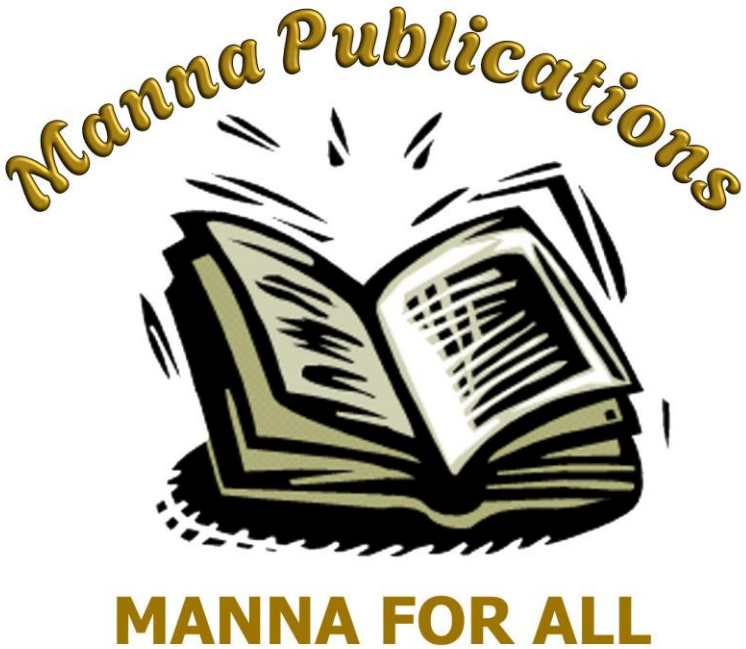
# PAUL BRINGS GOOD NEWS TO THE WORLD

## Acts of the Apostles

**A Bible Teaching Commentary**
**for personal or group study**

**Written by Fred Morris**




# ACTS Part 2

## Chapters 13 to 28

# PAUL BRINGS GOD'S GOOD NEWS TO THE WORLD
# ACTS Part 2, Chapters 13 to 28

- **Paul's three missionary journeys from Antioch**
- **Preaching with Holy Spirit power to start new churches**
- **Miracles, riots and persecution**
- **Teaching and sending letters to encourage holiness**
- **Arrested in Jerusalem and shipwrecked in Malta**
- **A 'prisoner for Christ' in Rome**

**THIS BOOK** describes the second part of the Acts of the Apostles, and the three missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul in the Roman Empire nearly 2000 years ago. The teachings of Paul spread quickly around the Roman world by letters and by preaching. They remain as a guide for millions of Christians today. His example encourages believers to follow Jesus and lead a holy life, in a loving fellowship with other believers.

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# CONTENTS


INTRODUCTION....6
A JEW CALLED SAUL....6
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 13....7**
SAUL'S FIRST JOURNEY PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST....7
Why did the apostles lay hands on people's heads?....8
THE MINISTRY OF SAUL AND BARNABAS IN CYPRUS....9
The Messiah or Christ....10
Travelling ministers (Acts 13-16)....11
PAUL PREACHES TO BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES....11
The meaning of 'the Church'....13
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 14....14**
MIRACLES AND PERSECUTION....14
CONVERSIONS THROUGH PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS....14
Church government....15
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 15....15**
THE MEETING OF CHURCH LEADERS IN JERUSALEM....15
Church problems and church meetings (Acts 15:1-35)....17
THE MISSIONARY WORK OF PAUL GROWS....17
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 16....18**
THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL....18
GOD SAVES PAUL AND SILAS FROM PRISON....20
Demons obey the power of Jesus....20
GOD SAVES THE PRISON OFFICER....21
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 17....22**
PAUL PREACHES FROM CITY TO CITY....22
ONLY A FEW BELIEVE IN ATHENS....22
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 18....23**
GOD ENCOURAGES PAUL TO PREACH IN CORINTH....24
Work and ministry....24
PRISCILLA, AQUILLA AND APOLLOS IN EPHESUS....25
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 19....25**
THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL....25
The power of God at work today (Acts 19:19)....26
THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN EPHESUS....26
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 20....27**
HOW PAUL DECIDED WHAT TO DO....27
PAUL SPEAKS URGENTLY TO THE CHURCH LEADERS....28
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 21....29**
PAUL GOES BACK TO JERUSALEM....29
PAUL IS ATTACKED AND ARRESTED....30

Pharisees and Sadducees....31
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 22....31**
PAUL SPEAKS THE TRUTH FROM GOD TO THE CROWDS....31
The Resurrection of the Body....32
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 23....33**
PAUL SPEAKS GOD'S TRUTH TO THE JEWISH COURT....33
JESUS SPEAKS COMFORTING WORDS TO PAUL....33
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 24....33**
PAUL SPEAKS GOD'S TRUTH TO THE ROMAN GOVERNOR....34
When things go wrong....34
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 25....35**
PAUL ASKS TO SPEAK TO THE ROMAN EMPRORER....35
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 26....36**
PAUL SHARES HIS TESTIMONY WITH THE KING....36
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 27....37**
PAUL LEAVES FOR ROME BUT IS SHIPWRECKED....38
**Bible reading: Acts Chapter 28....39**
PAUL ON THE ISLAND OF MALTA....39
THE MINISTRY OF PAUL IN ROME....39
CONCLUSIONS....40

# PAUL BRINGS GOOD NEWS TO THE WORLD

# ACTS Part 2: Chapters 13-28

# INTRODUCTION

This is our second part to the Manna Bible teaching commentary written by Fred Morris on the Acts of the Apostles.

'Acts' is the name of the book in the New Testament part of the Bible written by Luke. He was a close friend of the Apostle Paul. Luke wrote it towards the end of the first century after the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. It was written for the followers of 'The Way' who believed the Good News and trusted in Jesus and who later became known as Christians.

The book of Acts tells what happened to the Jewish believers and other believers and how their witness changed the world as promised by Jesus Himself (Acts 1:8).

In our first Bible commentary on Acts, we read that Jesus (Hebrew name Yeshua) returned to Heaven to be with His Father who is our Creator and God Almighty (Hebrew name Yahweh). Jesus promised His Holy Spirit to be with His followers. This happened in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Through the power of the Spirit, God enabled the 120 followers of Jesus to grow in number daily to many thousands of believers.

The Holy Spirit encouraged the disciples or apostles of Jesus to preach boldly the Good News about Him. The Spirit also enabled them to heal people in the name of Jesus.

The word 'apostle' means messenger. The word 'believer' here means someone who trusts God and is a follower of Jesus Christ and believes that He is the Son of God.

Through the preaching of the Good News and the work of the Holy Spirit, many thousands of people believed and were saved from the judgement of God. They were baptised and began a new life of faith in God. They received His righteousness and His promise of everlasting life with Jesus.

## A JEW CALLED SAUL

At first it was mostly Jews who heard the Good News. Many believed in Jesus as the Son of God. They believed that He was their Jewish Messiah, the Christ. He was promised by God many years before and written about in their Old Testament scrolls.

The new believers met with the first followers of Jesus and mixed with the Jews in the Temple courtyard in Jerusalem and in the Jewish synagogues around the world.

Some of the Jewish leaders disagreed with the teaching of the apostles. A Jewish leader called Saul was given permission to put many followers of Christ into prison. Some were killed. But one day God stopped him doing this. Jesus spoke to

Saul personally on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6). He, too, became a follower of Jesus. Jesus forgave him and he was given the power of the Holy Spirit (9:17-19) to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. Saul was later called Paul, his Roman name.

In this second commentary on Acts, we tell you about the life and missionary journeys of Paul. Paul later moved from the church in Jerusalem to the church in Antioch-in-Syria. He travelled around the world preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is the Son of God who came to live on Earth to reunite us with His Father. Paul taught people that God allowed Jesus to be punished for our sins so that we could be forgiven. He knew that if we believe in Jesus and follow Him, we will live with Him for evermore when we die (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Like us, Saul (Paul) could not understand these things at first. But he re-read the Old Testament scrolls and believed that it was the purpose of God to save the world by offering salvation to all through Jesus the Christ. If we read our Bibles every day, the Holy Spirit will help us to understand these things.

Saul knew the Old Testament very well. They tell about the Messiah that God was going to send to the Jews. After his conversion, Saul believed that Jesus was God's Messiah or Christ. He also believed that Jesus came to save people who were not Jews (called Gentiles) as well as the Jews. He devoted his life to spreading this message or Good News of Jesus Christ.

Saul heard and understood all the teachings of Jesus through some of the disciples who had lived with Jesus. He shared the Good News with Jews and later with those who were not Jews, throughout the Roman Empire. This was the plan and purpose of God (Acts 9:15). Saul also wrote many letters to the churches he later planted in Cyprus, Turkey, Greece, Italy and elsewhere.

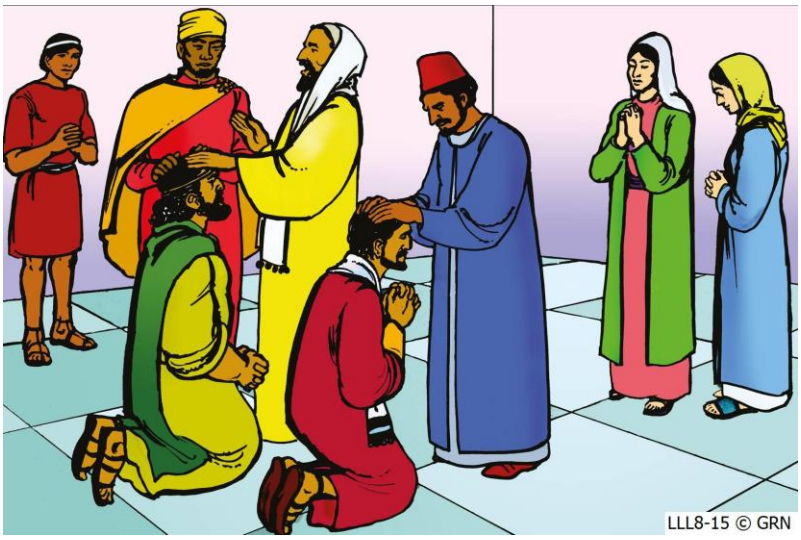
## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 13

**Learn about this:** *The work of the Holy Spirit in the church at Antioch (verses 1-3); how the governor of Cyprus believed in Jesus (4-12); how Saul preached the Good News to the Jews at Antioch-in-Pisidia (13-41); how the people responded to the preaching of Saul (42-45,48-50,52); how Saul and Barnabas responded to opposition (46-47,51)*

## SAUL'S FIRST JOURNEY PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST

The Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ were first called Christians in the church at Antioch (11:26). The church in Antioch grew strong. Antioch was in Syria, 500 km north of Jerusalem. Among the leaders were Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and also Saul (13:1-2). Also, young John Mark worshipped there who later wrote the Gospel of Mark (13:5). Some were teachers, some were preachers and some had the gift of prophecy. Teaching, preaching and prophesying are all gifts of the Holy Spirit given to those whom God chooses.

One day, as they were worshipping, praying and fasting (13:2) the Holy Spirit spoke to the believers: "Set apart Saul and Barnabas for Me. I appoint them for the special work I want [called, KJV] them to do."



**The church elders pray for Saul and Barnabas**

The church leaders fasted again. They prayed and laid their hands on the heads of Barnabas and Saul. They sent them off to do special work for the Lord (13:3). The Holy Spirit was in charge. He called and led His servants. He went before them to make the hearts of people ready to hear the Good News.

Notice these things about the calling of Saul and Barnabas:

- Saul and Barnabas were trusted leaders in the church by this time (13:1).
- Time was given to allow the Holy Spirit to speak through the people (13:2).

### Why did the apostles lay hands on people's heads?

'Laying on of hands' is an act of dedication and blessing that is mentioned several times in Acts. It is also mentioned in Hebrews 6:2. Jesus touched the sick (Mark 6:5) when He healed them. Paul (Saul) laid hands on people when he prayed for them to be healed (Acts 28:8-9). Timothy received a "gift from God" when Paul touched him (2 Timothy 1:6). And when Paul laid his hands on the heads of believers in Ephesus (Acts 19:6) they received the Holy Spirit, spoke in different languages and prophesied. This also happened when the apostles laid their hands on believers in Samaria (Acts 8:17). Church leaders lay their hands on believers when new leaders are chosen for a special work or office, especially as deacons (Acts 6:6), preachers and teachers (1 Timothy 4:13-14) and as missionaries (Acts 13:3).

Paul warned that the calling and appointing of these people should not be done hastily (1 Timothy 5:22). The special blessing for the people of God by placing a hand on their heads under the anointing of God, began in Israel 1700 years before the time of Christ (Genesis 48:5-20; Numbers 8:5-20). Only believers gifted by the Holy Spirit should lay hands on other believers. No-one troubled by demon spirits should lay hands on people, nor should hands be laid on people troubled by demon spirits.

- The prophets and teachers fasted and prayed for guidance about Saul and Barnabas. They laid hands on them to dedicate them to do good works of God (13:3).
- Saul and Barnabas were sent out guided by the Holy Spirit (13:3,4).

Notice also that the Holy Spirit called Saul and Barnabas but it was the local church that sent them out. The church members confirmed their support for Saul and Barnabas and also for their church leaders. They were all in agreement. They all met together united, to witness the laying on of hands. In this way, Saul and Barnabas were sent out by God through the local church. Later, the church welcomed them back and called a special meeting to listen to their reports (14:27).

Their church was open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They were happy to send some of their members to serve God overseas. They prayed for them and were encouraged by the ministry God gave them to do. They also gave thanks to God when they later heard of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these missionaries through their preaching and ministry of Jesus Christ.

## THE MINISTRY OF SAUL AND BARNABAS IN CYPRUS

Saul and Barnabas took young John Mark with them to help (13:5). They went down to the sea port of Seleucia. Then they sailed to the island of Cyprus. Barnabas was born in Cyprus.

They went first to the Jewish synagogues on the island to preach about their Messiah, Jesus Christ (13:5).

The Roman governor of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, listened to their preaching. He wanted to hear the truth from God, but Bar-Jesus, a Jewish magician (also called Elymas) tried to stop him from hearing about Jesus Christ. This was their first problem in ministry but they knew that their church in Antioch was praying for them.

It was here that Saul began to use his Roman name 'Paul' (13:9).

Sometimes we must speak out against Satan and take authority in the name of Jesus over people who are possessed by demon powers. Only the Holy Spirit can guide us for what to say and do, as He guided Paul. Paul was first filled by Holy Spirit power soon after his conversion to Christ when he was anointed by Ananias in Damascus (9:17). Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil… The hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind." (13:9-11). Elymas became blind for a time.

When the Roman governor saw what happened to Elymas, he believed. He was amazed at what Paul was teaching about the Lord Jesus (13:12).

When we teach and obey the truth of God, people will see the difference it makes in our lives. When we preach the Good News of salvation in Christ, people will ask for their sins to be forgiven. When we reach out in the power of the Holy Spirit, people will be healed.

## The Messiah or Christ

The divine purpose of God was to send His Messiah, His Son, to His chosen people, the Jews, first. After the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, many more people believed that He was the Son of God, both Jews and Gentiles. The Old Testament tells about the promised Messiah. Paul had to understand these things before he preached the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit gave him power and understanding to do this so that Jews and Gentiles could receive God's salvation through Christ alone. Many people believed in Christ and were saved. Paul helped to start or plant many churches in the Roman Empire at that time.

Here are 20 prophecies that Paul understood from the Old Testament about Jesus. These prophecies all came true at the time of Paul.

1. Jesus is the promised Messiah (Christ), God's Son, our Saviour (Deuteronomy 18:15; Jeremiah 23:5; Isaiah 53:12).
2. Jesus is the promised healer (Isaiah 35:5,6).
3. Joseph, who married Mary the mother of Jesus, came from Abraham and King David's family (Isaiah 9:7).
4. God promised that Abraham's family will bless all the nations on Earth (Genesis 12:2-3; 18:18).
5. Jesus was born in Bethlehem from the family and region of Judah/Judea (Micah 5:2).
6. Jesus was born as the Son of God to a young virgin woman while she was engaged to be married and before she had sex with a man (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:35).
7. As a baby, Jesus went to Egypt for safe keeping (Hosea 11:1).
8. Jesus moved to the region of Galilee to teach the people (Isaiah 9:1,2).
9. Jesus was 'the great prophet' spoken of by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15).
10. Jesus is our priest for ever (Psalm 110:4).
11. Jesus was wise and understanding (Isaiah 11:2).
12. Many people rejected Jesus (Isaiah 53:3).
13. Many people welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as a humble king, riding on a young donkey (Zechariah 9:9).
14. Jesus was betrayed by one of His disciples (Psalm 41:9).
15. Jesus was betrayed for 30 silver coins (Zechariah 11:12).
16. Many people said untrue things against Jesus (Psalm 27:12).
17. Jesus did not speak when He was put on trial (Isaiah 53:7).
18. Jesus died with criminals (Isaiah 53:12).
19. The hands and feet of Jesus were pierced through (Psalm 22:16).
20. The people laughed at Jesus and said bad things about him especially as He hung on the cross (Psalm 22:6-8).

### Travelling ministers (Acts 13-16)

We see many examples in the New Testament of servants of Jesus who are ministers or messengers who visit or write to other churches.

As a **preacher** and **evangelist** Paul travelled a long way to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. He started or planted new churches and appointed pastors.

Then Paul went back to visit these churches. He taught them more truths of God and encouraged them to follow in the way of Jesus (Acts 14:21-22; 16:4-5). He also wrote letters to them to explain the truth from God and the teachings of Christ (15:23). A person who does this is called a **teacher**. A person who brings words given by the Holy Spirit to believers is called a **prophet**.

Preachers, evangelists, prophets and teachers, who travel from town to town, are called travelling ministers. They can bring much blessing, encouragement and unity to the new believers. These ministers:

- must be humble people who have been chosen and anointed by the Holy Spirit (13:2).
- must be people who are approved and appointed by their home church leaders and members (13:3).
- must be prepared to work hard and not expect to get any money for doing this.
- should be supported by their home church who pray for them, guide them and help them to keep faithful to God.

These four guidelines help to avoid false ministers who travel from place to place without anointing or appointing. They need our prayer support, especially if they serve as missionaries to non-believers as part of their calling from God.

***Questions.*** Is your church a 'sending church'? Does your church send out and support and encourage travelling ministers? Do you share in the work of encouraging new churches? Do you pray for those who do this work (12:5)? Do you encourage or share in the ministry of writing letters? Is your church a 'receiving church'? Does your church receive and welcome evangelists, preachers, prophets and teachers from other churches? Do you work closely with the 'sending' churches? Do you help to pay their expenses or give them a gift?

## PAUL PREACHES TO BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES

From Cyprus, Paul and his friends sailed to the Roman Province of Pisidia (13:13-14). Mark left them, but we are not sure why (2 Timothy 4:11). Paul was not pleased with Mark. Mark was a young believer. He did not have a strong vision to serve the Lord at that time (Acts 15:38). Later, Paul learned to trust and work with young believers, including Mark.

When Paul and Barnabas visited other towns, they always visited the Jewish synagogues. That is where Jews met to hear their leaders read the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures. At Antioch-in-Pisidia, the Jews asked Paul to speak. He preached a great message (13:16-41).

This is how Paul preached to the crowd using many words from the Old Testament:

- He reminded them that God had blessed their people in Egypt, provided for them for 40 years in the wilderness and then led them into His Promised Land of Canaan (13:17-20). The country was later called Israel.
- He explained that, through the family line of King David, God brought His Saviour Jesus to Israel as their promised Messiah (13:23,32).
- He said that the people put Jesus to death on a cross but God raised Him from death to eternal life (13:28-30).
- Then he preached the Good News of God's Messiah that everyone who repents and believes in Jesus is forgiven and made right with God as promised long ago. He said that faith in Jesus offers more than faith in the Law of Moses. Jesus offers eternal life through His victory over death and sin (13:32,38-39).
- He finished with a warning not to make fun of this truth (13:40-41).

Many Gentiles believed and were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (13:48). New congregations were formed. But some of the Jews caused a lot of trouble for Paul and Barnabas. Many rejected the truth of God and the hope of eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus (13:46). This is a major part of God's Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. They sent the apostles away (13:50).

The preaching of Paul was so popular with the Gentiles that it made some Jews envious (13:42-46). They refused to believe in Jesus. They chose to trust in the Law of Moses but not believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, their Messiah. Paul's clear understanding of the purposes of God in the Old Testament was rejected by the devout Jews in Antioch-in-Pisidia. He longed for them to receive Jesus as their Messiah.

Then they chose leaders (elders) who had strong faith in God (14:23). They prayed and fasted for these people and left them in God's care. It is essential that churches have elders to help lead, teach and care for the members. Paul knew that it was not enough to have preachers in charge of the church groups.

**Talk about this:**

1. What special gifts were recognised in the Antioch church (13:1)?
2. How were the gifts revealed and used (13:2-3)? Does your church give time to listening to God? Does your church send out preachers or missionaries?
3. What made the Roman governor believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (13:12)?
4. Why did Paul retell the history of Israel (13:17-23)?
5. What did Paul say about the death and resurrection of Jesus (13:23-31)?
6. Why did Paul quote verses from the Old Testament prophets (13:32-41)?
7. How did Jews and other nations react to the preaching about Jesus (13:42-52)?

**Think about this:** Describe the work, worship and witness of the early church at Antioch-in-Syria (13:1-5). Describe the preaching method of Paul at Antioch-in-Pisidia (13:14-41). What are the many reactions to preaching about Jesus today?

**The meaning of 'the Church'**

The word 'Church' means 'all Christian believers in the world' who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. We often call these believers 'the body of Christ'. Paul described the Church as "the household or family of God [which is] the Church of the living God. It is the pillar and foundation of [God's] truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

We also call each local group of believers 'a congregation or church fellowship of believers'. Today the word 'church' is also used to mean the buildings where local believers meet to worship. But you do not need a building to worship God!

The first Christian believers met in homes and also in the courtyards of the Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath day (Saturday). These were popular meeting places for everyone to listen to the teaching of the apostles from the Old Testament and the words of Jesus repeated by the apostles.

# Bible reading: Acts Chapter 14

**Learn about this:** *Preaching with Holy Spirit power in Iconium (verses 1-6); preaching and healing in Lystra and Derbe (7-21); how Paul and Barnabas strengthened the new churches (22-23); Returning to the sending church at Antioch-in-Syria (24-28).*

## MIRACLES AND PERSECUTION

In Iconium, Paul preached to the Jews with great power. A great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. Other Jews did not like this and stirred up trouble, especially against the Gentile believers (14:2). The people were divided. Preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ often divides friends and families. Some believe and others do not (Matthew 10:21-23). Some are afraid to follow Jesus.

Paul and Barnabas stayed a long time there (14:3). They did not 'grow weary doing good' (Galatians 6:9). There were many believers in that city. The Good News of Jesus changed their lives. But after hearing of a plan to kill the two apostles, they moved away (14:6). They left behind believers who were strong in their faith in God and His Son, their Saviour.

Paul and Barnabas travelled to Lystra and Derbe. They preached boldly and God worked miracles through them.

In Lystra, the crowds saw a man healed and they became excited. They believed in pagan gods and spirits. So they called Paul 'Hermes' and Barnabas 'Zeus', the names of Greek gods (14:12). There was a temple to Zeus in that city.

A pagan priest wanted to sacrifice animals to Paul and Barnabas. Paul stopped him doing this. He told the people, "We are only human like you… turn away from these worthless things and worship the living God" (14:15).

Then Jews from Antioch-in-Pisidia made the crowds angry and they stoned Paul. They thought he was dead and dragged him outside the city but God saved his life.

## CONVERSIONS THROUGH PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS

The next day Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe (14:20). Here, many believed the Good News of Jesus Christ (14:21).

Paul and Barnabas then returned to the new churches planted in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch-in-Pisidia. They encouraged the new believers there (14:22-23):

- They helped them to become strong in their faith.
- They taught them to believe the truth of God.
- They warned them to expect many troubles.
- They appointed church leaders (elders).
- They prayed for God to protect them.

Paul and Barnabas learned to trust God for the work He had begun.

After a long journey, Paul and Barnabas went back to their home church in Antioch-in-Syria. They told the believers all about the wonderful things that God had done (14:27).

God used Paul and Barnabas to plant churches. The prayers of their sending church in Antioch were answered. There were miracles of healing and deliverance from persecution. There were many conversions especially among Gentiles. The believers in Antioch were part of the purpose of God to reach the world.

Paul and Barnabas stayed there a long time with the disciples (14:28). There were other jobs for him to do in the church.

**Talk about this:**

1. What did Paul and Barnabas do when they were persecuted (14:6,20)?
2. How should new believers be encouraged (14:22)?
3. Does your church tell you what God is doing in the lives of other Christian workers (14:27)?

**Think about this:** Why was it important to revisit the new churches (14:21-23)? Why was it important for Paul to return to his own church in Antioch-in-Syria (14:26-28)?

**Church government**

Jewish synagogues had a leader who was a teacher. Paul followed this order in setting up the early Christian fellowships (Acts 14:23). Under the leader there were male and females deacons in addition to elders who taught and helped the people. There were elders in Jerusalem (15:2) and James was leader of the Jerusalem group or council of churches (15:13).

Paul and Barnabas returned to the cities where they had preached. They encouraged the new believers and also appointed elders (14:21-23). Then Paul and Barnabas returned to their home church. It was important to report back to their own church elders who sent them out with the authority of the Holy Spirit (13:3).

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 15

**Learn about this:** *How to deal with problems in the lcal church (verses 1-2); how to use every situation to share what God has done (3-9); how to deal with problems among church leaders (10-19); how to bring unity and sound teaching within the churches (20-29); how to build and keep the peace between the churches (30-35); why Paul refused to work with Barnabas (36-41).*

## THE MEETING OF CHURCH LEADERS IN JERUSALEM

Men from Judea came to the church in Antioch and told the believers: "Unless you are circumcised… you cannot be saved" (15:1). Circumcision is the Jewish custom

of removing the spare skin from the male sex organ when a baby boy was 8 days old. God instructed Abraham to do this to all the boys of his family as a sign of His special covenant or agreement with the Jews (Genesis 17:11). Paul taught that faith alone saved men, so some Jewish believers and non-Jewish believers argued against each other about the need for circumcision rules.

Because of the disagreement, the church elders in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to the church leaders in Jerusalem. Titus also went to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1). They all went to ask Peter and James and the church elders what to do (15:2).

On the way they spoke to other Jewish believers in Christ. These people were pleased to hear that the Good News of Jesus Christ was received by Gentiles (15:3). But in Jerusalem, some of the believers were Pharisees. They were not pleased. They wanted to keep the old ways of religion, including circumcision.

In Jerusalem, James and the apostles welcomed Paul and the others. Then Pharisees in the group stood up and said that all believers should obey the Law of Moses and be circumcised (15:5). Peter answered, "God, who knows the heart… accepted the Gentiles by giving the Holy Spirit to them… He made their hearts pure because of their faith" (15:8). Peter believed it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved… "Those who are not Jews are saved in the same way" (15:11).

Then the church leaders listened quietly to Paul and Barnabas. They spoke about the signs and wonders God did among the uncircumcised Gentiles in the towns of Asia Province.

Later Paul wrote, "God's [gift of, KJV] grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ" (Ephesians 2:8). "Salvation [eternal life, KJV] is the free gift of God because of what Christ Jesus our Lord has done" (Romans 6:23). Many false religions say that you must work hard and obey religious laws to get to Heaven. Paul said: "Your salvation does not come from anything you do. It is God's gift. It is not based on anything you have done… but by the blood of Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 2:8-13). First we are saved and then we desire to do works of faith.

"The words of the prophets agree with this," James answered (Acts 15:15). He used words from the prophet Amos who told of a time when God will bless all the nations through Jesus Christ. "This means all the non-Jews who belong to Me [as well as Jews who believe in Christ, KJV]" (Acts 15:17; Amos 9:12). Then James warned the church leaders "not to make it hard for the non-Jews who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19). He also wanted all the apostles to remember to care for the poor (Galatians 2:10).

The church leaders in Jerusalem wrote a letter to the non-Jewish believers in Antioch-in-Syria. They sent it with Judas, Silas, Paul and Barnabas (15:22-23). Two were church leaders from Jerusalem; two were church leaders from Antioch. In the letter they said that they were sorry that some of the Jewish believers had upset the non-Jewish believers.

This letter brought unity among the believers and made everyone happy (15:31). Jesus had prayed to Father God for unity among believers (John 17:26).

Their message in the letter (15:24-29): -

- recognised there was a problem;
- apologised for any upset;
- confirmed their trust in the work of Paul and Barnabas;
- shared what the Holy Spirit taught them in Jerusalem;
- warned against eating all food offered in Satan and idol worship;
- offered other spiritual and moral advice.

Judas and Silas stayed in Antioch until peace was restored.

Like James, we must become part of the answer to the prayers of Jesus for Christian unity today (John 17:17). That is, between young and old believers, between believers from different cultures and also between new and traditional believers. This must be done in love and without changing the truth and purposes of God as recorded in the original Old and New Testaments written in Hebrew and Greek.

**Church problems and church meetings (Acts 15:1-35)**

Some church leaders wanted the new believers to have faith in the laws of Moses (15:1). The laws included circumcision. Others said that only faith in the Lord Jesus Christ set them free from their sins (15:11).

The church leaders took time to discuss what was right and wrong:

- First the **whole church met** to share what had happened (v.4).
- Then the **church leaders met** to discuss the problems (v.6).
- Everyone **listened quietly** (v.12).
- Then Paul and Barnabas **reported** to the congregation (v.12).
- They **read God's truth** from the Old Testament (v.16,17).
- Then James, the leader, **gave advice** about what to do (v.19-21).
- The whole church **agreed** about what to do (v.22).
- Then they **told the other churches** what was agreed (v.23-29).

This included not to eat food offered to idols or drink blood or eat meat that had not been drained from blood. Finally, they warned, "Do not commit sexual sins" (15:29).

## THE MISSIONARY WORK OF PAUL GROWS

Soon after this Paul wanted to go back to the new churches in Cyprus and Asia. Barnabas agreed but wanted to take his young cousin Mark with them (15:37). Paul did not want to take Mark with them. So Paul went with Silas to Asia and Barnabas went with Mark to Cyprus. This disagreement was caused by the refusal of Paul to trust a young believer who left their earlier missionary journey (13:13). Mark was the cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10) so Barnabas trusted Mark. However, Paul and Barnabas did not agree.

We know very little after that about Barnabas, but Mark later worked for Paul (Philemon 24). Mark also wrote his gospel about the teachings and ministry of Jesus. At the end of Paul's life, he asked Mark to help him (2 Timothy 4:11).

When Christian leaders disagree, it is better for both to go their separate ways. This avoids dividing the Church. Paul and Barnabas did not divide the believers – they went their separate ways and got on with the work of preaching and teaching the Good News.

God used them both to plant new churches. The truth of God about Jesus spread further and further using the good roads and ships the Romans built.

**Talk about this:**

1. Why did the church send leaders to Jerusalem (15:1-2)?
2. Do you welcome people from outside your church who are saved, including new believers (15:3)?
3. How did the early church solve problems (15:4-22)?
4. How do you protect new believers from false teaching and traditions that hinder the purposes of God (15:30-34)?

**Think about this:** Describe ways to help church leaders (15:10-19), church members (20-29) and other churches (23). Pray for churches to know the truth of God that sets people free from unhelpful traditions. Pray for unity at church meetings or in correspondence with other believers across the nation and the world.

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 16

**Learn about this:** *The personal details of Paul's work (1-5); the importance of the Holy Spirit in Paul's work (6-10); the result of obeying the Holy Spirit (11-15); the result of refusing help from occult powers (16-24); how Paul and Silas behaved in prison (25-34); Paul demands respect for Roman authority (35-40).*

## THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL

Paul and Silas went to Derbe and Lystra. In each place the letter from the church leaders in Jerusalem was read and the believers were encouraged.

In Lystra, Paul met a young man named Timothy. Timothy's mother and grandmother were both Jewish believers in Jesus as their Saviour (2 Timothy 1:5).

Paul trusted young Timothy and took him along with them. Timothy's father was not a Jew. Timothy was not accepted by some of the Jews, so Paul circumcised him (Acts 16:3). Circumcision is not necessary to make men right with God (Galatians 2:16), but Paul wanted to show respect to the Jews.

Paul, Silas and Timothy visited the churches in that area to encourage them. Their numbers grew daily (Acts 16:5). Then they went to towns which Paul had not visited before.

Every day Paul waited on God to find out what he should do. He went to Galatia because the Holy Spirit told him not to go north (16:6). It is always important to know what we should not do as well as what we should do.

One night, Paul had a vision. A man from Macedonia called to him, "Come over and help us." Next morning they set out for Macedonia (16:10). Paul and his fellow workers obeyed the Holy Spirit quickly.

**Paul's vision of a man calling him to Macedonia**

At this time Luke joined Paul and the others. Luke wrote down these acts or actions of the apostles for us all to read.

Like Paul, we too must wait and trust the Holy Spirit to guide us, and then obey. The Holy Spirit does this in many ways and at many times:

1. When we ask for the Holy Spirit in our lives (Luke 11:13).
2. When we do what pleases the Lord (Acts 16:5).
3. When we witness to others about Jesus (Luke 21:13-15).
4. When we study and understand the written word of God (2 Timothy 3:16,17).
5. When we are ready and waiting to obey (Acts 16:10).
6. When we move forward in the work God has called us to do (16:6).

This requires asking, doing, witnessing, studying, waiting and moving on in faith. Paul was doing all these things when the Holy Spirit spoke to him and moved him onwards (16:6-10).

They travelled by boat to southern Macedonia.

There was no Jewish synagogue in Philippi so they went outside the city to the river. There they found a special 'place of prayer' (16:13). Paul and the others spoke to some women who were praying there. They were now in Europe so there were fewer Jews there. However, they knew that the Holy Spirit was with them and guiding them. It was a special time and place to talk about Jesus.

A businesswoman named Lydia listened to the truth from God. She was not a Jew but she believed in God. She accepted Jesus as the Son of God and was filled with the Holy Spirit. She and her family believed and were baptized. Then she asked Paul and the others to stay at her house (16:14-15).

It was important for Paul, a Jew, to learn to respect the role of women among the believers. Paul also learnt that God calls poor slave girls to believe in Christ as well as rich business women.

## GOD SAVES PAUL AND SILAS FROM PRISON

The apostles often went to the river to pray quietly. One day a slave girl with a demon spirit followed them. 'She earned a lot of money for her owners by telling fortunes [predicting the future by magic, KJV]' (16:16). People paid money to hear what the demon spirit in the girl was going to tell them. These people listened to demon spirits instead of listening to God.

Paul was upset when this slave girl followed after them shouting "These men are servants of the Most High God" (16:17). She spoke the truth but Paul knew it came from a demon spirit. Paul was God's messenger; the slave girl with the demon spirit was not. She was used by her owners to deceive people about the future.

After several days, Paul spoke to the demon spirit in the girl. "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the demon left her (16:18).

Paul believed that the power of the Holy Spirit of God is greater than the controlling power of evil spirits. He knew and believed that the authority of Jesus Christ is greater than the power of Satan.

The owners saw that the girl had lost her power and they were angry. They could no longer make money through the girl telling the future. They took hold of Paul and Silas and dragged them to the marketplace. They caused a riot and shouted, "These Jews are doing things which are against the Roman law" (16:20-21). This was untrue and unfair. The city leaders ordered Paul and Silas to be whipped and put into prison. But God brings glory to His name if we continue to trust Him when we are persecuted for our faith.

**Demons obey the power of Jesus**

Evil spirits or demons recognise Jesus Christ and know that he is more powerful. But they try to deceive believers and those who are seeking the truth from God. The demon spirit within a slave girl tried to deceive the people that she knew all about the power of God (Acts 16:17). By shouting out her approval of Paul and Silas she was gaining attention for herself and for her evil masters – as if they were equals of the apostles.

Paul did not want a demon spirit to talk to the crowds. They could not understand who was telling the truth. We must not be deceived but be prepared to order demon spirits to go away in the name of Jesus. Do not do this on your own nor touch people with evil spirits. Ask other Christians to pray for you and with you when you order evil spirits to go. Remember that Jesus sent his followers to work together in pairs (Mark 6:7).

In prison, in the middle of the night, Paul and Silas sang hymns and prayed to God. As the other prisoners listened, an earthquake shook the prison. The head prison officer woke up and saw the doors open. He thought the prisoners had escaped. He drew his sword to kill himself, but Paul shouted, "Do not harm yourself! We are all here!" (16:25-28).

## GOD SAVES THE PRISON OFFICER

The prison officer was frightened. If the prisoners escaped, the Roman authorities would blame him.

The man fell on his knees in front of Paul and Silas. He cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you and your family will be saved" (16:30-31). Then they told him and his family about Jesus. The jailor and his family believed. At midnight, he took Paul and Silas and washed their wounds and gave them food. This showed that he was a changed man.

Paul baptized the prison officer and his whole family. For Paul and Silas, this was the most important thing to do: obey the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go and teach all people in all countries to believe and follow Me. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to do all things I have told you to do." Their troubles in prison did not stop the power of God from working.

In the morning, the city leaders told the prison officer to set Paul and Silas free (16:35). They begged them to leave (16:39) because Paul was a Roman and it was wrong to whip Romans.

This story shows how we should trust God in all things. This story also gives us a wonderful picture of the love of God. There was no arrest or punishment but complete forgiveness of sins for the jailor and for all who believed and followed Jesus, God's Son.

Then Paul and Silas went back to the house of Lydia. They stayed there only a short time, before going on to the next town. They obeyed God's call to preach the Good News in Macedonia.

The believers in Philippi grew strong in their faith. They loved Paul and cared for his needs when few others did (Philippians 1:3-5; 4:14-16).

**Talk about this:**

1. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy (16:3)?
2. Give two ways the Holy Spirit guided Paul (16:6-9). How did he respond (16:10)?
3. Do you have a special time and place where you can pray quietly to God (16:13)?
4. What did Paul learn about God calling both men and women to serve in the churches (2:17; 16:1-3,14-15;)?
5. What did Lydia do to help those who preached the Good News (16:15-16,40)?
6. What did Paul and Silas do when they were in trouble (16:25)?

7. What was the prison officer saved from (16:27-31)? What did he do next (33-34)?
8. Why were the Roman soldiers afraid of Paul (16:37-40)?

**Think about this:** Do you trust the Holy Spirit to warn you about going the wrong way and instead to lead you to people who need to know about Jesus (16:7,10)? What was the result of obeying the Holy Spirit (16:11-15) and refusing help from demon powers (16:16-24)? Pray for church leaders to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and aware of deceiving spirits.

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 17

**Learn about this:** *Paul's normal way of preaching to Jews and Gentiles (verses 1-3,10-11); the typical response of the Jewish leaders (5-9,13-15); the normal response to preaching the Good News (4,12); the reasons for a poor response in Athens (16-34).*

## PAUL PREACHES FROM CITY TO CITY

Paul and his friends went to Thessalonica. On three Sabbath days, Paul went into the synagogue and taught the Jews. He proved from the Old Testament "that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. This Jesus I am reporting to you is the Christ [Messiah]," he told them (17:3). Some Jews believed. Many Gentiles believed.

Jason, a Greek believer, opened his house to them. Certain Jewish leaders were jealous. They gathered some bad men and rushed to Jason's house looking for Paul and Silas. They could not find them, so they dragged Jason before the city leaders. "These men have caused trouble all over the world; now they come here and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They disobey Caesar and say that there is another king called Jesus" (17:6,7).

Jason paid money and was freed. At night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to safety.

In Berea many Jews received their message. They studied the Old Testament eagerly and carefully every day (17:11). It is important to check all preaching and teaching with the Word of God. The Jews also kept an open mind for new understanding of the Scriptures from the Holy Spirit. Many of the Jews and Gentiles believed, both men and women (17:12). But jealous Jews followed them to Berea, too, in order to make trouble for those who preached the Good News. So the believers took Paul and Silas away to Athens, the capital of Greece.

## ONLY A FEW BELIEVE IN ATHENS

Athens was the centre of culture and learning at the time of Paul. He was greatly troubled to see all the idols in the city. He preached the Good News about Jesus and His resurrection. In the synagogue he talked with those who worshipped the One True God (17:17). He explained to them how Jesus was their Messiah. He also spoke about Jesus to the people in the market place.

Some men took him to a meeting of the Areopagus where their law court met. "What is this new teaching?" they asked him (17:19).

The Greeks had many gods, but did not know Yahweh, the One True and Living God and Jesus Christ, His Son. Paul shared his faith with them in this way:

1. The One True God made the world. He is not a god made by the hands of people (17:24).
2. "God does not need anything." It is God Almighty, Creator of the Universe who gives life and everything else (17:25). He is Lord of all.
3. All people on Earth come from one man (Adam) whom God made (17:26).
4. God decided when and where they should live. God did this so that we should look for Him, the One True God, reach out for Him and find Him (17:27). He is never far from any one of us.
5. God is the creator of life. We live because of Him (17:28). We were created to be His children.
6. God is not made out of gold or silver or stone. Do not think about Him in this way (17:29). It is wrong to worship Him in this way.
7. Now is the time to repent and turn away from your sins and false religions (17:30).
8. God sent His Son to save us and He will judge us at the end of the age (17:31; John 3:17; 12:48).

Paul saw that they were 'very religious' people yet they did not know God. When the Greeks heard about Jesus being raised from the dead, some laughed. Others said, "We want to hear you again on this…" (17:32).

The people of Athens were rich, clever and well-educated. They loved to talk about religion and they worshipped different gods. But not many people believed in the One True and Almighty God and His Son, Jesus Christ. But some did believe. Dionysius was one of them. Also a woman named Damaris became a believer (17:34).

**Talk about this:**

1. What did the people do when Paul preached the Good News of Jesus Christ in Thessalonica (17:4-5), in Berea (17:11-12), and in Athens (17:32-34)?
2. Who believed in Jesus (17:4,12,34)?
3. What points in Paul's preaching can we include when we speak to non-believers about Christ (17:24-31)?

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 18

**Learn about this:** *Why Paul offered to work as a tentmaker while in Corinth (verses 1-3); why Paul stopped preaching to the Jews (4-7); why Paul stayed a long time in Corinth (8-17); how Paul encouraged the churches (18-23); how believers encouraged each another (24-28).*

# GOD ENCOURAGES PAUL TO PREACH IN CORINTH

Paul did not stay long in Athens. He went to Corinth and stayed with Aquila and his wife Priscilla who were tentmakers (18:1-3). In Rome, Claudius was emperor at that time. The Jewish leaders there made trouble for all those who believed in Christ as Messiah, so Claudius made all believers leave Rome. Aquila and Priscilla were Jews who believed in Jesus, so they left Rome. This is why they were living in Corinth. So Paul stayed with them and they made tents together to earn money. Aquila and Priscilla later lived in Ephesus and the believers met together in their house (1 Corinthians 16:19).

Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia to join them. Then Paul spent all his time preaching (18:5).

Paul 'gave witness to the Jews that Jesus was [and is] the Christ… They treated him badly [and blasphemed, KJV]' and this upset Paul (18:5-6). It was in Corinth that Paul decided to preach to the Gentiles only.

Soon after this, God spoke to Paul in a vision. "Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent. I am with you. No-one will harm you." God had many people in Corinth who might believe the Good News of Jesus and be saved (18:9,10). 'So Paul stayed there for a year and a half. He taught them from God's word [in the Old Testament]' (18:11).

The Jews attacked Paul but the Roman governor, Gallio, did not listen to the Jews (18:12-16).

**Work and ministry**

Paul had an ordinary job. He made and repaired tents. He sold the tents that he made. He did this work so that he could earn some money. He worked with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth (Acts 18:3). We believe he did this same work when he visited other towns (20:34).

Paul did this to earn money to pay for his food and clothes. He did not expect others to give him money for food and clothes. He believed it was good to spend part of his time working and part of his time teaching and preaching. In this way he was not a burden to the people he lived with. He did not receive payment when he taught them. Instead, the believers could make a gift to the poor believers in Jerusalem.

Paul did God's work but he also made tents to sell. He was happy to do both and believed that God wanted him to do that. Paul gave God the glory for all the work that he could do – his tent making, his teaching, his preaching. He did all things for the glory of God.

Many Bible teachers, ministers, preachers and evangelists have paid jobs. Some work full-time in ministry and are paid by the church or mission. Some work part-time for money and part-time in ministry without payment. All their work glorifies God and He blesses the work they do.

It was in Corinth that Paul wrote his letters to the Thessalonians which later became part of the New Testament. Paul praised them, encouraged them and corrected them.

## PRISCILLA, AQUILLA AND APOLLOS IN EPHESUS

After some time in Corinth, Paul sailed to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila. Paul left them there and went back to Jerusalem and then returned to his home church in Antioch-in-Syria (18:18-22).

After some time in Antioch, Paul returned to the churches in Galatia and Phrygia. 'He gave strength to all the believers there' (18:23).

During this time, Apollos arrived in Ephesus (18:24) from Alexandria, in Egypt. His knowledge of the Old Testament was good and he spoke with great power about Jesus. But he only knew the baptism of John the Baptist (18:25). Priscilla and Aquila helped Apollos to gain 'a better understanding of the way of God' (18:26). This included the teaching about the gift of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus for all believers (Acts 1:4-5; 2:38).

'Apollos wanted to go to Achaia. The brothers and sisters agreed and wrote to the believers in Achaia. They asked them to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who had become believers by God's grace' (18:27).

**Talk about this:**

1. Is it good for church leaders to have a part-time job to earn money (18:3)?
2. Paul was upset by the Jewish leaders in Corinth. What decision did he make there (18:6)?
3. How did Paul know that he was in the right place (18:9-11)?
4. How did God save Paul from the Jews who wanted to cause him trouble (18:12-16)?
5. Why do you think Paul journeyed to Jerusalem, Antioch-in-Syria and Asia Province (18:22-23)?
6. How did the believers in Ephesus help Apollos? What was the result (18:27)?

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 19

**Learn about this:** *Paul's teaching on baptism and the Holy Spirit (verses 1-7); the ministry of Paul at Ephesus (8-12); the result of using the name of Jesus without the power of the Holy Spirit (13-16); the work of the Holy Spirit at Ephesus (17-20); what Paul planned to do (21-22); how God used city leaders to avoid trouble for Paul (23-41).*

## THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL

When Paul returned to Ephesus, he found some believers who were baptized by John after repenting (19:3). Then Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus (19:5). Paul also laid his hands on them and prayed for them (19:6). The Holy Spirit came

down on them. Some spoke in different languages and some began to prophesy. Certain gifts of the Holy Spirit are given by God to each believer.

Paul spoke in the synagogue at Ephesus for three months. When some people began to speak against him and 'The Way' of Jesus he went to a teaching room owned by Tyrannus. He taught there every day for two years so that all the Jews and Greek-speaking Gentiles who lived in that region heard the word of the Lord (19:10).

While Paul was in Ephesus, he wrote letters to the church in Corinth and these became part of the New Testament. He explained the teachings of Jesus to stop them going the wrong way in life. He strengthened their faith and warned them about false teachings. When Paul planted new churches he tried to write to them or visit them.

God did many miracles through Paul, especially healing people who were ill and driving out demon spirits (19:11,12). The sons of a pagan priest were evil magicians. When they saw Paul casting out demons in the name of Jesus, they tried to do the same.

One day they tried copying Paul. They found a man with a demon spirit and shouted "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out" (19:13).

The demon spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know Paul, but who are you?" (19:15). Then the man jumped on them and beat them, so that they ran out of the house 'naked and bleeding'.

Because of this, many people in Ephesus believed and were sorry for the bad things that they had done. They burned their books and objects used in witchcraft. 'The word of the Lord spread everywhere' (19:20).

**The power of God at work today (Acts 19:19)**

"We have seen God's power at work. He visited us with miracles. People brought their idols to be burnt and gave their lives to Christ. People's thoughts were uncovered through the preaching of the word of God. At night, some people could not sleep. They came back in the morning to confess the wrong things they had done. It was really a time of God's grace. Now I am receiving phone calls and visits of people to praise God because He has changed their lives. Glory to God!" *(Pastor B., Burkina Faso, September 2004.)*

## THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN EPHESUS

The work of the Holy Spirit in Ephesus was very powerful at the time of Paul's third missionary journey. The Good News spread everywhere around (19:19-20).

During this time Paul decided to visit the new churches in Macedonia and Achaia (regions of Greece at that time). He also wanted to visit Jerusalem and Rome (19:21). Jerusalem was the centre of the Jewish religion and also the Jewish followers of Christ. Rome was the centre of the Roman Empire. Achaia was

the centre of the former Greek empire. Paul knew that these were important places to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ and to teach and encourage the new believers who lived there.

Paul stayed in Ephesus a little longer but sent two of his helpers to Macedonia (19:22). Paul followed them later (20:1).

At this time, the people who made silver idols in Ephesus encouraged the crowds to cause trouble for the followers of Jesus (19:23-29). The city clerk calmed the crowds down, knowing that the Roman governor would want to know why there was trouble in that city (19:35-41). In this way, God used a non-believer for His purposes. Therefore, Paul did not move away from Ephesus at that time. He stayed with the believers. He wanted to help and support them.

**Talk about this:**

1. How did Paul encourage the new believers in Ephesus (19:4-6)?
2. Why is it necessary to burn or destroy all objects used in witchcraft, magic and the occult when we believe in Jesus (19:19)?
3. What effect did Paul's preaching have on the worship of gods in Ephesus (19:26)?
4. How did God use a non-believer to calm the crowds who caused trouble (19:25-41)?

**Think about this:** What can followers of Christ do to encourage others? What miracles can we expect to do today in the name of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit (19:11-12)? How do you pray for Government leaders and church leaders?

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 20

**Learn about this:** *How the Holy Spirit guided Paul (verses 1-7; 11-16); how Paul taught the believers and raised a young man from death (7-11); what Paul believed in for himself (17-27; 33-35); Paul's last words to the church leaders in Ephesus (28-32); the way love was shown among the church leaders (36-38).*

## HOW PAUL DECIDED WHAT TO DO

Paul knew when to stay and when to move on. He was a busy preacher and teacher but he listened to the Holy Spirit to guide him. "Live by the Holy Spirit's power. Then you will not do what your sinful nature wants to do" (Galatians 5:16). "He will tell you where to go and what to do" (The Living Bible).

He stayed with the Ephesians until the trouble was over. Paul encouraged them when it was time for him to leave (Acts 20:1). He left to visit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (Greece) before planning to return to Troas in Asia Province (20:3-6).

Paul knew that he must:

- fulfil his divine calling to preach the Good News to the Gentiles;

- be guided by the Holy Spirit to know when to move on;
- plant new churches and teach and encourage the new believers;
- obey his church leaders in Antioch-in-Syria who regularly prayed for him.

Paul also hoped to visit Jerusalem and then Rome and then Spain.

Paul was prevented from going back to his home church in Antioch. He heard that the Jewish leaders wanted to arrest him (20:3). So instead, he travelled through Macedonia to the Roman Province of Asia but sailed past Ephesus. Paul never saw Greece or Syria again, including his home church.

Seven of the Christian brothers went with him to Macedonia then went on to Troas to wait for Paul to arrive. He joined them there and stayed seven days to teach.

The believers met in an upper room and Paul talked to them until midnight. It was hot and the room filled with smoke from the oil lamps. A young man sat in the open window. He fell asleep and fell to the ground below. When they reached him, he was dead. Paul went down and threw his arms around the body of the young man and his spirit came back into him again (20:10).

After this miracle, Paul went back upstairs, shared food and taught the people until it was morning. He broke and shared bread with the believers in the way Jesus instructed His disciples at the Last Supper (20:11; Matthew 14:19; Luke 22:19).

Then Paul went by boat to Miletus. In this way he saved time on his journey to Jerusalem (20:16).

## PAUL SPEAKS URGENTLY TO THE CHURCH LEADERS

While at Miletus, Paul sent for the church elders from Ephesus. He spoke serious words to them: "You know that I haven't let anyone keep me from preaching… to you. I have told both Jews and Greeks [Gentiles] that they must turn to God and turn away from their sins. They must have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (20:18-21). He did not fail to preach the full message of the Good News that Christ's sacrifice and resurrection fulfils all the Old Testament laws and prophecies.

"And now, compelled by the Holy Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem. I do not know what will happen to me there" (20:22).

"The Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me… However, my life is worth nothing to me. I only want to complete the work the Lord Jesus has given me [with joy, KJV]. He wants me to give witness to others of the Good News of God's grace [in Jesus]" (20:23-24).

Paul warned, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the believers. The Holy Spirit has made you leaders. Be shepherds of [feed, KJV] the church of the Lord which He bought with his own blood… After I leave you, men will come and try to change God's truth" (20:28,30).

The Holy Spirit chose the church elders, so they were responsible to God, not to Paul.

When Paul was ready to depart, the church workers cried and hugged and kissed him (20:37). Paul told them that he would never see them again.

**Talk about this:**

1. What can you do when your life is in danger from people who cause trouble (20:3; Matthew 2:14-23)? What affect do you think it had on Paul's sending church in Antioch when he was unable to return to them?
2. How much did Paul benefit from the support of believers (20:1,4)?
3. How was the Holy Spirit power demonstrated through Paul (20:10)? How did this encourage the believers (20:12)?
4. Why did Paul spend so much time teaching as well as preaching (20:7,11,25-31)?
5. What did Paul teach in order to train good church leadership (20:27-28)? Why was this so important (20:29-31)?
6. How did Paul build up the faith of all the believers (20:32,36)?

**Think about this:** When you are busy serving God, do you give time to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying? Do you talk with, and listen to, those who pray for you and also encourage them?

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 21

**Learn about this:** *Paul's journey to Jerusalem (verses 1-16); Paul's stay in Jerusalem (17-30); How Roman rulers influenced Paul's life from this time (31-40).*

### PAUL GOES BACK TO JERUSALEM

Paul travelled by ship from Miletus, near Ephesus, to Tyre (21:1-6). He met with the Christian believers there. They told Paul what the Holy Spirit said about the troubles to expect in Jerusalem. But Paul believed that the Holy Spirit wanted him to go.

When the ship came to Caesarea, Paul stayed with Philip the evangelist. While he was there, Agabus came from Jerusalem. He took Paul's belt and tied his own hands and feet with it as a sign. He spoke words given to him by the Holy Spirit: "In this way the Jews… will tie up the owner of this belt" (21:11). Paul, like Jesus, now knew what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem.

Paul answered Agabus and the believers: "Why are you weeping? I am ready to be tied up and to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (21:13).

The believers knew the dangers ahead, but some of them went up to Jerusalem with Paul. Paul stayed with Mnason, an early believer from Cyprus who lived in the city. Thousands of people were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. They filled every home, but God had a special place for His servant Paul and his friends with Mnason (21:16).

The next day Paul went to see James and the elders of the Jerusalem church (21:17-18). In Greece and the Roman Province of Asia many thousands of Gentiles had believed. Paul wanted to tell the elders what God had done there.

The elders praised God. But they said to Paul, "There are thousands of Jews [which believe, KJV] who try hard to obey the Law of Moses. They have heard that you teach the Jews to turn away from Moses. They think you teach them not to circumcise their children and not to live according to our customs. They will hear that you have come, so do what we tell you" (21:20-23).

They told Paul to take four men who were with them to the Temple, to be purified; to have their heads shaved; to pay for them to offer sacrifices. This was obeying the Law of Moses.

Paul agreed to do this. However, he always preached that men are saved, by the grace of God, through faith in Jesus alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Believers are then helped by the Holy Spirit to keep the meaning of the Law, which is fulfilled in us through Christ after our salvation.

## PAUL IS ATTACKED AND ARRESTED

Paul had kept the Law of Moses before. He had shaved his head at Cenchrea because of a vow he made to the Lord (Acts 18:18).

At the Temple, some of the Jews from Asia saw Paul. They hated Paul and wanted to kill him. They said he had taken a non-Jew into the Temple. "He has made this holy place unclean," they shouted (21:28).

The crowds tried to kill Paul, but the Roman commander saved him from them and tied him up with chains. The soldiers carried him away to the Roman fort (21:34-35). There, Paul stood on the steps and asked to speak to the crowds (21:39).

Paul preached that the Law of Moses was good but could not save people from their sins (Romans 3:20). He preached that people are put right with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22). He knew that the Law is a guide for telling us what is wrong. It shows what is right and wrong.

Many found this difficult to understand. This is why Paul was in trouble with some of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem (Acts 21:21). Many believers were trying hard to follow Christ and also to follow the Law of Moses (21:20). Because of this, Paul was asked to show that he believed in the Law of Moses (21:23-24). He wanted to please these men and also to please God. But soon Paul was in trouble with Jews from the Roman Asia Province (21:27).

Then he asked to explain the truth (Acts 21:39). This later caused further trouble with the Jews in Jerusalem (22:22). Peter, however, praised Paul's God-given wisdom and warned his readers not to misunderstand Paul or distort what he said (2 Peter 3:15-16).

**Talk about this:**

1. Discuss the work of the Holy Spirit in Paul's journey to Jerusalem (19:6; 20:22-23; 21:4,11-13).
2. What advice did the believers give to Paul (21:4,12)?
3. How did the believers encourage Paul (21:14)?

4. How did the words of the Holy Spirit in 21:11 begin to come true (21:30-40)?

**Think about this:** Paul was in trouble with some of the Jewish leaders for preaching Christ to the Jews. Paul was also in trouble with some of the Jewish believers for preaching Christ to Gentiles. So why did the Holy Spirit take Paul to Jerusalem? Always ask God to show you His bigger picture or purpose when you experience trouble.

### Pharisees and Sadducees

The Pharisees and Sadducees were two religious groups of Jews. Jesus warned believers not to follow their ways (Matthew 16:6; 23:2-3).

There were several thousand **Pharisees** at the time of Jesus and Paul. Pharisees were devout Jews who obeyed the Law of Moses and the Temple laws. They believed in God's truth recorded in the Old Testament and thought that they were the experts in understanding and applying the truth from God. They told people what to believe and what to do, and what not to do.

They made many more laws of their own. Therefore, it was difficult for the people to obey all their rules and to find peace with God. Jesus said that the Pharisees did not obey their own laws (Matthew 23:3). And He knew that no-one could find peace with God by following lots of man-made laws.

The **Sadducees** were wealthy Jews who obeyed the Law of Moses but did not make any new laws. They said that the people should obey the Law but make up their own minds what to do day by day. They obeyed the old religious traditions yet did not seek God's guidance from His written word. This is why the Sadducees always argued with the Pharisees about obeying the Law. The Sadducees also refused to believe in angels, spirits and life after death (the resurrection of the body).

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 22

**Learn about this:** *Paul's personal testimony (verses 1-21); the hardened hearts of religious people (22-23); how the Roman rulers treated Paul (24-30).*

## PAUL SPEAKS THE TRUTH FROM GOD TO THE CROWDS

When Paul was arrested, he was allowed to speak to the crowds in Jerusalem. He spoke in the local Aramaic language so that they could fully understand him. (Jesus often used the Aramaic language.) Paul told them:

- He was a Jew who knew the Law of Moses very well (22:3)
- He had permission to put followers of Jesus into prison and send them to die (22:4-5).

- He was met by Jesus on the road to Damascus (22:6-11).
- God sent a Jewish believer to speak to him. He told Paul to witness about Jesus (22:12-16).
- In Jerusalem, Jesus told Paul to witness about Him in other countries and to people who were not Jews (22:17-21).

When the crowds heard this they wanted to kill Paul (22:22). The Roman commander gave orders for Paul to be flogged (22:24). But when the commander found out that Paul was a Roman citizen as well as a Jew, they stopped flogging him (22:29). Then the Roman commander took Paul to the Jewish Court, the Sanhedrin, to have a fair trial (22:30).

**Talk about this:**

1. How did Paul explain his actions to the angry crowd (22:1-21).
2. How did the Holy Spirit guide Paul to prevent a flogging (22:22-29)?
3. What did the Roman officer do in order to give Paul a fair trial by the Jews (22:30)?

**The Resurrection of the Body**

An important subject in the Book of Acts is the resurrection of the body. Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth: "If no one rises from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, what we preach doesn't mean anything. Your faith doesn't mean anything either" (1 Corinthians 15:13-14). The resurrection of Jesus Christ was so important that it was taught in almost every sermon preached in the Book of Acts (1:22; 2:31; 4:2,33; 17:18,32; 23:6; 24:21).

Paul was taught by the other apostles that after His resurrection, Jesus was seen by over 500 people at different times before His ascension (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

The Sadducees were the upper class of Jews. They opposed the teaching about the Good News of salvation through Jesus. They did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death nor in the resurrection He promised to every believer.

The Old Testament speaks only a little of the resurrection. Perhaps the best reference is in Daniel 12:1-2. "At that time… of suffering your people will be saved whose names are written in the Book of Life. Huge numbers of people who lie dead in the dust of the earth will wake up. Some will rise up to life that will never end. Others will rise up to shame that will never end." See also Acts 24:15.

This promise of 'everlasting life' is mentioned only once in the Old Testament but New Testament Christians believed in everlasting life after resurrection from death. Everlasting life is not a continuation of our old life on Earth but of a new life with God Himself (John 11:25; 2 Corinthians 4:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

**Think about this:** Do you have a personal testimony? Can you speak boldly to angry or disbelieving people in the same way as Paul did, whatever the cost? Think about how God saved Paul from injury when he boldly testified about what God had done in his life, as a follower of Jesus.

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 23

**Learn about this:** *How the Jewish leaders treated Paul (verses 1-4); how the religious leaders argued among themselves (5-10); God's purpose for Paul (11); the Jews' purpose for Paul (12-13); what Paul's nephew did (14-22); the Romans' purpose for Paul (23-35).*

### PAUL SPEAKS GOD'S TRUTH TO THE JEWISH COURT

The next day, Paul was allowed to speak to the Sanhedrin, which was the highest Jewish court. He spoke of the hope of resurrection of life after death. The Sadducees said there was no resurrection, so they argued with the Pharisees, who believed in the resurrection of the body after death.

Paul told the court that he was a Pharisee. He believed in life after death and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (23:6). This caused a big argument. The religious leaders argued among themselves. People who refuse to believe the whole of God's truth often end up disagreeing and arguing with each another.

Some of the Jews wanted to harm Paul, so the commander ordered his men to take Paul to an army prison.

### JESUS SPEAKS COMFORTING WORDS TO PAUL

That night, the Lord Jesus Himself came to Paul and said, "Be brave [cheerful, KJV]! You have given witness to me in Jerusalem. You must do the same in Rome" (23:11). This comforted Paul and encouraged him. He remembered these words in the difficult times ahead.

The Jews planned to kill Paul. A nephew of Paul heard of this and visited him in prison. Paul sent his nephew to the Roman officer in charge, to tell him of the plan to kill him (23:12-22).

So the commanding officer ordered his men to take Paul to Caesarea during the night. There he waited to see Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, the main district of Israel (23:24). Paul would then have a proper trial.

In this way, God protected Paul from his enemies.

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 24

**Learn about this:** *How the Jewish leaders told Felix lies about Paul (verses 1-9); how Paul gave an honest account of himself (10-21); how Paul had freedom to teach and meet friends while a prisoner in Jerusalem (22-27).*

# PAUL SPEAKS GOD'S TRUTH TO THE ROMAN GOVERNOR

Five days later, some of the Jews from Jerusalem came to Caesarea to speak to Felix. They told Felix that Paul had caused a lot of trouble among the Jews all over the world. They told Felix that Paul was a leader of the religious group called 'The Nazarenes' (24:5).

Paul told Felix that he was a faithful Jew and also a follower of Jesus (24:14). Paul had done nothing wrong against the Law of Moses. He believed everything in the Old Testament. He tried to do what was right in the eyes of God and man (24:16). Felix understood everything that Paul said (24:22) and he sent the Jews away.

Felix let the friends of Paul visit him and care for his needs (24:23). Later, Felix and his wife sent for Paul to listen to him. Paul witnessed to his faith in Jesus Christ (24:24). He also spoke about:

1. Righteousness – how to follow Jesus.
2. Holiness – how to live the right way ourselves and towards each other.
3. Judgement – how God will judge all people through His Son Jesus.

Felix was afraid (24:25) and wanted Paul to give him money to set him free (24:26). Paul refused to bribe Felix. Instead, Paul talked to Felix about God's truth. Asking for bribes and giving bribes is not the way God approves.

### When things go wrong

When things appear to go wrong, it feels as if God is no longer with us. Throughout the Bible, God often spoke directly to His people. Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus said "All authority [power, KJV] is given to Me" (Matthew 28:18).

We should remember that God has handed all authority and power to His Son, the Lord Jesus, to judge what to do when things go wrong. Through His Spirit we see the Lord guiding Paul (Acts 23:11):

- Jesus spoke in the middle of the night.
- Jesus appeared in bodily form and stood near Paul.
- Jesus came to encourage him.
- Jesus prepared him to witness of Him in Jerusalem and in Rome.

When you have troubles, believe that Jesus will be with you and guide you. Sometimes He will let you know a little of what lies ahead. He does not tell us much about the future, so that we learn to live by faith. Paul did not know much about the future, only that one day he would go to Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire at that time (23:11). God warns us not to be tempted by attractive ideas or fantasies about the future, especially from witches, fortune tellers, mediums or spirits of the dead (Deuteronomy 18:10-13). He wants to prepare us to trust only our Lord's resurrection power within us and obey the guidance of the promised Holy Spirit (John 14:26).

After two years Porcius Festus became governor. To please the Jews, Felix left Paul in prison (24:27).

**Talk about this:**

1. Why did the Sadducees argue with Paul and with the Pharisees (23:8)?
2. How did God encourage Paul (23:11)?
3. What did the Roman commander say about Paul (23:29)?
4. How did Paul escape from the Jews (23:12,16,23,25)?
5. Why was Paul sent to Rome (23:11; 25:12)?
6. Why was Felix afraid to listen to Paul (24:25)?

**Think about this:** Do you remember to pray for the Jews including the Jewish believers in Christ? Seek God's understanding of the Old Testament and its value for today.

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 25

**Learn about this:** *How the Jewish leaders tried to trick the new Roman ruler Festus (verses 1-3); how Festus tried to keep the peace with the Jews (4-9); why Paul asked to go to Rome for his trial (10-12); how Festus used Agrippa to find out more about Paul (13-27).*

## PAUL ASKS TO SPEAK TO THE ROMAN EMPRORER

After Festus became governor, he heard the Jewish leaders speak against Paul. They asked Festus to send Paul to the Jewish court in Jerusalem. They wanted to kill him.

Festus did not let them do this. He made the Jews go to the court in Caesarea. So they came from Jerusalem to make their charges against Paul. They brought many charges against him, but they could not prove any of them (25:7).

Finally Paul said, "I appeal to Caesar." Festus spoke with his council, then replied, "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!" (25:12). Caesar was the Roman emperor Nero, the chief ruler in Rome. Rome ruled over Judea at that time. (Later on, Nero persecuted the Christians.)

A few days later, King Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice came to visit Festus. The Roman Emperor had appointed Agrippa king of the Jewish people. Agrippa said, "I want to hear Paul speak" (25:22). Agrippa II was the great-grandson of King Herod the Great who tried to kill Jesus when He was a child (Matthew 2:16).

Festus gladly brought Paul to be questioned by King Agrippa. Festus said that he needed the king's help to send Paul to the Roman Emperor with a list of charges against him. "It makes no sense to send a prisoner to Rome without listing the charges against him" (25:26-27).

**Talk about this:**

1. How did Paul's words cause an argument between the Sadducees and the Pharisees (23:1-8)? How did this help Paul to remain safe as a prisoner of the Romans?
2. What three things did God say to encourage Paul (23:11)?
3. Who did God use to save Paul from the Jewish troublemakers (23:12-35)? How was Paul kept safe by Felix, the Roman Governor?
4. How did Paul describe the way the Jewish leaders were causing him trouble (24:10-21)?
5. What three ways did Felix and his wife show their interest in Paul (24:24.26,27)? How did this keep him safe in prison?
6. What was the new plot to kill Paul (25:1-5)? Why was Paul told he had to go on trial in Rome (25:10-12)?

**Think about this:** Read Mark 13:9-11 and Acts 9:15-16. Do you remember to pray for persecuted Jews and persecuted Jewish believers in Christ, as well as persecuted Gentile Christians? Seek God's understanding of the Old Testament and New Testament teaching and events and their importance for today.

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 26

**Learn about this:** *The importance of Luke's third account of Paul's conversion (1-15); the account of Paul's ministry (16-21); the words of prophecy that Paul read from the Old Testament (22-23); the reactions of Festus and Agrippa (24-32).*

## PAUL SHARES HIS TESTIMONY WITH THE KING

The next day, King Agrippa met Paul with Festus. This fulfilled the prophecy by Ananias about Paul in Acts 9:15. "He will carry My name to those who are not Jews and to their kings [and] to the people of Israel."

Paul thanked King Agrippa for the opportunity to speak about his faith and the opposition he had suffered (26:2). He also told the king he was pleased the king understood a lot about the Jewish religion (26:3).

Paul then told the king that he was a faithful Jew who had lived by the rules of the Pharisees (26:5). Paul told the king that at first he did not

**Paul preached to kings about Jesus**

believe that Jesus was the Son of God. So he had punished those people who were followers of Jesus (26:9-11).

Paul then told how he met the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus (26:12-18) and how he preached about Jesus to the Jews and the Gentiles (26:19-20). Paul said this was why the Jewish leaders tried to kill him (26:21).

He taught about the same things that Moses and the prophets said was going to happen (26:22-23):

- Christ the Messiah was going to suffer (Isaiah 53).
- He was going to rise from death (Psalm 16:10).
- He came to save His own people, the Jews, first (Luke 1:54-55).
- God's salvation will then be for all people (Isaiah 42:6; Luke 2:32).

King Agrippa almost believed in Jesus. He tested Paul by saying that Paul was mad (16:24). Then he asked Paul, "Are you trying to talk me into becoming a Christian?" (26:28). Then he got up and walked away when Paul told him, "I pray to God… that you may become like me, except for these chains" (26:29).

Agrippa spoke to Festus and the others with him. He said, "Why should this man die or [even] be put in prison? He has done nothing wrong to deserve this" (26:31). Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could be set free. But he has appealed to Caesar" (26:32).

So Paul was sent to Rome by ship to be tried by Nero, the Roman Caesar or Emperor.

**Talk about this:**

1. Why did Paul speak to King Agrippa (25:13-22)?
2. How did Paul show he knew about the king's understanding of the Jewish religion (26:3,26-27)?
3. How much of what Paul said was his own personal testimony (26:4-21)? Discuss all the things he said.
4. What help did Paul claim to have in his life (26:22-23)? How did he support what he said with quotations from the Old Testament?
5. Why did the king try to discourage Paul speaking to him (26:24,28)?
6. What was Paul's prayer for Festus (26:29)? How did Agrippa react to these words spoken in public? (26:30-31).

**Think about this:** What happened when Paul believed in Jesus (26:16-18)? What happened when Festus was challenged to believe in Jesus (26:24,28,30-31)? How did God use the events of this day in Paul's life to spread the Good News in Rome to all who were ready to listen?

## Bible reading: Acts Chapter 27

**Learn about this:** *How God protected Paul and everybody on board the ship to Rome (verses 1-44).*

# PAUL LEAVES FOR ROME BUT IS SHIPWRECKED

Paul had been a prisoner for two years. Aristarchus, Paul's friend, went with him to Rome. Paul called him 'a fellow prisoner' (Colossians 4:10). Luke travelled with them also.

Julius, a centurion of the Imperial Regiment, was in charge of one hundred soldiers who guarded Paul and the other prisoners (27:1). Julius knew he could trust Paul, so at Sidon he let Paul go off the ship to visit the believers who lived there (27:3).

This was after mid-September at the beginning of the stormy season. Paul knew that sailing was too dangerous and told the captain (27:10). The owner of the ship did not listen, so the Roman guard ignored Paul's advice. They sailed towards Phoenix in the island of Crete when the wind was good (27:12,13) This was a safe place to stay for the winter.

But very soon the ship was caught in a storm and driven along by the wind away from land. The seamen threw everything into the sea to lighten the ship and save it from sinking. They went without food for many days. They 'gave up all hope of being saved' (27:20).

One night an angel spoke to Paul: "Do not be afraid," he said. "You must stand trial before Caesar; and God will save the lives of all who sail with you" (27:24).

Paul told the men: "Keep up your courage, men. I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me… We will be saved but we must run the ship onto the beach of an island" (27:25-26).

After 14 days in the storm, the water became shallow (27:27). They put down anchors to hold the boat there until it was daylight (27:29). Paul told the 276 men that no one was going to die (27:34,37). He broke bread and gave thanks to God. They were filled with hope and ate more food before throwing the rest of the cargo into the sea to make the ship lighter (27:35-37). As daylight came, they saw a sandy beach, and tried to run the ship onto the beach. It was trapped in the shallow water and quickly broke up because of the huge waves. The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners, but Julius saved them because of Paul and his faith. Then some of the men swam to shore. Others held onto pieces of wood; everyone reached land safely (27:44). God saved them all.

**Paul is shipwrecked**

# Bible reading: Acts Chapter 28

**Learn about this:** *How the people of Malta were converted through Paul (1-10); how the believers in Italy welcomed Paul (11-16); God's purpose for the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ in the last days of Paul's life (17-30).*

## PAUL ON THE ISLAND OF MALTA

The land was the island of Malta. The people of Malta were very kind (28:2). They made a fire to dry and warm the men. While Paul picked up wood for the fire, a snake attached itself to Paul's hand, possibly by its teeth.

"He must be a murderer," the people said as they waited for him to die from the poison. When nothing happened to Paul, they said that he was a god (28:6).

The chief Roman officer on the island took Paul and his friends to his home. His father was sick in bed, so Paul prayed for him and laid hands on him and God healed him. Many other sick people came to Paul for prayer and healing (28:8-9).

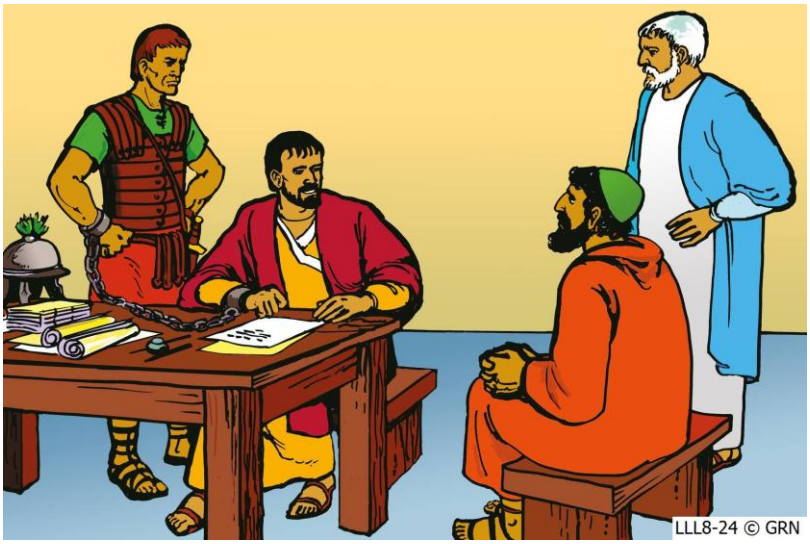
During Paul's stay on the island of Malta, the whole island heard about Jesus. Christianity in Malta dates from this time. Many times Malta was attacked by the nations around it. But the people of Malta trusted in God for their freedom.

Three months later Paul was taken to Rome by ship. The winter storms had ended. Before he reached the city, many believers came out to meet him. At the sight of them, Paul was encouraged and he praised God (28:15).

## THE MINISTRY OF PAUL IN ROME

For two years, Paul was under house arrest. He stayed in his own rented house 'and welcomed all who came to see him' (28:30).

Paul explained the Kingdom of God to the Jews. He used the Books of the Law of Moses and the Prophets to teach them. And he spoke to them of Jesus and His resurrection (28:23).



**Paul waited in Rome as a house prisoner**

Some believed the Good News, but others did not. Then Paul used the words of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:9-10). The same words were used by Jesus (Matthew 13:3-23; Mark 4:3-20; Luke 8:4-15).

Luke does not tell us what happened to Paul

next. But we believe he was later put to death by Nero during a time of great persecution for followers of Christ.

During the time Paul waited in Rome, he preached boldly the Good News of Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31). He also wrote letters to some of the early Christian congregations (Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians). It was important for Paul to teach them. His letters are also helpful for teaching believers today, in addition to the teachings of Jesus in the gospels.

The wish of Paul to go to Rome was fulfilled in an amazing way. God allowed Paul to go there as a prisoner, not as a free man. He was a 'prisoner for Christ'. In this way, the Good News was preached to those who were willing to come and listen. And, through the writings of Paul from prison, the churches were encouraged and given understanding of the teachings of Christ and the purposes of God in the Old Testament.

Paul was confident that the Good News of God's salvation in Jesus would be proclaimed to all the nations. Many new fellowships started in the Roman Empire and sent out missionaries across the world.

**Talk about this:**

1. How did the ship owners do the 'wrong thing' (27:9-12)? How did God use Paul to save the lives of the people on the ship?
2. How did God encourage Paul on his way to Rome as a prisoner (28:14-15; 27:23-25)?
3. Discuss how Paul changed the lives of the people of Malta (28:2-10).
4. How did God use Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome (28:17-30)?

**Think about this:** How did God fulfil His purpose to build up the early Church in the last days of Paul's life? Pray for faith to trust God in the storms of life and to spread the Good News. Do you see how God fulfilled Paul's desire to teach and preach the Good News in Rome and how being 'a prisoner for Christ' served the purposes of God? Do you ask God to guide you daily?

## CONCLUSIONS

We praise God for the calling and ministry of Paul in many towns, cities and countries. Finally, in Rome, Paul was at the centre of the great Roman Empire but as a house prisoner. Because of this, the Good News of Jesus Christ spread throughout the known world (Philippians 1:12-14). This happened because, while in Rome, Paul spoke to his visitors and wrote to the churches. Paul's calling into ministry fulfilled the words of Jesus Himself (Acts 9:15-16; 23:11) to preach to Jews and Gentiles, even to kings.

Jesus warned His followers, "Everyone will hate you because of Me. But the one who stands firm [endures, KJV] to the end will be saved" (Mark 13:13). Paul stood firm until his work for God was finished. He was probably put to death by the Emperor Nero in AD 67. This was after three missionary journeys and many

beatings, imprisonments, plots and threats against him, plus the final dangerous journey to Rome.

During the years following the death of Paul, the writings of Luke (the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts) were copied many times and given to the believers to read. The same happened with the writings of Matthew, Mark, John, and the letters of Paul and the other apostles and the writer of the book called Hebrews.

Other writers at this time tell us that all twelve apostles were killed for their faith. However, the early church grew, and spread around the world. The believers were encouraged and grew strong through reading what is now our New Testament, along with the Old Testament scrolls. We can trust the words of the writers about Jesus Christ and His teachings, because they all knew Jesus personally. The risen Lord Jesus spoke to Paul and told him to be a witness for Him to the world.

So we thank God for the writings of Paul and others which teach everyone the truth about Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. It is a good thing for every believer to read the letters of Paul and the rest of the New Testament in addition to the book of Acts. They are essential reading in times of church growth, church decline, church disputes or church persecution, especially the four Gospels containing the words and ministry of Jesus Himself.

Many people believe that we are near the time of great troubles before Christ returns (Mark 13:4-8). Many will doubt their faith at this time. Many will be deceived by powerful leaders and by other religions. But many will be saved and stay true to God by obeying the teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles as we await, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the return of Christ.

***A prayer:*** Heavenly Father, unite and empower Your people so that Your truth continues to go out to the world. Establish Your eternal salvation and righteousness in and through Jesus Christ, who is the sacrificed Son of the Lord God Almighty of Jews and Christians everywhere. May Your Kingdom come, on Earth as in Heaven. Come soon, Lord Jesus! Enable us to teach Bible truth, preach the Good News and reach those who need the touch of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

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