something he could just add to his old way of life. Simon really did believe in the power of God, but like the demons, that faith did not include trust and submission to God's will (Jas 2:19). He did not want God to radically change the direction of his life (Isa 55:6; 1 Cor 6:11) or transform him from the inside out (2 Cor 5:17). Third, Simon thought the gospel was compatible with his sin. Because Simon was seeking his own glory, he was full of bitterness whenever anyone or anything overshadowed him. Because he was still committed to his old way of life, he was still a slave of his own sin. Even his request for prayer was detestable. He only asked to get rid of the consequences of his sin, not the sin itself

ASK 

1. Who tried to get the Spirit's power to use for himself?
Simon.
2. What was Simon's belief like?
It was factual: he believed that there was real power in the gospel. However, it was not trusting: he did not want to submit to the control of the gospel.
3. Why did Simon want the Holy Spirit?
To use for his own glory. To make himself a more powerful sorcerer.
4. What did Simon think about his sin?
He didn't mind his sin, so long as he could avoid sin's consequences.

DISCUSS 

1. How did Simon treat the Holy Spirit's power like a genie in a bottle?
2. Is it ok to change the gospel to make it more acceptable to different people or cultures? Why or why not?

DAY 5

One body, Spirit, hope, faith, baptism, and God and Father •
Ephesians 4:4–6

READ

Ephesians 4:1–6

EXPLAIN

The truth of Ephesians 4:4–6

As the Holy Spirit demonstrated by coming on the Samaritans, there is one, unified body of believers. There is no division and no requirement other than the gospel to enter Christ's body. This is because there is one Spirit, who unites all Christians in the "bond of peace," which is love (Eph 4:3; Col 3:14). Having been bound together by God's Spirit, Christians are united in at least seven different ways. They share "one body," the church, made up of every believer since the church was born on Pentecost. This body was formed by "one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:11–13) and shares "one hope," the believer's eternal inheritance in Christ (Eph 1:11–14). It follows "one Lord," Jesus (Acts 4:12; Rom 10:12), and obeys "one faith," the Scriptures (Jude 3). It practices "one baptism," which probably refers to water baptism when Christians declare their allegiance to Jesus as Lord and Savior. Finally, this one body submits to "one God," who is "over all and through all and in all." All this has been made possible through the "one Lord," Jesus, who "has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14).

ASK

1. What's the one requirement for entrance into Christ's body, the church?
The gospel.
2. Who unites all Christians?
The Holy Spirit.
3. What are the seven ways Christians are united?
See explanation paragraph for answers.
3. Who made unity possible?
Jesus.

DISCUSS

1. Does "one body" mean every Christian is exactly alike (1 Cor 12:12–27)?
2. It is not uncommon for Christians to enjoy sweet fellowship with another Christian they just met. How is this possible?

NEXT WEEK

Philip shares the gospel with the Ethiopian

Acts 8:26–40



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON

WEEK 31

Philip shares the gospel with the Ethiopian

Acts 8:26–40



DAY 1

Philip obeyed the Spirit • Acts 8:26–30

READ

Acts 8:26–40

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 8:26–30

Philip had been north of Jerusalem, but now an angel commanded him to go south. That was a strange command. Why should Philip leave what he began in Samaria? Why should he go by the less traveled road through dry hills instead of the more common one along the sea? But the strangeness of the command did not stop Philip. He got up and went. It's a good thing he obeyed, because an unexpected person was there: an Ethiopian official. But this wasn't just any Ethiopian. He was the Secretary of the Treasury, in charge of all the finances. More importantly, he was sincerely seeking God. He had purchased a scroll of Isaiah, and he happened to be reading it right then. Philip didn't yet know who this man was or what he was reading. But again, the Spirit guided him, and Philip fully obeyed. This shows that the work of bringing people to Jesus is, first, a work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit begins the work and sees it through to the end (John 3:3; 16:7–14). Second, it is the work of servants who obey the Spirit.

ASK

1. Who told Philip to go south?
An angel of the Lord.
2. What was strange about the place where Philip was sent?
It was on the other side of Jerusalem from where Philip was. It was a less-used road.
3. Did Philip obey?
Yes.
4. Who did Philip find?
An important Ethiopian who was seeking God.

DISCUSS

1. To what mission field have you been called?
2. How does God answer people who sincerely seek Him (Jer 29:13; Matt 7:7)?

DAY 2

Philip proclaimed Jesus • Acts 8:31–35

READ

Acts 8:26–40

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 8:31–35

The Spirit also uses Scripture to bring people to Jesus. He arranged it so that the Ethiopian was reading Isaiah 53, one of the fullest descriptions of the Messiah's suffering and death in the Old Testament. The Ethiopian read about someone who unjustly and silently suffered and died, but he couldn't figure out who this person was. Who is the "servant" (Isa 52:13; 53:11)? Philip answered: it is about the Messiah, and the Messiah is Jesus. Jesus suffered and was despised (Isa 53:1–3; Mark 9:12). Jesus was a servant who gave His life for the sake of others (Isa 53:4–6; Mark 10:45). Jesus was truthful, silent, and submissive even while unjustly condemned (Isa 53:7–9; Matt 26:42; John 18:36–37). Jesus was killed with wicked men but was with a rich man in His death (Isa 53:9; Matt 27:38, 57–60). Jesus died as a guilt offering, yet by rising again He gained long life (Isa 53:10a; Mark 16:6). Finally, Jesus perfectly accomplished the Father's will (Isa 53:10b; John 5:19). This is the gospel: Jesus is the Messiah who died to take away our sin (Isa 53:11–12; 2 Cor 5:21).

ASK

1. What was the Ethiopian reading?
He was reading Isaiah 53, which predicts Jesus suffering for others.
2. What did Philip explain?
Philip explained all about Jesus, starting with Isaiah 53.
3. What did Philip use to tell him about Jesus?
The Bible.

DISCUSS

1. Was this event just a big coincidence?
2. Why is it important that we use Scripture when sharing the gospel with others (Rom 10:17)?

DAY 3

Philip's testimony brought salvation • Acts 8:36–40

READ

Acts 8:26–40

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 8:36–40

Because of Philip's explanation, the Ethiopian believed. He showed his faith by action when he asked to be baptized. The Ethiopian's faith is also clear in his attitude. The direction of his journey didn't change, but his heart did! It turned from frustration and confusion to joy. He rejoiced because he had found the answer he had longed for. He had found forgiveness for sins and salvation from death (Rom

8:1). He had found peace and righteousness (5:1). And best of all, he had found Jesus, his precious Savior and King (Luke 2:10–11). His joy showed that he belonged to Jesus, since Jesus came to put His joy in His followers (John 15:11). With one mission accomplished, the next began. The Spirit never rests in bringing people to Jesus, and now He had two servants to work through, not just one. The Ethiopian carried his new faith back home, and over the centuries Christianity spread in Ethiopia. As for Philip, the Spirit carried him off to Azotus (Ashdod), about 20 miles north of Gaza. From there Philip continued his mission up the coast until he came to Caesarea.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. What did the Ethiopian want to do?
He wanted to be baptized.
2. What did the Ethiopian feel like afterward?
He was full of joy, because he had Jesus and the Spirit.
3. Where did the Spirit take Philip?
To Azotus (Ashdod), about 20 miles north of Gaza.
4. What did Philip do?
Philip continued to preach the gospel until he came to Caesarea.

DISCUSS 

1. Why is joy a mark of a Christian (John 15:11)?
Are you a joyful person?
2. Can a Christian be joyful in any situation? What causes you to be joyful or not?

DAY 4*Baptism: an outward picture of an inward reality • Romans 6:3–4***READ** 

Romans 6:1–14

EXPLAIN **The truth of Romans 6:3–4**

Since the Ethiopian asked about baptism, Philip must have explained it as part of the gospel message. This shows that baptism is a high priority! Outwardly, **baptism** is *immersion in water*. But it is also a symbol of an inward reality. It is *a sign of unity with Jesus* (1 Cor 12:13). It is identifying with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection and committing to live as one who belongs to Jesus (Rom 6:1–4). By being submerged in water, Christians show their unity with Jesus in His death and burial. And by rising out of the water, Christians show their unity with Jesus in His resurrection. Having been united with Jesus in His resurrection, Christians enjoy a “newness of life,” a new, righteous character (2 Cor 5:17). Baptism is also *a sign of trusting God to wash away sin*, kind of like how water washes away dirt (1 Pet 3:21). Because baptism is so important and is commanded (Matt 28:19; Acts 2:38), every believer must be baptized—and should want to be baptized—if at all possible.

ASK 

1. What is baptism?
Baptism is being immersed in water as an outward sign of an inward unity and loyalty to Jesus, and as a sign of trusting God to wash away sins.
2. How did Philip show that baptism is a high priority?
Since the Ethiopian asked about baptism, Philip must have explained it as part of the gospel message.
3. Why does baptism often accompany the gospel message?
Because baptism pictures salvation.

DISCUSS 

1. Where does your church baptize? Why does it not matter where you baptize or what kind of water you use?.
2. How did Jesus show the importance of baptism (Matt 28:19)? Have you been baptized? Why or why not?

DAY 5

Always be ready • 1 Peter 3:15

READ

1 Peter 3:8–22

EXPLAIN

The truth of 1 Peter 3:15

Philip loved Jesus and was ready to share His Word. What about you? Have allowed Jesus to be the boss of your life? Is your heart a home for God? Do you listen to Jesus and talk to Him often, so that you know what He wants you to do? Do you obey and love His Word? Are you ready to do what Philip did: use Scripture to talk about Jesus? Do you know what you believe? Are you able to communicate what you believe to others? Christians must be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks, sharing the good news of salvation with humility, accuracy, kindness, and respect. Whenever possible, we should all witness like Philip did, because faith comes by the word of Christ (Rom 10:17). And as we saw with the Ethiopian, it is the word that causes people to be spiritually born again (1 Pet 1:23). So know the Bible and tell people what it says: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Rom 10:15).

ASK

1. How do we make our heart a home for God?
*By living in constant communion with Jesus.
By obeying and loving His Word.*
2. What must Christians always be ready to do?
Share the reason for their faith with anyone who asks.
3. How must Christians do it?
With “gentleness and respect.”
4. Who causes people to be spiritually reborn?
The Holy Spirit.

DISCUSS

1. What are the historical facts of the gospel (1 Cor 15:1–4)?
2. Why do people who share the gospel have “beautiful feet” (Rom 10:14–15)?

NEXT WEEK

Saul is converted

Acts 9:1–31



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON

WEEK 32

Saul is converted

Acts 9:1–31



DAY 1

Saul was the fiercest persecutor of the gospel • Acts 9:1–2

READ

Acts 9:1–9

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 9:1–2

The greatest persecutor of the early church was Saul. He was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28) and a Pharisee trained by one of the most famous rabbis (22:3; 23:6). His qualifications were flawless (Phil 3:4), and so was his zeal to rip the church apart (3:6; Acts 8:3). He had agreed with putting Stephen to death (8:1), and he was convinced that he was doing the right thing (26:9). He was obsessed with persecution. It was his way of life. It consumed him. He didn't want Christians in prison. He wanted them dead (26:10–11). And not just in Jerusalem, but everywhere (26:11). His life was all about destroying the Way, people who claimed that Jesus was the way to God (John 14:6; Acts 18:26). So he set off for Damascus, a large city in Syria, north of Judea, where Christianity had begun to spread among the large Jewish community. Saul had authority from the high priest, but he was about to meet someone with even more authority: Jesus. This encounter would radically transform Saul—the gospel's greatest opponent would become its greatest proponent.

ASK

1. Who was trying to kill Christians?
Saul.
2. Why was Saul going to Damascus?
To arrest and kill Christians.
3. Did Saul have permission to do this?
Yes. Saul had authority from the high priest.
4. Did Saul think he was doing the right thing?
Yes. He believed that he was serving God.

DISCUSS

1. Is sincerity enough to make someone a good person?
2. Have you ever thought you were doing the right thing, but then realized the Bible showed it wasn't right?

DAY 2

Jesus defeated the fiercest persecutor of His gospel • Acts 9:3–9

READ

Acts 9:1–9

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 9:3–9

Even though it was noon (Acts 22:6), Saul saw a supernatural light and heard a clear voice. Saul immediately knew that this person was the Lord. But who exactly was this Lord? The answer shook Saul's world. What he thought was great service to the Lord was actually great sin against Jesus. By persecuting believers, Saul was persecuting Jesus. Saul's experience was unique, but it shows two principles of salvation. First, Jesus calls the sinner. He causes the sinner to see who Jesus really is (John 6:37, 44; 2 Cor 4:6), and as a result, He causes the sinner to desire to live under His authority (22:10–11). This is what happened to Saul, who spent the next three days seeking Jesus in prayer. Second, Jesus convicts the sinner by showing him how desperately sinful he is (Luke 18:13). He replaces pride with humility so that the sinner is ready to respond in faith (Matt 11:25; 18:3). So Saul, instead of entering Damascus as a proud conqueror of Christians, was led in as a humble captive of Christ. By calling and convicting Saul, Jesus defeated the church's fiercest persecutor.

ASK

1. Who appeared to Saul near Damascus?
Jesus.
2. What did Saul call Jesus?
Lord.
3. How did Jesus call Saul to faith?
Jesus caused Saul to realize just who He is—Lord, Son of God, and Messiah.
4. How did Jesus convict Saul of his sin?
Jesus allowed Saul to see that what Saul thought was a good thing (persecuting Christians) was actually a very terrible thing (attacking God).

DISCUSS

1. Why did Jesus say Saul was persecuting Him (Col 1:24)?
2. Have you ever recognized your own sin the same way Saul did (1 Tim 1:15)?

DAY 3

Jesus made Saul a witness to His gospel • Acts 9:10–19

READ

Acts 9:10–31

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 9:10–19

Imagine if you were Ananias: how quickly would you obey and go help a man who wanted to kill you? Ananias was ready to obey, but he still wondered why he was being sent to the enemy. Jesus answered that He had chosen Saul to be His instrument. This shows that Jesus is the one in charge. He is the one leading the mission to proclaim His name to the whole world. Now He had chosen Saul to accomplish a big

part of that mission—to Jews (Rom 1:16), to Gentiles (11:13), and to kings (Acts 26). If that wasn't enough to convince Ananias, Jesus added that instead of causing more suffering, Saul himself would suffer greatly for Jesus (2 Cor 11:24–29). Ananias obeyed, and through Ananias, Saul's **conversion** was complete. Saul's physical blindness was healed, illustrating that he also had new spiritual sight (Heb 11:1, 13, 27; 2 Cor 4:4–6). Saul also confirmed his faith through baptism. Thus, while the process of turning from self and turning toward Jesus had begun while still on the road, now Saul's faith shows his conversion was complete.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. Who did Jesus use to equip Saul to be His chosen instrument?
Ananias came, prayed, and baptized Saul.
2. Why was Ananias initially confused when Jesus told him to go to Saul?
Saul was the enemy of the gospel.
3. What did Jesus call Saul?
“My chosen instrument.”
4. Why did Jesus call Saul His “chosen instrument”?
Jesus was going to use Saul to tell others about Jesus.

DISCUSS 

1. How do we know Saul’s conversion was complete?
2. Are you willing to share Jesus with others? Even if it’s dangerous? Even if other people end up getting lots of attention (like Saul) and you do not (like Ananias)?

DAY 4*Jesus proclaimed and protected His gospel • Acts 9:20–31***READ** 

Acts 9:10–31

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 9:20–31**

Jesus’ plan for Saul began right away. Saul proclaimed the opposite of what he used to believe. He said Jesus is the Son of God—the Messiah who has all the authority of the Father (Mark 14:61). The Jews were shocked by how completely he had changed. After that, Saul spent about three years in the area just south of Damascus called Nabatean Arabia (Gal 1:17–18). The Nabatean king, Aretas, must not have liked Saul’s preaching there, so even after Saul returned to Damascus, Aretas worked with the Jews to try to capture him (2 Cor 11:32). Saul escaped, but just as Jesus had said, he was already preaching and being persecuted. This pattern would continue in Jerusalem, but first, Saul had to overcome opposition from within the church. The Christians there were suspicious: was Saul tricking everyone in order to hurt them more? Fortunately, Barnabas made peace, and Saul met Peter and James (Gal 1:18–19). After that Saul continued proclaiming that Jesus is Lord, until he again needed to flee. This time, he went back to his hometown, Tarsus, until Barnabas came to give him a new mission (Acts 11:25).

ASK 

1. When did Saul begin proclaiming Jesus?
Right after his conversion.
2. Why were the Christians in Jerusalem afraid of Saul?
They thought Saul might be tricking everyone in order to hurt them more.
3. How did Barnabas know Saul’s faith was real?
By how boldly Saul proclaimed Jesus and suffered for Him.
4. How did Jesus protect His church?
By ending Saul’s persecution, Jesus allowed the church to have a time of peace.

DISCUSS 

1. Have you been mistreated for telling others the good news about Jesus?
2. What keeps you from being a witness for Jesus? Lack of genuine conversion for yourself? Lack of love for Jesus or for others? Lack of knowledge? Fear of how people will respond?

DAY 5

The washing of regeneration • Titus 3:5

READ

Titus 3:1–11

EXPLAIN

The truth of Titus 3:5

Along with the human response in conversion comes God's act of **regeneration**. Paul not only experienced this in his conversion, but he also wrote about it in his letter to Titus: "he saved us...by the washing of regeneration." This is new birth by the Spirit (John 3:3), when the Spirit radically changes a person from the inside out (2 Cor 5:17). We see that this happened to Saul because the Spirit also filled him (Acts 9:17). Not only did Saul need the Spirit to be saved, but he also needed the Spirit in order to be a key witness to Jesus (1:8). Saul knew this. He knew it was only God's power within that made the difference (2 Cor 4:7). Like all Christians, Saul needed to be transformed in order to display Christ (2 Cor 3:18). The Spirit changed Saul from a proud and bitter persecutor to a humble and joyful sufferer (Phil 3:4–11) and from an arrogant legalist to a grateful believer (1 Tim 1:13–17). Before, he had appointed himself to be chief persecutor. Now, he was an apostle not because of himself, but because of God's gracious choice (Gal 1:1).

ASK

1. What is regeneration?
It is new birth caused by the Holy Spirit.
2. Who experiences regeneration?
Every Christian at salvation.
3. How did Paul show that he had been regenerated?
He changed from a proud and bitter persecutor to a humble and joyful sufferer and from an arrogant legalist to a grateful believer. He relied on God's authority and not on his own.

DISCUSS

1. Why is regeneration necessary (Eph 2:1, 5)?
2. Have you been born again? If so, how does this affect your life (Gal 5:16–26)? If not, how can you be (Luke 11:13; Jas 4:3–10)?

NEXT WEEK

The Gentiles receive the gospel

Acts 10:1–11:18



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON

WEEK 33

The Gentiles receive the gospel

Acts 10:1–11:18



DAY 1

Gentiles were seeking God • Acts 10:1–2

READ

Acts 10:1–33

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 10:1–2

Acts 10 is a massive step in God's salvation plan. Long ago, God chose to bless all nations through the descendants of one man, Abraham (Gen 12:1–3). Yet Israel failed in its mission to bless all nations (Isa 42:9), and still few Gentiles believed even after Jesus died for the world (1 John 2:2). But now in Acts 10, the 2,000-year-old promise began to come true, for God brought salvation to Gentiles. God prepared the way by preparing the heart of Cornelius. Cornelius was centurion in the Roman army. He was probably not Roman himself, but he was still a Gentile. As a centurion, he was in charge of about 100 soldiers, he was likely a strong, courageous, and responsible man. More importantly, he worshiped the true God. Although he was not a *proselyte*, a full convert to Judaism, he prayed to God and showed practical love to the people of Israel (Gen 12:3a). Like Cornelius, his whole family also worshiped God. That included not just immediate family members, but also slaves and others who lived or worked as part of the household. They were all ready to receive the gospel.

ASK

- Who was the centurion who prayed to God?
Cornelius.
- What is a centurion?
A leader in the Roman army in charge of about 100 soldiers.
- How do we know Cornelius was a worshiper of God?
He was "devout," "feared God," "gave alms generously," and "prayed continually to God."
- Who joined Cornelius in worshiping God?
His entire household.

DISCUSS

- How did God reveal that Gentiles were originally included in His salvation plan (Gen 12:3)?
- If you have repented, describe how God prepared your heart for salvation. If not, what kind of heart must you have in order to be saved (Jer 29:13)?

DAY 2

God prepared to save Gentiles • Acts 10:3–33

READ

Acts 10:1–33

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 10:3–33

God sent an angel in response to Cornelius' prayers and kindness. At the same time, Jesus and the Holy Spirit prepared Peter to respond to Cornelius' invitation. This was important, because Jews thought Gentiles were unclean. So Jesus gave Peter a vision of clean and unclean animals and told Peter to eat them. But what did this have to do with Gentiles? The old laws regarding food were not primarily about food to begin with. They were for keeping Israel separate from the people around them, guarding Israel against the nations' idolatry (Lev 20:25–26). But now Jesus had created a new community cleansed by His blood and kept holy by the Spirit on the inside rather than by laws on the outside (Gal 5:18; Col 2:20–23). Peter didn't quite understand this just from the vision, so the Holy Spirit spoke directly to Peter to help him make the connection. Now Peter understood: the same new covenant that made all food clean also made all people clean. So Peter went to Cornelius, and the preparation was complete. God had brought His obedient Jewish witness to an eager Gentile audience.

ASK

1. Who did God send to answer Cornelius' prayer?
Peter.
2. What did Jesus show Peter to prepare him to go to Gentiles?
A sheet full of clean and unclean animals.
3. What did Jesus say about the vision?
What God has made clean, do not call common.
4. What did the Spirit say this meant?
Go to the Gentiles. God offers salvation to them too.

DISCUSS

1. What is the lasting principle that the old food laws were about (Lev 20:25–26; 2 Cor 6:14–7:1)?
2. Why does that principle no longer prevent fellowship between believing Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:13–19)?

DAY 3

The gospel offers salvation to all people • Acts 10:34–42

READ

Acts 10:34–48

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 10:34–42

Peter preached to a new group of people, but he preached the same gospel. So what gospel did Peter preach? He preached the good news of peace through Jesus Christ. This is good news because all our problems come from not having peace with God. Jesus died to bear God's wrath against sin (2 Cor 5:19), so He turns enemies of God into friends (Rom 5:10). Jesus

is able to bring such total peace because He is Lord of all. While on earth, Jesus proved He is Lord of all. The Father, the Spirit, and His own righteous actions confirmed that He is Lord, even over Satan (1 John 3:8). Second, His death and resurrection prove that He is Lord. He is the Lord of life (Acts 3:15) and also the judge of the living and the dead (John 5:21–29). To some, judgment doesn't seem like "good news," but it is only bad news to those who reject Jesus. To those who love Jesus, it is just one more reason to trust Him with their lives. So the *gospel* is the good news that Jesus is Lord of all.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. Did Peter preach a new gospel?
No. He preached to a new group of people, but he preached the same gospel.
2. How did Peter define the gospel?
It is the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.
3. Who are unbelievers at war with?
They are at war with God.
4. What are some things Jesus is Lord over?
Satan, life and death, judgment.

DISCUSS 

1. Do you rejoice that Jesus is Lord of all? Why is that such good news (Isa 9:6–7)? Can someone be saved without gladly accepting Jesus as Lord (Rom 10:9)?
2. How would you answer someone who says there are many ways to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)?

DAY 4*The gospel offers salvation through faith • Acts 10:43***READ** 

Acts 10:34–48

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 10:43**

The peace with God that Peter delivered to the Gentiles is the same **gospel** the prophets predicted (Isa 53:11): the good news of forgiveness by faith in Jesus. Forgiveness is good news, because we can never have peace so long as God holds our sins against us. But by His death, Jesus offers to wipe our sins away (Acts 3:19) and cancel the debt we owe God (Col 2:14). Because Jesus paid the price, forgiveness is a gift that we cannot earn. And since it is a gift, it only comes by faith (Rom 4:16). We must believe in Jesus, trusting in Him alone to save us, for there is no other name that saves (Acts 4:12). Because it is a gift, all boasting is excluded (Eph 2:9). We do not contribute to our salvation in any way. We simply receive what God has so graciously provided. And this gracious gift is ours the moment we believe (Rom 10:9). Finally, just as the prophets predicted, this forgiveness is offered to everyone (Isa 55:1–7). This is the gospel that Peter was now offering to Gentiles, without requiring them to become Jews first.

ASK 

1. What did Peter say is the only way to be forgiven?
By believing in Jesus.
2. Why is boasting excluded?
Salvation is by grace—it is a gift. We do nothing to earn it.
3. Is the gift of salvation offered to everyone?
Yes, just as the prophets predicted.

DISCUSS 

1. How is salvation like a gift? If you add works to grace, is it still grace (Rom 4:4)?
2. Since salvation is a gift, how does it affect the way you live now (Gal 2:20–3:3, 11)?

DAY 5

God saved Gentiles • Acts 10:44–48; 11:15–18

READ

Acts 10:34–48; 11:15–18

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 10:44–48; 11:15–18

Peter had not even finished when the Holy Spirit came on everyone who was listening. To make sure that Peter and the other Jews didn't miss it, the Spirit caused the Gentiles to speak in other languages. Peter realized that this sign, which did not normally happen, was meant to connect to what happened at Pentecost. The Spirit came in such a visible way to prove that the Gentiles really did have faith, repentance, and eternal life. Having the Holy Spirit is an essential part of what it means to be a Christian (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:13). Since the Holy Spirit came on everyone in Cornelius' household, they were all true believers, and they all had been forgiven. Because Peter realized that they had all believed, he immediately had Cornelius' household baptized. He did this because baptism is the sign of faith. After that, Peter stayed a few days. This would have been unthinkable for him before, but now he saw that God cleansed both Jew and Gentile without distinction (Acts 15:9). He understood that since Jesus is our peace, there is no wall separating Jew and Gentile (Eph 4:12).

ASK

1. How do you know that Cornelius and his family believed?
The Holy Spirit came on all of them, and Peter had them baptized.
2. Why did the Spirit cause the Gentiles to speak in other languages?
To make it very clear to all the Jews that God had accepted Gentiles.
3. Why did Peter have them all baptized?
Baptism is a mark of faith, and because they all received the Spirit, Peter knew they all believed.
4. Did Peter leave right away?
No. He stayed a few days, a sign of the new fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers.

DISCUSS

1. While speaking in tongues was unique, all Christians show evidence of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23). Is there evidence of the Spirit in your life? What must you do to see His work in you (5:25)?
2. What can you do to seek greater fellowship with all kinds of believers?

NEXT WEEK

God frees Peter from prison

Acts 12:1–24



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON
WEEK 34

God frees Peter from prison

Acts 12:1-24



DAY 1

Herod attacked the church • Acts 12:1-4

READ

Acts 12:1-25

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 12:1-4

Herod seemed unbeatable. First, he was well-connected. This particular Herod was Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great who tried to kill Jesus (Matt 2) and father of Herod Agrippa II who would later hear Paul's defense (Acts 25-26). He grew up in Rome as a close friend of the future emperors Gaius Caligula and Claudius. Gaius made Herod king over the northern part of Israel in 37 AD, then in 41 AD Claudius added Judea to Herod's realm. Second, Herod had a good understanding of the Jews and was skilled in winning their approval (26:3). To increase his popularity, Herod executed James. This grieved the church, since James was with Peter and John in the inner group of apostles closest to Jesus. Then, to boost his popularity even more, Herod planned to kill the Gentile-loving Peter right after Passover while the holiday crowds were still in Jerusalem. Probably remembering Peter's previous escape from prison (Acts 5:19), Herod made sure he was vigilantly guarded. Against such a well-connected and cunning enemy, the church appeared to be doomed.

ASK

1. Who violently attacked the church?
King Herod Agrippa I.
2. Did God rescue James?
No. James was executed.
3. Why did Herod persecute the church?
Because it made him popular with the Jews.
4. Why did Peter's situation seem hopeless from a human perspective?
Herod was powerful and clever, and Peter was very well guarded.

DISCUSS

1. Are Christians persecuted for their faith in your country? Pray for specific Christians who are being persecuted right now around the world (look online for "Open Doors," "Voice of the Martyrs," or "Compass Direct News").
2. What might a total lack of persecution reveal about your faith (2 Tim 3:12)?

DAY 2

God rescued Peter • Acts 12:5–17

READ

Acts 12:1–25

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 12:5–17

The church had a powerful weapon that Herod had not taken into account: prayer. They prayed earnestly for Peter. For awhile, it didn't seem to make a difference. Days passed, but Peter was still in prison and would be executed the next day. Yet, while they were still praying, God was already answering their prayers. An angel woke Peter up and led him out of the prison without any difficulty. The chains fell off, and he walked right past the guards and out the main gate. Against this kind of supernatural power, Herod's power seems pretty powerless. Even the praying believers didn't think prayer could make such a difference! When Peter showed up at Mary's house, the believers there were so shocked that they argued about it as Peter waited outside the gate. Peter was more level-headed. He told them to tell James that he was free. This James was the brother of Jesus (Matt 13:55), who at this point was recognized as the leader of the church in Jerusalem. With that message delivered, Peter wisely disappeared before Herod came looking for him.

ASK

1. What did the believers do?
They prayed with all their might.
2. How did God answer their prayers?
God sent an angel to rescue Peter from prison.
3. What happened when Peter showed up at Mary's house?
The people didn't believe it was Peter.
4. What did Peter do after God freed him from prison?
He went away before Herod came looking for him.

DISCUSS

1. Could Herod have done something else that would have stopped Peter from escaping? Is there something in your life right now over which you need to trust that God has power?
2. Do you believe that prayer actually makes a difference? Does your prayer life match what you claim to believe about prayer?

DAY 3

Herod accepted worship from the people of Tyre and Sidon • Acts 12:18–22

READ

Acts 12:1–25

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 12:18–22

Herod looked like a fool. Instead of giving the crowds in Jerusalem a popular execution, he had to admit that one prisoner had managed to escape four squads of soldiers. Frustrated, he blamed his guards and executed them in Peter's place. It did not occur to him that his problem was something more than careless guards. But life went on for Herod, and if he couldn't get his way in

Jerusalem, at least he could in his capital of Caesarea. Men had come south from Tyre and Sidon to try to earn back Herod's favor. Somehow they had offended him, and he had responded by restricting the food traded to their cities. So there they were, gathered in the stadium, with the Mediterranean Sea sparkling nearby and the sound of its waves lapping up on shore. It was a perfect day to be praised, Herod thought, and he made the most of it by dressing in royal robes. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, these robes were woven with silver thread. As the sun sparkled off his robes, Herod soaked up their gushing praise

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. Why did Herod look like a fool?
He had to admit that one prisoner had escaped his four squads of soldiers.
2. What did Herod do to his guards?
He executed them.
3. What did Herod do in Caesarea?
He appeared in a shining robe to receive praise from people from Tyre and Sidon.
4. Why were the people from Tyre and Sidon praising Herod?
They had offended Herod and were trying to earn back his favor.

DISCUSS 

1. Have you ever blamed someone else for your own problem? Have you ever tried to get people to praise you? What happened as a result?
2. How were both the people of Tyre and Sidon and Herod in sin (Luke 4:8)?

DAY 4*God defeated Herod • Acts 12:23–25***READ** 

Acts 12:1–25

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 12:23–25**

Herod did not soak up the people's praise for very long, for at that moment an angel struck him down. Josephus adds that Herod died about five days later, having been eaten by worms. Possibly, Herod had been infected by parasitic worm eggs forming a cyst on his liver. That cyst then burst while he was being praised, causing massive internal damage that claimed his life five days later. But whatever the physical cause, it's clear that this was an act of God, a punishment for two things. First, God struck him because God hates pride (Jas 4:6). One way or another, God always humbles the proud (Isa 2:9–17). Second, God struck Herod because God fiercely loves His people (Zech 12:1–9). For all his cleverness, Herod made a serious mistake when he went after God's people. In contrast to Herod's miserable end, the church flourished. As Herod's body collapsed, God's word spread rapidly. But God was only just getting started, for Saul, also known as Paul, was back on the scene along with Barnabas. As Herod's body was laid in its tomb, Paul's first missionary journey was about to begin (Acts 12:25–13:3).

ASK 

1. What happened to Herod?
An angel struck him and he died full of worms.
2. Why did God send an angel to kill Herod?
Because of Herod's pride and because Herod had attacked God's people.
3. How did God win in the end?
He killed Herod and caused the gospel to keep spreading.

DISCUSS 

1. Can anyone win against God in the end (Phil 2:10–11)?
2. How serious is pride (Jas 4:6; Isa 2:11)? List and confess specific areas of pride in your life.

DAY 5

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you • John 15:20

READ

John 15:18–27

EXPLAIN

The truth of John 15:20

It shouldn't surprise us that Herod killed James and threw Peter in prison. Jesus told His disciples to expect persecution. He predicted that just as He was hated and persecuted, so His followers would be too. They could expect to be treated the same way He was treated. If people had persecuted Him, then they would persecute the disciples too. If they had kept His word, then they would keep the disciples' word too. Jesus had even specifically predicted James' martyrdom (Mark 10:39). In fact, He said that to be a Christian is to count yourself dead already (8:34). God is able to rescue with great power, as He rescued Peter (Heb 11:34), but many believers are also mistreated and killed without being rescued (11:37). Why do some get rescued and not others? God uses both death and life to bring great honor to Himself (Phil 1:20). The only question is whether you think eternal life with Jesus forever is worth it, even if you are not rescued in this world (Mark 8:35–38).

ASK

1. What should all Christians expect?
Persecution.
2. What did Jesus tell His disciples?
To expect persecution.
3. Why should Christians expect persecution?
Christians will be treated the same way Christ was treated.
4. Why does God rescue some from persecution and not others?
Because God uses both death and life to bring great honor to Himself.

DISCUSS

1. Have you ever been persecuted for your faith? As you become more like Jesus, should you expect greater persecution?
2. If you are on God's side, then how will you win even if you die like James (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26)?

NEXT WEEK

The Gentiles are saved by faith alone

Acts 15:1–35



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON
WEEK 35

The Gentiles are saved by faith alone

Acts 15:1–35



DAY 1

The question of the Law created conflict • Acts 15:1–5

READ 📖

Acts 15:1–19

EXPLAIN 🎯

The truth of Acts 15:1–5

Paul and Barnabas had just finished their first missionary journey, and now there were more Gentiles becoming Christians than Jews (Acts 13:46–49; 14:27). So conflict arose over how Jews and Gentiles were saved: do they belong to the same body of Christ? And if so, how should they interact? James had already cautioned Peter about interacting with Gentiles (Gal 2:12). He was probably trying to protect Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, since Jews hated it when Jewish Christians treated Gentiles as equals. But there were Jews in the Jerusalem church that didn't think James went far enough. They said Gentiles could not be saved until they first became Jews. To become Jews, they needed to be *circumcised*—get a special surgery that was a sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:10–14). These Jews were right that salvation comes through Abraham (12:1–3), but they didn't understand that faith is what makes someone a descendant of Abraham (Gal 3:29; Rom 4:9–12). Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to resolve this. If the church was to keep spreading the news of salvation, it had to know what salvation requires!

ASK ?

1. What conflict arose in the church?
How Jews and Gentiles were saved.
2. What did some Jews say Gentiles needed to do to be saved?
Be circumcised.
3. Why did some Jews say Gentiles needed to be circumcised to be saved?
They thought the kingdom of God was only for Jews—for the nation of Israel.
4. Who argued against them in Antioch and then in Jerusalem?
Paul and Barnabas.

DISCUSS 🗣️

1. Which came first, Abraham's salvation or his circumcision (Rom 4:9–10)?
2. Why is there still conflict in the church today (Jas 4:1–2)?

DAY 2

The council answered the question of salvation: Peter spoke first • Acts 15:6–11

READ

Acts 15:1–19

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 15:6–11

The council had authority to answer this question because it was made up of apostles (Eph 2:20) and elders (Acts 14:23; 1 Pet 5:1–5). Peter spoke first. He told again how Cornelius and his family had all received the Spirit, a sure mark of salvation (Acts 10:44–48; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:13). They had received the Spirit just like the Jews had at Pentecost, showing that God made no distinction between circumcised and uncircumcised people. Peter also reminded the Jewish believers of what they already knew: even they could not live up to their legal traditions. Jesus had called the laws a burden too heavy to bear (Matt 23:4), and He had invited sinners to take His yoke instead, one that is easy and light and gives spiritual rest (11:28–30). His yoke is easy because it is by *grace—a gift that we cannot earn*. Jesus earned it for us, and all we have to do is believe that He did. But as soon as we begin to think that we must accomplish even a tiny part of salvation, we deny that Jesus' death paid it all (Gal 2:21).

ASK

1. Did Peter say salvation is by grace or by keeping the law?
It is by grace
2. What example did Peter give to prove his opponents wrong?
Peter reminded them of Cornelius' salvation.
3. How do you know Cornelius was saved?
Cornelius received the Holy Spirit.
4. How can you receive grace from God?
By faith. Believe that Jesus died on the cross in your place.

DISCUSS

1. How does Paul describe false teachers (Acts 20:28–31)?
2. Are Christians saved by good works or saved in order to do good works (Eph 2:8–10; Titus 3:5–8; 1 Pet 2:9–12)? When you do good things, why do you do them?

DAY 3

The council answered the question of salvation: James spoke last • Acts 15:12–19

READ

Acts 15:1–19

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 15:12–19

Barnabas and Paul confirmed Peter's words, but James gave the final word. James was the leader of the Jerusalem church. He was the half-brother of Jesus and respected by everyone for his justice and kindness. James affirmed Peter's argument by saying that God was taking from the Gentiles a people for His name. In the Old Testament, those words described how God took Israel out from among the Gentiles to be His

chosen people (Deut 14:2). But now James was saying something new and astonishing: God was actually choosing some Gentiles to be His people! To make this clear, James reminded Jewish believers that this is what their own prophets predicted. Specifically, Amos had spoken of a time when Gentiles would be called by God's name (Amos 9:11–12). Amos did not say Gentiles would become Jews, and as a result be called by God's name. Rather, they would be called by God's name while still being Gentiles. So there was no reason to burden the Gentiles with laws they themselves could not keep. They were already saved and members of the church without being circumcised.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. Who confirmed Peter's words?
Barnabas and Paul.
2. Who spoke last?
James, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church.
3. What did James say about Gentiles being saved?
God was calling a people for Himself who were Gentiles.
4. What prophet did James say predicted Gentiles being saved?
Amos.

DISCUSS 

1. What kinds of evidence did Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and James use to prove that Gentiles are saved by grace alone?
2. Can you be justified by doing the works required by the law (Gal 2:16)?

DAY 4

The council told Gentiles to abstain from three foods • Acts 15:20–21

READ 

Acts 15:20–35

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 15:20–21**

If Christians include both Jews and Gentiles, how can they all get along? Before, James had advised some separation between Jew and Gentile to protect his flock in Jerusalem from persecution. Now, he realized that the gospel and church unity were more important, so he allowed Jew and Gentile believers to eat together (cf. Gal 2:12). Still, it's best to avoid trouble if possible, so James urged Gentiles to be considerate of their Jewish brothers. For the sake of unity, it was necessary for Gentiles to avoid four things: food offered to idols, sexual immorality, meat that had been strangled, and blood. Three of these restrictions are about food. Food is neither clean nor unclean in itself (1 Cor 8:8; Acts 10:10–16; Mark 7:18–19; Rom 14:14, 17). But since food laws were the main cause of trouble, giving up some freedom was well worth it for the sake of Christian harmony (1 Cor 8:9, 13; 10:28; Rom 14:15, 21). Whenever we make decisions about things that are morally neutral, we should care more about others than ourselves (1 Cor 10:32). We should also ask, what will most honor God (10:31)?

ASK 

1. What kind of food did the council tell Gentiles not to eat?
Meat offered to idols, strangled meat, and blood.
2. Why did the council tell the Gentiles not to eat these foods?
They were offensive to the Jews.
3. What would this promote?
Unity in the church.

DISCUSS 

1. Just because something is not a sin, does that mean you should do it?
2. List some things you sometimes have to give up, not because they are wrong, but in order to be kind to others (giving up your plan for the day, the toy you want to play with, etc.).

DAY 5

The council told Gentiles to abstain from sexual immorality •
Acts 15:22–35

READ

Acts 15:20–35

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 15:22–35

The other restriction was about sexual immorality. For the most part, this is not neutral like food. All Christians must be pure (Eph 5:3–5). Gentile Christians needed to be reminded of this, because it was easy for them to be drawn into the sexual immorality that was acceptable in the pagan Gentile world (1 Cor 6:12–20). Overall, James' point was that Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, should serve each other in love. Instead of seeking their own desires, they should do what builds one another up. James also practiced what he preached. He sent leaders from Jerusalem and an official letter to show the church's concern for the Gentiles in Antioch. He praised Paul and Barnabas to show that he and the church in Jerusalem were not their enemies. He made it clear that the council's decision was unanimous: all the elders and apostles were united in this decision. They were united by their love for Jesus and by humble submission to the Holy Spirit. As a result, what began as a conflict ended with encouragement and peace, strengthening the church.

ASK

1. How was the restriction about sexual immorality different?
For the most part, it was not neutral.
2. What was James' main point?
Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, should serve each other in love. Instead of seeking their own desires, they should do what builds one another up.
3. What was the result of the council?
Christians were encouraged, there was peace, and the church was built up.

DISCUSS

1. How can conflict in the church dishonor the name of Christ? How can conflict be an opportunity to love and encourage one another and build up the body of Christ?
2. Think of some recent conflicts you have had. How did you handle them? Did you look out for yourself or for the interests of others?

NEXT WEEK

The Philippian jailer is saved

Acts 16:16–40



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON
WEEK 36

The Philippian jailer is saved
Acts 16:16–40



DAY 1

Paul and Silas were thrown in prison • Acts 16:16–24

READ 

Acts 16:16–40

EXPLAIN 

The truth of Acts 16:16–24

The trouble began when a demon-possessed slave girl began following Paul and Silas and saying, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” But how is that a bad thing? She was telling the truth, wasn’t she? While her message was true at that moment, demons’ ultimate goal is to twist the truth and destroy. If Paul accepted her message at this time, he would have a hard time rejecting it when her message turned destructive. So Paul cast the demon out in the name of Jesus. Her owners were not happy. They didn’t care about this girl as a person, only as property. She was a great way to make money since people paid for her to tell their fortunes. So the girl’s owners, blind with greed, falsely accused Paul and Silas of throwing the city into chaos. In reality, it was the girl’s owners who created the chaos. As at Jesus’ trial (Luke 23:22–23), anger left no room for justice, and Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned without any attempt to investigate the truth.

ASK 

1. Why did Paul cast out the demon?
Paul knew that accepting praise from a wicked source was a trap.
2. Why were the slave girl’s owners so angry?
They didn’t care about her. They just used her demonic fortune-telling to make money.
3. What did the slave girl’s owners accuse Paul and Silas of doing?
Throwing the city into chaos. In reality, it was the girl’s owners who created the chaos.
4. Where did the magistrates put Paul and Silas?
In prison.

DISCUSS 

1. Why is it dangerous to accept support from wicked people (Prov 26:28; 29:5)?
2. What are some ways you have recently tried to use other people for your own benefit? What can you do to make this right?

DAY 2

Paul and Silas worshiped in prison • Acts 16:25–26

READ

Acts 16:16–40

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 16:25–26

What did Paul and Silas do? Lash out in anger? Grumble and complain? Demand their rights? Not at all! They sat there praying and singing hymns through the night. Imagine what it would have been like to hear their songs echo through the prison cells! In a place of misery and despair, their voices echoed with joy and hope. They responded not based on their circumstances, but based on what they knew to be true about God. He is always good and always does good (Ps 119:68). He brings good out of evil (Rom 8:28), and He turns our temporary suffering into glory that never ends (2 Cor 4:16–18). This joy doesn't make sense to the world, because it is given by the Spirit (Gal 5:22) to people who follow the Spirit's lead (Eph 5:18–19). So Paul and Silas kept singing and singing. God wanted these men to spread their joy, so He sent a rather strange earthquake that not only burst the doors open but also caused the chains to fall off all the prisoners!

ASK

1. What did Paul and Silas do while they were locked up?
They kept on praying and singing hymns.
2. Why could Paul and Silas sing even in prison?
They knew God is good. They knew God does good, even in bad situations. They knew heaven was worth suffering in this world. They knew they had done nothing wrong.
3. What unlocked the doors and their chains?
An earthquake.

DISCUSS

1. How would most people respond in Paul and Silas' situation?
2. Has something happened to you this week that you didn't like? How did you respond? With joy? What can give you joy even when things don't go your way?

DAY 3

Paul and Silas evangelized in prison • Acts 16:27–34

READ

Acts 16:16–40

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 16:27–34

Instead of rejoicing, the jailer drew his sword to kill himself. He no longer saw any reason to go on living. He knew that he faced both shame and the death sentence for allowing his prisoners to escape (Acts 12:19). Just then, the two apostles told him that no one had escaped. Who were these two strange men? The jailer probably had heard about the message they had been preaching, so after seeing how hopeless his

own life was, he turned to them for help: "What must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas' answer? Nothing. Don't do anything. Simply believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe in who He is (John 20:31) and in what He has done (1 Cor 15:3–4). That's it. No laws. No rituals. Just believe. The jailer did believe, along with his household. What a radical change happened that night! Instead of suicide, eternal life. Instead of hostility, love (John 13:35). Instead of despair, joy—the deep and lasting pleasure of having sins completely forgiven (Ps 32:1; Rom 4:7). Since the whole family believed, the whole family confirmed their faith by being baptized.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. Why was the jailer so upset that he was going to kill himself?
He thought all the prisoners had escaped and he would be sentenced to death.
2. What did the jailer have to do to be saved?
Believe on the Lord Jesus. Trust who He is and accept what He has done.
3. What two things confirmed the jailer's faith?
He was baptized and he showed love for the apostles by washing them and feeding them.

4. Why did God allow Paul and Silas to get thrown into jail?
To bring salvation to the jailer and his whole family.

DISCUSS 

1. How did the night's events help to prepare the jailer's heart for salvation (Matt 5:3)?
2. Is your life characterized by joy? If not, what can you do to increase in joy (Phil 4:4-9)?

DAY 4*Paul and Silas were released from prison • Acts 16:35-40***READ** 

Acts 16:16-40

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 16:35-40**

Now that their prison ministry was accomplished, God set Paul and Silas free. The magistrates just wanted them to go away and not cause any more trouble. But Paul refused. The magistrates had violated Roman law. If this became known to those with greater authority, the magistrates could lose their positions and their honor. Even the city itself could lose its Roman privileges. So Paul demanded that they openly admit their mistake and show honor to Paul and Silas. Since Paul was not concerned about his own life or honor (Phil 1:20), he was acting on behalf of others. He was setting a precedent of justice by not allowing governing officials to think it was ok to condemn the innocent. He was loving others by demanding justice. In the end, all the believers were encouraged, and Paul and Silas visited Lydia and the believers before leaving. The jailer was rejoicing, and Paul and Silas saw God's power to save yet again. For those who boldly preach the gospel and praise Him no matter the circumstances, God turns suffering into success.

ASK 

1. How had the magistrates violated Roman law?
By beating a Roman citizen and condemning Paul and Silas without a trial.
2. What could have happened to the magistrates if their actions became known?
The magistrates could lose their positions and their honor. Also, the city itself could lose its Roman privileges.
3. Why did Paul make the magistrates apologize?
To set a standard of justice to protect other Christians.

DISCUSS 

1. Are you in the middle of some kind of suffering now? How does this story give you hope.
2. How does Paul show that it's okay for Christians to seek justice (Isa 1:17)?

DAY 5

Put on the whole armor of God • Ephesians 6:10–18

READ

Ephesians 6:10–18

EXPLAIN

The truth of Ephesians 6:10–18

Since Paul cast the demon out of the slave girl (Acts 16:18), is that something we should expect to do today? Should we, like Paul, cast out evil spirits in the name of Jesus? Scripture gives a clear answer: no. Casting out unclean spirits was one of the marks of a true apostle (Mark 3:15; 2 Cor 12:12). And since the apostles have finished their task, Scripture never instructs believers today to confront or cast out demons like this. So how are we to respond? Demons are real, and spiritual warfare is all around us, but since we are not apostles, we are to respond by putting on the spiritual armor God has made available to every believer. All but one of the pieces of spiritual armor—belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation—are primarily defensive in nature. Only the sword of the Spirit is designed specifically to attack the enemy. With this spiritual armor, God equips us to resist and repel Satan's attacks.

ASK

1. Should Christians today expect to cast out demons?
No. Scripture never instructs believers today to confront or cast out demons.
2. How are Christians supposed to respond to spiritual warfare?
By putting on the spiritual armor God has provided.
3. How many pieces of spiritual armor are there? What are they?
There are six pieces of spiritual armor. See explanation paragraph for names.
4. What piece of spiritual armor is designed to attack the enemy?
The sword of the Spirit.

DISCUSS

1. What kind of war is raging all around us at all times?
2. Does a soldier put on his armor before or after the battle? Do you spend time each morning preparing for the battles that will come that day?

NEXT WEEK

Paul preaches in Athens

Acts 17:16–34



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON

WEEK 37

Paul preaches in Athens

Acts 17:16–34



DAY 1

Paul was provoked by idols • Acts 17:16

READ

Acts 17:16–34

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 17:16

Every Christian has a mission to show how excellent Jesus is, by both words and behavior (2:9, 12). But sometimes it's hard to know where to start. How do you know what to say and when to say it? The book of Acts has many examples, and Acts 17 in particular provides ten principles for speaking the gospel to others. The first principle is to have the right motivation. Paul had just escaped from Berea after Jews from Thessalonica had chased him out of town (Acts 17:13). So Paul was waiting in Athens while Silas and Timothy continued to minister in Berea (17:14–15). To some, a chance to visit Athens would have been the opportunity of a lifetime. Athens was still the cultural capital of the world. But Paul was not in awe of the city's greatness. Rather, he was provoked by all the city's *idols*, for *images or statues of pretend gods* dishonor the true God (Isa 40:18–19) and cause only harm to those who worship them (Hab 2:18). So to be a true witness of the gospel, you must want God to be honored and people to be rescued.

ASK

1. What's the mission of every Christian?
To show how excellent Jesus is, by both words and behavior.
2. Why was Paul in Athens?
He had just escaped from Berea and was waiting there for Silas and Timothy.
3. What motivated Paul to preach in Athens?
He was provoked by all the idols—they offended God's honor and they were deceiving people.

DISCUSS

1. Does it make you sad when you see people worshipping false gods?
2. Do you tell others about Jesus? When you do, why do you do it)?

DAY 2

Paul was prepared for every opportunity • Acts 17:17–23

READ

Acts 17:16–34

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 17:17–23

The second principle is to be prepared to talk about Jesus in a way that makes sense. Paul took the time to reason with those he spoke to. Third, seek every opportunity. That starts by taking the initiative to find opportunities. Paul did not wait around hoping for someone to come talk to him. Fourth, connect. When Paul spoke to Jewish audiences, he started with Scripture. It was something both he and the Jews knew and accepted. But the Athenians knew nothing of the Hebrew Scriptures. So even though Paul taught them biblical truths, he did not quote specific verses. Instead, Paul connected with the Athenians by starting with the two things they all agreed about: there is a God, and the Athenians did not know Him. Yet while connecting, fifth, do not compromise. Jews already had a decent idea of who God is, so Paul mostly talked to them about the Messiah. But in Athens, Epicureanism and Stoicism had false ideas about gods and life. Instead of glossing over these differences, Paul spent most of his speech showing how the true God was not like the so-called gods of the Greeks.

ASK

1. When Paul was in Athens, where did he preach?
The Areopagus, also called Mars Hill.
2. How did Paul make the most of his opportunity while in Athens?
He took the initiative to find people to talk to. He did not wait around for someone to come to him.
3. How did Paul connect with the Athenians?
He started with what they all agreed on: there is a God, and the Athenians did not know Him.
4. How did Paul not compromise?
He spent time explaining where the Greek beliefs were wrong.

DISCUSS

1. What are some things you can do to prepare to share the gospel in a way that makes sense?
2. What are some ideas unbelievers you know share with you? What is an important idea they are wrong about?

DAY 3

Paul preached the true God • Acts 17:24–29

READ

Acts 17:16–34

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 17:24–29

The sixth principle is to show who God is. This is the starting point of the gospel, and Paul began at the very beginning (Gen 1:1): God is the creator. Creation is clear evidence that God exists and has great power (Rom 1:20). It also means that He is the owner—He is Lord of heaven and earth. Because He made it all, it exists for Him and belongs to Him (Ps 24:1). God

is also *transcendent*—He is greater than the world, not a part of it, and not dependent on it (Ps 50:9–12); and *sovereign*, completely in control of the world (Dan 4:34–35); and *immanent*: He is present in the world and so close that anyone who seeks Him will find Him (Ps 139; Jer 29:13). Finally, God is a *person*—a living being who can make decisions about right and wrong. If God is just a force or an idol made from metal, then He cannot tell us what to do. But we know God is a person by looking at ourselves. We are persons, and personal beings do not come from something impersonal.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. What difference does it make that God is the Creator?
It means He is also the owner. If He created us, then we exist for Him.
2. Is God part of the world?
No. He is transcendent—bigger and greater and existing outside of the world.
3. Is God so far outside the world that He is not involved in the world?
No. God is also immanent. He is everywhere in the world and very close to us all the time.

4. What is one way to know that God is not an idol made out of wood, stone, or metal?
Because humans are real, living people. Real, living people cannot come from things that are not alive or personal.

DISCUSS 

1. Why must there be a creator? What difference has this made in the way you lived this week?
2. When sharing the gospel, why is it important to show that we are accountable to God (Ps 24:1–2)?

DAY 4*Paul warned people to respond • Acts 17:30–31***READ** 

Acts 17:16–34

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 17:30–31**

The seventh principle is to warn about coming judgment. Since God is the personal creator and owner of the world, He deserves all our honor and love and obedience. He owns us, and we exist for Him (Rom 11:36). But we have not lived for Him, so He has the right and the power to judge His creatures for rebelling against Him. Judgment leads to the eighth principle: call people to repentance. This means challenging and comforting. It's a challenge because it's calling people to respond, and it's requiring them to admit their sin, humble themselves, and seek forgiveness (Isa 55:7). But it's comforting because it's saying there is hope. There is a way to escape punishment in the end. But are we really sure any of this is true? The answer is the ninth principle: tell about the resurrection. The evidence for the resurrection is massive, and despite centuries of attempts, no one has been able to explain it away. That is proof that Jesus is who He says He is, which means He will come back to judge just as He said He would (John 5:22–29).

ASK 

1. Why does God deserve all our honor and love and obedience?
He is the personal creator and owner of the world.
2. Why must we warn about coming judgment?
God owns us, but we have not lived for Him, so He has the right and the power to judge us for rebelling against Him.
3. Did Paul just give the Athenians information?
No, he also challenged them to repent because judgment is coming.
4. How can we be certain the gospel is true?
The resurrection. It is proof that Jesus is who He says He is.

DISCUSS 

1. List some ways you have not lived for God this week. Do you deserve to be punished when God judges?
2. How can you have hope on judgment day? What must you do (Isa 55:6–7)?

DAY 5

The people responded • Acts 17:32–34

READ

Acts 17:16–34

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 17:32–34

The tenth principle is to expect people to respond in different ways. Some made fun of Paul. Some wanted to hear more, maybe out of sincere interest or maybe just to be entertained. Finally, some truly believed. Still, it seems the church in Athens remained small. That's not surprising. In places where people pride themselves on their own knowledge, they are not likely to humble themselves before God. And where people enjoy talking about all kinds of new ideas, they rarely commit to believing anything. But Paul had been a faithful witness, and for a few Athenians, it made an eternal difference.

ASK

1. What's the tenth principle?
Expect people to respond in different ways.
2. Did the Athenians believe Paul?
A few did, but others laughed and others just wanted to keep talking.
3. Why is it likely that the church in Athens remained small?
They were proud and did not humble themselves before God. They enjoyed all kinds of new ideas, so they did not commit to believing anything.

DISCUSS

1. What shows how successful you are in being a witness: your faithfulness to speak the truth, or the number of people who believe?
2. How many of the ten principles for sharing the gospel can you remember?

NEXT WEEK

God protects Paul

Acts 27:1–44



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON

WEEK 38

God protects Paul

Acts 27:1-44



DAY 1

Paul earned the centurion's trust • Acts 27:1-3

READ

Acts 27:1-20

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 27:1-3

Jesus promised Paul that he would be a witness about Jesus far away in Rome (Acts 23:11). But if God's plan was to have Paul tell about Jesus in Rome, why did He allow a deadly storm on the way? According to His providence, or His care and control over creation, God sent the storm to glorify Himself as the promise-keeping God, and Paul made sure to display God's glory through his godly leadership. At Caesarea, Paul and some other prisoners were assigned to a centurion named Julius. Two of Paul's companions, Luke (the author of Acts) and Aristarchus, accompanied Paul on his journey. On the first day they sailed north from Caesarea to Sidon. The centurion Julius "treated Paul kindly" and allowed him to leave the ship to visit the church in Sidon. Already Paul had earned the centurion's trust. Paul's trustworthy character would soon allow him to lead everyone on the ship for the glory of Christ.

ASK

1. Where was Paul sailing to?
Rome.
2. What scary thing happened on the way?
A huge storm was about to wreck the ship.
3. Why was Paul a prisoner?
He was arrested in Jerusalem for disturbing the Jews by his preaching.
4. How did the centurion show he trusted Paul while at Sidon?
Julius allowed Paul to go see his friends there.

DISCUSS

1. Can your parents and teachers trust you when no adults are around? Is there a way your attitude or behavior needs to change in order to earn their trust?
2. What is a leader?

DAY 2

God used a storm to get people's attention • Acts 17:4–20

READ

Acts 17:1–20

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 17:4–20

Since the Fast (the Day of Atonement) was already passed (cf. Lev 23:26–32; Zech 7:3), it was October, maybe later. Sailing on the Mediterranean was risky from mid–September to mid–November and deadly from mid–November to February. In stormy weather, the Mediterranean can have waves over 30 feet tall! So Paul, who had already experienced three shipwrecks (2 Cor 11:25), warned the centurion not to sail. Unfortunately, the centurion did not listen, hoping to make it to a more comfortable harbor in Phoenix. But God was in control. He would arrange circumstances so that the centurion and everyone else would listen to Paul's wise message. As they sailed toward Phoenix, a huge storm blew the ship away from Crete. They quickly prepared for the storm, and they even threw some cargo and even the ship's tackle overboard. Since the storm blocked out even the sun and stars, the sailors could not track where they were. They were now lost in the storm, and they gave up hope of surviving. But this was all under God's control, for He controls and cares for all creation (Job 36:26–32; Ps 145:15–16).

ASK

1. How did Paul show wisdom and boldness in Fair Havens?
Even though he was just a prisoner, he spoke up and said it was foolish to sail during stormy winter weather.
2. Did Paul have experience sailing?
Yes. Paul had already experienced three shipwrecks.
3. Did the men listen to Paul?
No. They were hoping to make it to a more comfortable harbor in Phoenix.
4. What did God use to get the men on the ship to stop trusting themselves?
A huge storm.

DISCUSS

1. Why is it important to listen to wise counsel (Prov 11:14; 15:22)? Who do you go to for advice?
2. How can God's providence encourage you when bad things happen?

DAY 3

Paul led by faith in God's promise • Acts 17:21–38

READ

Acts 17:21–44

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 17:21–38

That night God promised that Paul would survive in order to preach to Caesar, and that everyone else would survive for Paul's sake. This promise is the turning point of the story and the key truth of the passage. First, it shows that God is faithful (2 Cor 1:20). Second, God's promise to Paul shows God's providence as He causes the gospel to spread (Matt 16:18). He controlled the storm in order to spare Paul, and He

saved Paul so that Paul could tell about Jesus in Rome. Third, God often shows mercy to the wicked for the sake of the righteous (Gen 18:23–32; Ezek 22:30). He saved the others on the ship for Paul's sake. Fourth, godly leadership is built on the foundation of God's promises. Because Paul believed God's promise, Paul encouraged the men that they would survive, and he remained calm when the rest were afraid. The sailors were so afraid that they tried to abandon the ship, but Paul, the prisoner, had become the real leader of the ship. The centurion listened to Paul and everyone followed Paul's example and ate.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. What did God promise Paul during the storm?
God promised Paul would still preach in Rome, and that everyone else would be saved too.
2. How long were they caught in the storm?
Fourteen days (Acts 27:33).
3. Why did Paul lead with such confidence, even though only a prisoner?
He found strength not in himself, but in the promises of God.
4. How did Paul care for the needs of others?
He encouraged them to eat, and he prevented the sailors from abandoning everyone else.

DISCUSS 

1. List some promises God has made to you. Do these promises make a difference in the way you live?
2. How do godly leaders bring peace, hope, and direction in times of crises?

DAY 4*God saved everyone just as He had promised • Acts 27:39–44***READ** 

Acts 27:21–44

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 27:39–44**

As they listened to Paul, the men on the ship gained hope. They even saw an island to land on, and they lightened the ship so that they could sail into shallow water right up onto the beach. But then their hope was crushed again when they crashed into a reef hidden under water. God used this as yet another opportunity to show His power through Paul. Out of respect for Paul, Julius kept all the prisoners alive, and everyone survived, just as God had promised. Then, after a brief stay on Malta (Acts 28:1–11), Paul went on to Rome (28:14), just as God had promised.

ASK 

1. What happened when the men tried to land on an island?
They crashed into a reef hidden under water.
2. What happened to the ship and everyone on it?
The ship crashed, but everyone made it to Malta and survived.
3. How did Paul's godly character save all the prisoners at the end?
Julius kept the prisoners alive because he wanted to keep Paul alive.
4. Did God keep His promise to Paul?
Yes. Paul and everyone on the ship survived, and Paul went on to Rome.

DISCUSS 

1. What difference did Paul's leadership make for those around him?
2. Do you have anyone following you (spouse, child, sibling, co-worker, friend)? Are you leading them well?

DAY 5

Servant leadership • John 13:4–5

READ

John 13:1–15

EXPLAIN

The truth of John 13:4–5

What's the worst chore at your house? That weekly task that's so dirty, dull, and disgusting that nobody wants to do it? You'll do any other job, so long as you don't have to do that one. When Jesus walked this earth, that job was foot washing. People walked a lot in Jesus' day, and they used dirt paths, not roads, to get where they were going. They also wore sandals, exposing their sweaty feet and toes to the rising dust clouds kicked up as they walked. But even though this job was normally reserved for the lowest-ranking household slave, it was not beneath Jesus. On Thursday, the night before His crucifixion, He rose from supper and began washing His disciples' feet. Imagine the disciples' shock! Here was their Teacher—their Lord and Master!—stooping down to clean their smelly feet. Jesus' actions are even more profound considering that the disciples had just been arguing about which one of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24). The disciples had it all wrong, but Jesus' cleansing was surely a lesson they would never forget: even the greatest among them are not too great to serve.

ASK

1. Why was foot washing such a disgusting job?
People wore sandals and walked a lot on dirt paths.
2. Who normally washed feet?
The lowest-ranking household slave.
3. Why did Jesus wash His disciples' feet?
To teach them the importance of humbly serving others.
4. What were the disciples arguing about?
Which one of them was the greatest.

DISCUSS

1. Who do you resemble more: Jesus or the disciples?
2. What is a “servant leader”? What will you do to humbly serve someone else today?

NEXT WEEK

Paul testifies to the gospel in Rome

Acts 28:11–31



SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON

WEEK 39

Paul testifies to the gospel in Rome

Acts 28:11–31



DAY 1

Paul kindly invited Jews to hear the hope of Israel • Acts 28:16–22

READ

Acts 28:16–31

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 28:16–22

Why did Paul begin by defending himself? He did not want his testimony to be spoiled by rumors that he was a wicked person, so he explained that even the Roman governors found him innocent but could not set him free because of pressure from the Jews (Acts 25:18–19; 28:18–19). But instead of attacking those who falsely accused him, Paul evangelized in a careful and kind way. He wanted to lead the Jews to faith in Jesus, so he made it clear that his appeal to Caesar was not an attack on the Jews. In fact, Paul showed he loved them very much because he was willing to be chained as a prisoner “for the **hope of Israel.**” Ezekiel used this word in his vision of dry bones (Ezek 37:11). Ezekiel’s vision of God’s Spirit breathing new life into dry bones showed that Israel’s hope was in God’s promise to breath new, eternal life into Israel and restore them to their land (37:11–14; Acts 23:6). After Paul’s defense, the Jews were willing to listen, but it seems that they were skeptical.

ASK

1. Where was Paul a prisoner?
Rome.
2. Why could Paul tell about Jesus so much even though he was a prisoner in Rome?
He was allowed to live in a house, so anyone could come talk to him.
3. Why did Paul defend his innocence to the Jews?
So that his testimony of Jesus would not be spoiled a bad reputation.
4. How did Paul first describe the gospel to the Jews?
He called it the hope of Israel, God’s promise of new, eternal life with Him forever.

DISCUSS

1. What kind of reputation do you have? Does it make people want to believe you or not?
2. Humans can be put in chains, but can the gospel ever be locked up?

DAY 2

The Jews rejected Paul's testimony about Jesus • Acts 28:23–27

READ

Acts 28:16–31

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 28:23–27

Since the Jews were willing to listen, Paul taught them all day, showing that evangelism requires persistence. He taught them the gospel: **God's Kingdom** and Jesus. God's kingdom includes God's rule over all things (Ps 145:13), but here in the context of the gospel it more specifically refers to the kingdom of people redeemed and rescued by Jesus from the kingdom of sin and Satan (Col 1:13). In order to persuade the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah, Paul taught them from “both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.” Jesus, Peter, and Paul each used Scripture to prove that Jesus was the Messiah (Luke 24:44–47; Acts 2:17–36; 13:32–39), and the sermons in Acts are saturated with Scripture. Unfortunately, although some Jews were starting to be persuaded, most left unconvinced. As they were leaving, Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9–10 to rebuke them for responding to God's Word just like their ancestors had. God's Word entered their ears but did not change their lives. It is not enough to know the gospel; the gospel only saves those who are willing to trust it with their lives (Acts 2:38).

ASK

1. How did Paul describe the gospel to the Jews?
He called it the Kingdom of God, which is God's reign over all those Jesus has rescued from sin, Satan, and death.
2. What did Paul use to explain the gospel to the Jews?
He used Scripture.
3. Did the Jews believe him?
A few did, but most did not.
4. According to Isaiah, why did most of the Jews refuse to believe?
They did not want to listen or be changed.

DISCUSS

1. Are you able to use the Bible to tell about Jesus? What can you do to get better at this?
2. How many times have you heard God's Word? Has it only gone into your ears, or has it also changed your life?

DAY 3

Paul taught about Jesus openly in Rome for two years • Acts 28:28–31

READ

Acts 28:16–31

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 28:28–31

Because the Jews resisted the gospel, Paul explained that “this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” For two years Paul continued to teach about the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. He taught “all who came to him,” and his message spread even to Caesar's soldiers (Phil 1:13) and Caesar's household (4:22). Besides teaching,

Paul also used his imprisonment to write Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Even though he was in prison, Paul had both confidence and freedom to teach the full gospel. In some ways, Acts ends abruptly. What happened to Paul and his appeal before Caesar? But the ending of Acts is not supposed to be an ending. The gospel had spread to Rome, but there are still many places where the gospel still needs to spread. So as Acts ends, Paul's mission becomes ours. Like runners in a great relay race, the baton has passed from Paul to us, and it is our turn to take the good news of the gospel to anyone who will listen, whether Jew or Gentile.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. Who did Paul share the gospel with after the Jews refused to listen?
Gentiles—and many believed.
2. By not believing, what did the Jews lose?
They lost out on spiritual healing and salvation.
3. Did prison or rejection stop Paul from telling about Jesus?
No. For two years he told many people about the kingdom of God, and during that time he also wrote several books of the Bible.

DISCUSS 

1. How well do you use your time? Even when you can't do what you had planned, do you make the most of the time to honor Jesus?
2. How is the spread of the gospel like a great relay race? Are you in the race?

DAY 4*Like father, like son • Isaiah 6:9–10***READ** 

Isaiah 6:1–13

EXPLAIN **The truth of Isaiah 6:9–10**

Someone who is always listening to loud sounds becomes more and more deaf. Eventually he thinks loud sounds are soft, and he cannot hear soft sounds at all. This is like people who hear God's Word over and over but do not accept it. When God sent Isaiah to Israel, He warned that they had dull, unresponsive hearts. The people would "hear," but not understand. They would "see," but not comprehend. Through Isaiah's faithful ministry, the people's hearts would become "dull." By consistently rejecting God's truth, their ears would become "heavy" and their eyes "blind." They would hear the truth with their ears, but its meaning would be hidden from their hearts. Over 700 years later, Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9–10 to the Jews who heard his message but refused to believe. Just like their ancestors, these Jews were deaf to God's word. As a result, they missed out on the great hope of Israel. Let their example warn you: accept God's Word quickly before you become deaf to God's message. The more you hear the truth without obeying, the harder it becomes to obey.

ASK 

1. How were the Jews of Paul's day like their ancestors?
They heard God's Word, but they did not understand it.
2. What passage did Paul quote after most Jews left him unconvinced of the gospel?
Isaiah 6:9–10.
3. What did God warn Isaiah?
God was sending Isaiah to a people with unresponsive hearts.
4. What happened to the Jews' hearts as they continually rejected Isaiah's message?
They became dull.

DISCUSS 

1. Do you consistently hear God's Word? Has it changed your thoughts, words, and behavior?
2. Do you want to obey God's Word? What can you pray every time you read or hear God's word (Ps 119:18; 143:10)?

DAY 5

Salvation has come to the Gentiles • Romans 11:11–12

READ

Romans 11:1–15

EXPLAIN

The truth of Romans 11:11–12

God can turn great disaster into great blessing. He turned a terrible thing—Israel rejecting their own Messiah—into a great blessing: it was through the Jews' unbelief that the gospel spread to Gentiles (Rom 11:11–30). As Paul explained when the Jews refused to listen, “This salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen” (Acts 28:28). Also, even though the majority of Jews continue to reject the gospel, they will not always do so. Israel did not “stumble” so as to fall. They will not always be hard and rebellious. They are only partly hard, and one reason God is saving Gentiles is to draw Israel back to Himself. When Israel sees so many Gentiles enjoying salvation, they will be “jealous” and finally want to come back to God too. As a result, one day all Israel will be saved, and when that happens, there will be even greater blessing for Gentiles than before! So even though the Jews rejected Paul’s message in Rome, God’s gospel cannot be stopped. It continues to spread, from Jew to Gentile and one day back to the Jews.

ASK

1. Why did the gospel spread to Gentiles?
The Jews rejected their Messiah.
2. Is Israel hardened forever?
No. One day all Israel will be saved.
3. What was the salvation of Gentiles designed to do?
Make Israel jealous so that they too seek salvation.
4. Can the gospel be stopped?
No. It continues to spread today.

DISCUSS

1. Are you a Jew or a Gentile? How has God’s plan of salvation affected you? What part do you play?
2. Sometimes we think only about how the gospel affects our own lives. How does Romans 11 help you see the big picture of God’s plan of salvation?

NEXT WEEK

John testifies to the exalted Jesus

Revelation 1:1–20

