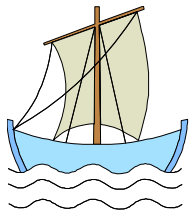


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# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

## From Pentecost to Revelation

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# 1. ACTS OVERVIEW

TITLE: After the ACTions of the Holy Spirit

AUTHOR: Luke

DATE of WRITING: About 63 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Various places

TIME COVERED: AD 30 - 60

RECIPIENTS: Theophilus, then everyone

KEY VERSE: *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* (Acts 1:8)

KEY WORD: "Holy Spirit" (54 times); "name" (33 times), "witness" (12 times)

PURPOSE: The Gospels contain the facts of Jesus' earthly life.

Acts continues the story about the start of the early church and sets the background for understanding the epistles.

THEME: To continue the record of the works ('acts') of the risen Lord.

# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

**From Pentecost to Revelation**

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The Old Testament shows our need of a Redeemer and God's promise to send One. The Gospels show how that was fulfilled in Jesus. The book of Acts picks up the story after Jesus' ascension back to heaven (1:1-26). It shows how a handful of believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, started the church and spread God's message to the world. The epistles are letters written to churches and individuals during the time of Acts. Revelation shows the final fulfillment of all the ages.

**LUKE THE WRITER** Luke wrote both Luke and Acts. While Paul wrote the most books in the New Testament, 13, and John was next with 5, Luke wrote the most pages. His book called Acts was a follow-up to his Gospel of Luke. It is a historical book, a transitional book. It is not a theology for us to apply in every detail, but it is an accurate historical record of the transition from Law to Grace, from Israel to Church, from Jew and Gentile to Bride of Christ. Any transition takes time and goes through various stages. This was true of the early church, too.

chapter	1-7	8-12	13-28						
area	JERUSALEM	JUDEA - SAMARIA	ENDS OF THE EARTH						
people	JEWS	SAMARITANS	GENTILES						
men	PETER	PHILIP (Peter/Paul)	PAUL						
church	ESTABLISHMENT	EXTENSION	EXPANSION						
time	2 YRS (33-35)	13 YRS (35-48)	14 YRS (48-62)						
		Missionary Jour  Chapters  Years	1MJ	2MJ	3MJ	Rome1	Trip	Rome	...
			13-14	16-18	19-20	21-28			
			1 ½	2 ½	4	5	5	1	...
Books		James	Mark Gal.	IThes IIThes	I Cor II Cor Rom	Eph Col Phile Phili Acts	ITim Titu Mt Lk I Pt II Pt	II Tim Heb Jud	Jn I Jn II Jn III Jn Rev

The book follows the outline laid down in 1:8: *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

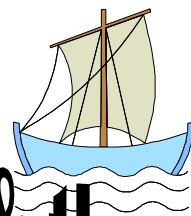
**I. "JERUSALEM" (1-7)** In the first section of Acts the focus is on Jerusalem. Peter leads the early church. The account is picked up with the ascension of Jesus to heaven (1). The start of the early church in Jerusalem is recorded – Pentecost (2). Events of the young church are then listed: a cripple cured (3), Peter and John arrested and released (4), Ananias and Saphira killed for deception (5), 7 deacons chosen to help with the work load (6) and the death of Stephen (7).

**II. "JUDEA & SAMARIA" (8-12)** God used this first wave of persecution against the Christians in Jerusalem to cause them to scatter with the gospel. They should have done this before but didn't, now they must. Philip's preaching in Samaria and to the Ethiopian eunuch, (8), Paul's conversion (9), and Peter's evangelism of the Gentile Cornelius and his household (10-11) comprise the historical elements. The church has gone from Jews in Jerusalem to Jews and Gentiles throughout Palestine.

**III. "ENDS OF THE EARTH" (13-28)** In this third section the focus shifts to Paul and his missionary journeys - 3 of them (13 - 20). Paul was the one to take the gospel to Gentiles and start churches in Asia Minor and even into Europe itself. The book ends with Paul's arrest and trip to Rome for trial (21-28). After his release he continued to travel, then was martyred in Rome.

Now it's our turn to take the gospel and spread it. Like in a relay race, each one has his turn to do his part. Now is your turn as part of this generation. Don't drop the baton!

## **2. CONTINUING JESUS' WORK** **(Acts 1)**



# **ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH**

**From Pentecost to Revelation**

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It's been said that of all the centuries, the 20<sup>th</sup> is most like the first. That is true. Therefore there is much we can learn from the early church which can help us today. This series of articles on Acts and the early church will be very informative and practical.

'Acts' was the name given to Luke's second book in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. It was a sequel the Luke's Gospel, picking up and continuing the story of Jesus which he had started. Luke was the only Gentile to write a book in the Bible. He was close to Paul and traveled with him for many years, that's where he got his information. 'Acts' shows the nature of the book – actions. It isn't called 'wishes' or 'dreams' but appropriately 'Acts' of the Apostles. Really it was a record of the actions of the Holy Spirit.

Acts records the continuation of the work Jesus started. It didn't die with Him but, as He had planned, continued after He went to heaven. In chapter 1 we see some necessary ingredients to keep doing the work that Jesus started.

**1. PROPER MESSAGE (1-2)** Luke makes it clear at the start that he is continuing the story of Jesus. That message has continued even to today. One generation after another has passed it on. Now it's our turn to take the baton of Truth and pass it to the next generation. Our message, too, is Jesus. Social reform, peace among men, psychological wholeness and self fulfillment have their place, but Jesus must come first.

**2. PROPER MANIFESTATION (3)** The heart of our faith is based on the resurrection, as Luke reminds us. That is still the ultimate proof of our message.

**3. PROPER MIGHT (2b, 4-5, 8a)** The Holy Spirit is the power behind our work. Without Him within us, empowering and guiding us, we cannot continue His work today. Thus this book is really the Acts of the Holy Spirit, and His story is not yet finished.

**4. PROPER MYSTERY (6-7)** Some things we don't know, though – mainly when Jesus will be coming back. Each generation awaits the return of Jesus, and one will be fortunate to see it. Until then the date of this remains a mystery. We eagerly await His return but keep working all the same.

**5. PROPER MISSION (8)** Luke reminds his readers of Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit to enable us to be witnesses for Jesus. That's how we continue Jesus' work today. A witness tells what he knows, gives first-hand information of what Jesus has done for him and what he knows about Jesus. We are not called to be lawyers to argue Jesus' case, but witnesses to testify to what He has done for us. This isn't an option, its an command. We are told to be witnesses to those where we live as well as those on the other side of the world.

**6. PROPER MOTIVE (9-11)** After this review, connecting the early church with the life of Jesus, Luke picks up the story where he had left it off before. He tells about Jesus' ascension 40 days after His resurrection: on Sunday, May 14, 33 AD. The place was the Mt. Of Olives outside Jerusalem. Angles assured the watching disciples that Jesus would one day return the same as He left.

**7. PROPER MEN (12-26)** After the ascension the disciples went back to Jerusalem to await the promised Holy Spirit. They met in the upper room when possible. These disciples were committed to carrying on the work Jesus had started. A 'disciple' was a learner, a follower, someone who lived with a teacher 24 hours a day in order to be able to think and act like him. For Jesus' disciples this is a life-long process. The early disciples set an example for us today. They were characterized by team spirit, perseverance, total obedience and deep faith. Jesus was their undisputed leader, their master. Peter became the spokesman for the disciples on earth, but all acknowledged Jesus as Lord and Sovereign.

Their first major action as a group was to find a replacement for Judas, who had betrayed Jesus and taken his own life. Twelve was a special number in the Old as well as New Testaments, and so Peter suggested they select a replacement so they could be at full strength again. Matthias was chosen. He had been one of the 70 who followed Jesus despite being passed over when Jesus chose the 12. Barsabbas, who was also considered but lost out to Matthias, continued to faithfully serve God in whatever way he could. Like Caleb, he didn't pout and quit but loyally served in any role God would have for him. This willingness to serve anywhere was an important trait of a disciple.

Thus the transition was made as Jesus' followers committed themselves to carry on the work that Jesus had started, no matter the cost or the obstacles. It took total commitment.

In the days of the Roman Emperor Nero, there lived and served him a band of soldiers known as the "Emperor's Wrestlers." Fine, stalwart men they were, picked from the best and the bravest of the land, recruited from the great athletes of the Roman amphitheater. In the great amphitheater they upheld the arms of the emperor against all challengers. Before each contest they stood before the emperor's throne. Then through the courts of Rome rang the cry: "We, the wrestlers, wrestling for thee, O Emperor, to win for thee the victory and from thee, the victor's crown."

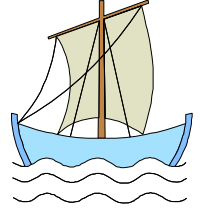
When the great Roman army was sent to fight in Gaul, no soldiers were braver or more loyal than this band of wrestlers led by their centurion Vespasian. But news reached Nero that many Roman soldiers had accepted the Christian faith. Therefore, this decree was dispatched to the centurion Vespasian; "If there be any among your soldiers who cling to the faith of the Christian, they must die!" The decree was received in the dead of winter. The soldiers were camped on the shore of a frozen inland lake. It was with sinking heart that Vespasian, the centurion, read the emperor's message. Vespasian called the soldiers together and asked: "Are there any among you who cling to the faith of the Christian? If so, let him step forward!" Forty wrestlers instantly stepped forward two paces, respectfully saluted, and stood at attention. Vespasian paused. He had not expected so many, nor such select ones. "Until sundown I shall await your answer," said Vespasian. Sundown came. Again the question was asked. Again the forty wrestlers stepped forward.

Vespasian pleaded with them long and earnestly without prevailing upon a single man to deny his Lord. Finally he said, "The decree of the emperor must be obeyed, but I am not willing that your comrades should shed your blood. I order you to march out upon the lake of ice, and I shall leave you there to the mercy of the elements."

The forty wrestlers were stripped and then, falling into columns of four, marched toward the center of the lake of ice. As they marched they broke into the chant of the arena: "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory and from Thee, the victor's crown!" Through the night Vespasian stood by his campfire and watched. As he waited through the long night, there came to him fainter and fainter the wrestlers' song. As morning drew near one figure, overcome by exposure, crept quietly toward the fire; in the extremity of his suffering he had renounced his Lord. Faintly but clearly from the darkness came the song: "Thirty-nine wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory and from Thee, the victor's crown!" Vespasian looked at the figure drawing close to the fire. Perhaps he saw eternal light shining there toward the center of the lake. Who can say? But off came his helmet and clothing, and he sprang upon the ice, crying, "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory and from Thee, the victor's crown!"

### **3. BIRTH of the CHURCH**

## (Acts 2)



# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

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The great Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, the first to discover the magnetic meridian of the North Pole and to discover the South Pole. On one of his trips, Amundsen took a homing pigeon with him. When he had finally reached the top of the world, he opened the bird's cage and set it free. Imagine the delight of Amundsen's wife, back in Norway, when she looked up from the doorway of her home and saw the pigeon circling in the sky above. No doubt she exclaimed, "He's alive! My husband is still alive!"

So it was when Jesus ascended. He was gone, but the disciples clung to his promise to send them the Holy Spirit. What joy, then, when the dove like Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost. The disciples had with them the continual reminder that Jesus was alive and victorious at the right hand of the Father. This continues to be the Spirit's message to us today as we continue Jesus' work.

It was Sunday, May 24, 33 AD, the **DAY OF PENTECOST (1-13)**. 'Pentecost' means 'fiftieth' for it was 50 days from the Feast of Firstfruits (7 weeks of 7 days = 49 days, Pentecost was the following day). It is similar to our Thanksgiving celebration, for it thanked God for the full fall harvest.

On that day the disciples were, as was usual for them, meeting in the temple courts. That was the only place large enough for all of them to gather – they didn't have access to any room that would hold 70+ people! The temple was available and used for such purposes. Rabbi's would gather there with their followers to teach them.

All of a sudden God's Holy Spirit came, as promised. The Holy Spirit wasn't visible, but there was plenty of evidence of His coming. **Audible** evidence was a sound like a hurricane. **Visible** evidence was tongues like fire on each believer. **Oral** evidence was the ability to speak in other known languages, which they hadn't previously known. This enabled them to witness in the languages of those who were watching, telling them what was happening and passing on the message of Jesus. Bewilderment (5-6), amazement (7, 12), curiosity (8-11) and denial (13) marked the responses of the people. In response to the mocking charge that they were just drunk, Peter took up their defense. He gave a tremendous sermon, a real world-changing message.

**PETER'S FIRST SERMON (14-41)** Normally a preacher's first sermon isn't his best – ask anyone who preaches. That wasn't the case for Peter. He was God's messenger bringing God's message. With an audience of perhaps 200,000, he told them about Jesus. He already had their attention because of their interest in how everyone could be speaking languages they didn't know.

Peter, who knew his Bible well as all good Jews did, immediately turned to Joel 2 to form his explanation of what was happening. These verses spoke of people in the Millennium speaking as the disciples then were, all from God's Spirit. What they were seeing that Day of Pentecost was just a prefulfillment of it. If God can do that in the Millennium, why couldn't He be giving a little taste of it right then? He's not saying the Millennial Kingdom has begun, Peter is just making the point that God can do this kind of thing. Drunkenness isn't the only explanation.

Actually much of what is prophesied in Joel 2 wasn't fulfilled on Pentecost ("sun to darkness, moon to blood," etc.) This passage really won't find its fulfillment until the end of the Tribulation and the Millennium.

Now that he has defended their speaking in unknown languages, Peter turns their attention to what was really happening there. It had to do with Jesus. Peter quickly summarizes Jesus' incarnation (22a), life (22b) and death (23). Then he focuses on the resurrection (24-32). Again he quotes the Old Testament to help support and prove his point.



Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11 which obviously refers to the resurrection of someone. It couldn't have been David, for his tomb was in Jerusalem as everyone knew. Therefore David must have been writing about someone else – the Messiah. Peter leads them to this conclusion.

Having supported his claim to Jesus' resurrection, Peter then continues his story with the ascension (33-35), sending of the Holy Spirit (37b) and exaltation in heaven (36). Again he quotes a prophecy by David (Psalm 110:1) to support Jesus' ascension. David didn't fulfill it, so who but the Messiah would? This, too, helps support Peter's defense of what is happening: they aren't drunk, it's caused by God's Spirit. Jesus, who ascended to Heaven, sent the Holy Spirit as promised.

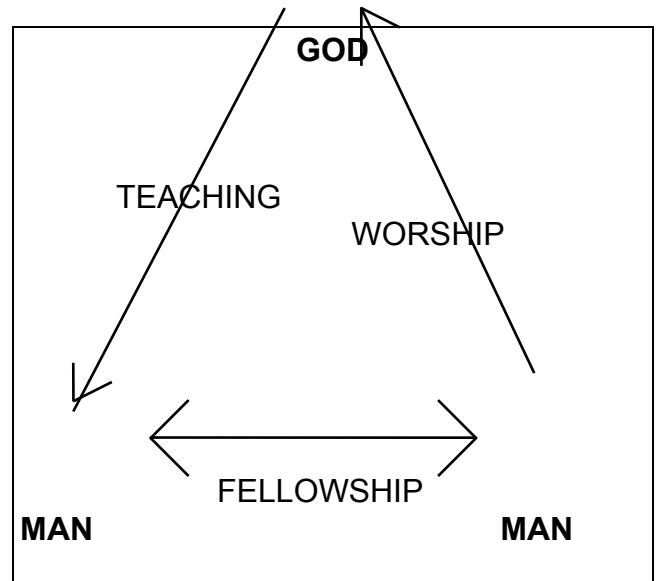
God's Spirit, Who had indeed come, convicted the listeners of the truth of Peter's words. Sensing this, Peter applied his message to them. Changing from 2 person to third, from plural to singular, and from active to passive, he gives them two distinct requirements. First they must repent (v. 38). This means to do a U-turn in their minds. From legalism and law they must turn to salvation by grace. Then, after they accept this free gift of salvation, they were to commit their daily lives to Him in discipleship as shown by baptism. This same Holy Spirit would fill them, too.

About 3,000 people responded to Peter's message by accepting Jesus as their Savior and making Him Lord by baptism (v. 41).

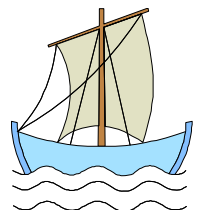
**JERUSALEM'S FIRST CHURCH (42-47)** What a day! In the morning 120 were filled with the Holy Spirit and in the afternoon another 3000 were baptized into Body of Christ. But what were they to do? There was no church to join, no leaders who had been through this before, no one with any experience, and no written New Testament. What they did was pattern their new church after what they were used to – the synagogue.

Teaching (God to man), worship (man to God) and fellowship (man to man) are the three ingredients necessary in any body of believers. There must be a balance between all three. Reaching outward is also necessary - evangelism. Thus these four activities are all essential: Word, worship, warmth and witness. Churches grow warmer through fellowship, deeper through teaching, stronger through worship and larger through evangelism.

It is God's Holy Spirit that empowers and works through all these. Most homes are connected to a water main. This supplies the house with adequate water for normal life. But suppose a fire breaks out. Then firemen tap a nearby hydrant to secure a much greater flow of water to meet the emergency. To be "full" of the Spirit is like a house supplied continuously with adequate water. But to be "filled" on occasion, as the apostles were in Acts 4:31, is to be given extra energy and power for special service. "And when they had prayed, -- they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). For the special task of persisting in evangelism, even when the religious leadership violently opposed them, the apostles needed a special filling of God's power. They had been "full of the Spirit" all along. Now they needed "extra filling" to meet the extra demands on them.



## **4. 'RELIGION' or JESUS (Acts 3)**





It's often been said that there is a big difference between religion and Christianity. Religion is works-based, man reaching up to God by his own works, traditions and rituals. True Christianity isn't like that. It's a relationship. God is the initiator, not man. He reaches down to man by grace, offering salvation which is free for man but paid for by Christ. The Jews in Jesus' day had a full-blown case of religion. Jesus came to reintroduce the relationship part – Christianity. Unfortunately they didn't respond. They rejected and crucified Him. Now his followers are offering the same free salvation in Jesus. If you've ever tried witnessing to someone who is 'religious' you know how hard that is. It's like having an inoculation. You get a bit of the bug and that keeps you from getting the real thing! That's how it is with religion. Still, God can break through those walls. He did in the summer of 33 AD in the temple in Jerusalem. Let's see how He did it so we can better know how to witness to religious people.

# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

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**1. Keep your own personal relationship with God strong through daily devotions (1-2).** Peter and John were opposites in many ways, that's what made their friendship so unusual. Older & larger Peter was an outgoing extrovert who liked to be around people and didn't have natural self discipline. Young and smaller John was an introvert who tended to be overly sensitive and become moody and depressed. What they both needed, and had, was a strong pattern of spending time with God in personal devotions each day. That's what they had. Daily they went to the temple to participate in the worship there. They didn't see themselves as too good for or above the temple worship. God used this to change them, He also used it to bring them in contact with a crippled man.

Now the temple was full of cripples. Poor sanitation and hygiene led to many birth defects among the people. They couldn't earn a living and there was no government program to support them, so they had to be carried to the temple to lay and beg for money all day. Hundreds were there each day, but only one was chosen for healing. Why this one? Was there something about his faith in God or his openness to the gospel of Jesus? Or did God simply elect him out of the many?

**2. Be sensitive to those God puts in your path (3).** Peter and John must have been asked for money over and over each day. It became natural to just ignore such requests for they couldn't all be met. Peter was sensitive to their needs, not hard and callous to them. He was also sensitive to God's leading in his life, and he sensed (and obeyed) the Spirit telling him to do something different with this man.

**3. Be flexible, change your schedule when God sends an interruption (4-5).** Instead of walking past and continuing on his way inside to worship, Peter paused to minister to the man. He never will make it in to the temple that morning, but that is OK this day for He has other plans for Peter's day, plans Peter never imagined. How flexible are you when God sends interruptions and tells you to meet the needs of another before your own? Often God chooses warmth and love to break through the cold, hard exterior of religiosity.

**4. Let God do something to get the people's attention (6-11).** When the man asks for money Peter honestly tells him he doesn't have any, but he can give him something much better. In Jesus' name, so Jesus gets the credit and not Peter, he tells the man to walk. Immediately a miracle occurs and the man is healed. His legs are healed from whatever deformity he had. They grew strong and

the muscles developed, plus he could walk without trial and error – he had balance and coordination. When God does a miracle, He does it right!

**5. When He does get their attention, be quick to speak for Christ or the change will be gone (12a)** Naturally, the people who were nearby noticed what was happening, and others stopped and looked as the ex-cripple jumped and shouted his praise to God. As they moved into the temple court the went to Solomon's Colonnade, where groups gathered to hear the rabbis teach. Peter seized this opportunity as an occasion to speak for Jesus. If he wouldn't have been alert it would have passed. We, too, must be alert to the opportunities God gives us to speak for Him and to use them before they are gone. When they are gone, they don't return!

**6. Don't feel superior to those who don't know Jesus (12b).** Right off Peter makes sure they know the man wasn't healed by his power. He doesn't want to take any glory from God. He is truly humble. As nice as it is to get attention and credit for what happens, it is more important to make sure God gets the attention and credit. Don't steal God's glory!

**7. Keep the focus of your comments on Jesus (13a).** Right away Peter makes it clear that it is Jesus who gets the credit for this. He calls Him "God's servant Jesus" (13), "the Holy and Righteous One" (14), and "the Author of Life" (15). Jesus must always be our focus, all we say and do must give credit to Him.

**8. Point out how 'religion' fails to meet man's inner need for a relationship with God (13b-14).** Peter doesn't hesitate to point out their sin and failure. He clearly says they rejected and crucified Jesus. Their self-centered system of pride and works failed, for it rejected God Himself, the One they claimed to serve. We, too, need to show people how and where their religious systems fail. They don't have inner peace, joy, assurance of forgiveness and a new meaning and purpose in life.

**9. Tell them that only Jesus satisfies (15-17).** Only Jesus can bring what we need, never our own religious works. Peter says that, although they rejected and killed Jesus, God brought Him back to life. As proof of that Peter says that it was that resurrection power that healed this cripple. Therefore Jesus was greater than their religious system, for He overcame it and conquered death.

**10. Quote Scripture, don't just use your own words (18).** Even Jesus, suffering and death were part of God's plan, as Peter says the Old Testament prophets had foretold. He backs up what he says with Scripture, as he did in his sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

**11. Challenge them to repent and ask for God's grace (19-24).** It's not too late, though, Peter tells them. They can right now repent and turn to God from their man-made system. Then they will have salvation and, who knows, Peter says, maybe Jesus will return as the Messiah to set up the kingdom He offered them?

**12. Encourage them by using examples of godly people from the past (25-26).** Peter concludes by reminding them of their rich heritage from Abraham, a man who had a deep personal relationship with God. He doesn't scold them but encourages them to follow Jesus.

**13. Accept rejection as part of witnessing for Jesus, don't take it personally (Acts 4:1)** While many probably will accept Peter's words, the immediate result is persecution and rejection by the same religious rulers who rejected Jesus. Acts 4 tells that story. Don't let the rejection and persecution of a few keep you from spreading Jesus' message whenever you can.

## **5. HANDLING PERSECUTION (Acts 4)**

Standing up and speaking for Jesus often carries a cost. Peter and John will go through this over and over. In the summer of 33 AD they first experienced this. Oh they had had some of it while with Jesus, but now they were on their own and had to face it directly. What they did sets a pattern for us to follow when we get persecuted for speaking about Jesus.

**1. Be submissive (1-7)** The healing of the cripple had given Peter an opportunity to speak for Jesus (Acts 3). This brought opposition from the hard-core religionists – the religious leaders. They sent their temple guards to roughly grab Peter and John and throw them into prison.

After keeping them in prison overnight to intimidate them, the religious rulers (the same men who had condemned Jesus to crucifixion) challenged them as to how this miracle was done.

Note that 'religion' intimidates those who challenge it. It is built on works and tradition and persecutes those who oppose it.

**2. Be filled with the Holy Spirit (8a)** The last time Peter was challenged as to Jesus, he lied and fled from a servant girl of Caiaphas'. Now he stands before Caiaphas, Annas and the others and clearly stands up for Jesus. What made the difference? Peter knew he couldn't do it on his own strength, he needed to have God's Spirit within him. Without the filling of God Spirit we, too, are unable to stand up to persecution, opposition and rejection.

**3. Be bold, use opportunities (8-18)** Filled with the Spirit, Peter clearly spoke to them of Jesus. That wasn't the name they wanted to hear. They gave Jesus the credit for the healing of the crippled man. He continues to quote Scripture to support what he says (Psalm 118:22). He challenges them to turn to Jesus for salvation.

God used their courage and stand to speak to the religious rulers. Note the verbs in verse 13. They "saw," "realized," "were astonished," and "took note that these men had been with Jesus." What could they say – there was the ex-crippled man standing right there, healed and whole! All they could do was to threaten the disciples to no longer speak about Jesus. The religious rulers were more concerned about their power and prestige, not about obeying God. They knew the truth, as they did about the crucifixion. The Roman soldiers had given them the truth about the resurrection, but they chose to cover it up. Their pride was great.

**4. Be obedient to God at all costs (19-22)** However the disciples made it clear they would obey God and not man. There wasn't much the religious rulers could do, for to punish them would not be well accepted by the people since they all knew the man and it was clear he had been healed. Despite the threats the disciples continued to speak about Jesus.

**5. Bind yourself to others for fellowship and support (23-24a)** The first thing that Peter and John did upon being released was to go back to the other believers. Persecution brings people closer together. As believers we need each other for fellowship and support. Having close contact with other believers is necessary in so many areas, and helping us stand up to persecution is one of them. One of the reasons cult members can withstand the rejection and criticism they face is because they have a strong support system. As Christians, we need to stick together, especially as persecution increases and the Second Coming draws closer.



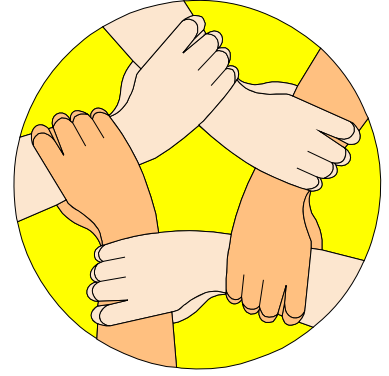
# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

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**6. Bless, praise and thank God throughout it all (24b-28)** Recognizing God as sovereign, they saw all things as coming from His hand, whether seemingly good or seemingly bad. Psalm 2:1-2 is quoted to show God knew and had it all planned all along.



**7. Ask God for greater boldness (29-31)** What is most impressive is that the early believers didn't pray for removal of the persecution but for courage to face it. That should be our desire, too. God answered their prayer by filling them with His Holy Spirit. That is how God provides courage for us today, too.

**8. Watch God work despite (or because of) persecution (32-37)** Despite the persecution, many continued to believe. There were about 5,000 men (15,000 + total people) in the church at this time (v. 4). Man can incarcerate the messengers, but not the message. Persecution just makes the church grow. It's like pouring gasoline on a fire to put it out.

Many in our day and time face great persecution, too. It's been said that there is more persecution going on today than in all the previous centuries combined.

An African pastor was overwhelmed by rebels who demanded that he renounce his faith. He refused. The night before they took his life, he wrote the following lines on a scrap of paper:

"I am part of the 'Fellowship of the Unashamed.' I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I've stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tame visions, mundane talking, chintzy giving, and dwarfed goals!

"I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by presence, lean by faith, love by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by power.

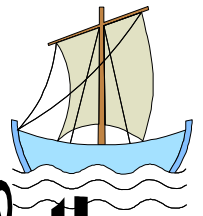
"My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my Guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, diluted, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

"I won't give up, shut up, let up, or burn up till I've preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up, and stayed up for the cause of Christ.

"I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops. And when He comes to get His own, He'll have no problems recognizing me. My colors will be clear.

"Lord, develop in me the perseverance and faithfulness to pursue Your goal for my life even in the face of rejection."

## **6. GOD HATES HYPOCRISY (Acts 5)**



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One of Satan's more successful activities is to tempt believers to sin through pride. He encourages us to compare ourselves to others, to play a subtle form of 'spiritual king of the mountain.' Pride, self-centeredness and greed are basic values of Satan's which led to his rebellion and fall. He uses them to feed our rebellion and bring about our fall as well. That is nothing new. It's always been that way. It started with Adam and Eve. It can be clearly seen in the early church, too.

In Acts 4:32-37 we find that believers with resources were using those things for the benefit of those who were without. Barnabas even went so far as to sell a field and gave the money to be used for poorer believers. Now that must have really caused people to think highly of Barnabas, although that wasn't why he did it. Still, Satan used it to tap into the pride and self-centeredness that is a natural part of all of us.

**THE HYPOCRITICAL ACT (1-4)** Ananias ("God is gracious") and his wife Sapphira ("Beautiful") were middle class believers who lived in Jerusalem. They sold a piece of property, too, and brought some of the money and gave it to the apostles to distribute to the needy. The problem was that they didn't give all the money they had received. Now there was no law that said she had to give it all. It was entirely up to them. What they did wrong was to imply, actually state, that they had given all of the money. Why would they say they did if they didn't? They wanted the same approval and popularity that Barnabas had gotten from his action.

Thus their sin wasn't in keeping some of their money, for they didn't have to give it. Their sin lay in pretending to give it all so people would be impressed with them. It was hypocrisy. Their motive was the sin, not their action. Jesus called hypocrites "whitened sepulchurs." They were whitewashed graves, pretty white on the outside but full of death and decay inside. Other word pictures to describe hypocrisy include leaven, over grown graves, a broken pot whose crack is painted over to hide it, tares, a wolf in sheep's clothing, an empty well and a hired mourner who acts sad at a funeral.

The Bible makes it clear throughout that God hates hypocrisy (Amos 5:21-24; Isaiah 1:11-18; Mark 7:6-7; Matthew 23). The Greek word translated (really transliterated) 'hypocrisy' means literally "to speak from behind a mask." It was originally used for an actor who would hold a large wax mask in front of his face while acting a part in a play. That is a good picture of a hypocrite.

Cain, Absalom, Joab and Judas are all examples of hypocrites. Their stories don't have happy endings. The story of Ananias and Sapphira doesn't have a happy ending, either.

**GOD'S JUDGMENT ON HYPOCRISY (5-11)** Everything would have gone fine for Ananias and Sapphira. No one knew they weren't giving all their money. No one but God, and He told Peter. It's called the gift of discernment, and how it works is that the Holy Spirit wordlessly tells a servant of God something they need to know but wouldn't have known any other way. Peter knew, just knew down inside, that they didn't give all the money. The Holy Spirit had convicted them of their sin but they hardened themselves against repenting and confessing (something VERY dangerous to do). As a result God struck Ananias down dead.

Ananias was a believer. He didn't lose his salvation and go to hell, but he did lose any opportunity to serve God on earth and receive rewards in heaven. He was accountable and sinned willingly and knowingly. He tried to cover up his sin. It was all based on pride, self-centeredness and greed.

God is so very fair with all of us. He gave Sapphira her own chance, so she wouldn't seem forced by Ananias. She came in later on her own, not knowing what had happened to her husband. She was also asked if this was all the money. She could have told the truth but didn't. It wasn't a matter of wifely submission, she was greedy as well. She, too, died immediately.

That brings up the question of God's standards. Why did God kill them when He doesn't kill every greedy hypocrite in the church today? Well, He should and could. It's only His mercy that keeps Him from doing so. He sets His standards at the start so we know what they are, then shows mercy. He did that when the nation Israel was forming and Nadab and Abihu used their own fire instead of God's fire in the Tabernacle (Lev 10:2). They both died. He set His standard when the Jews entered the land of Canaan and Achan in his greed and self-centeredness hid some of the spoils from Jericho (Josh 7:25). He and his whole family died. Thank God for His mercy on us today, or there wouldn't be any of us alive! Don't take advantage of God's mercy. Instead live a life of holiness for God.

**JUDGMENT RESULTS IN PURITY (11-14)** Anyway, as you can imagine, this had a profound impact on those within and those without the church! It showed the believers the need to be honest and holy. It warned unbelievers about pretending to be part of the church just to get the free food. God has always been more interested in quality than quantity.

**PURITY RESULTS IN POWER (12, 15-16)** When we live holy lives in obedience to God He will use that to work His will through us. God's greatness was seen in the early church. God did miracles through them to show He was behind all they did. Today God uses changed lives – our changed lives. Through us He shows others that He is behind it all. They had power over Satan's forces as well. God's power was active and everything got stirred up.

**POWER RESULTS IN PERSECUTION (17-28)** Satan's forces also got stirred up and in turn stirred up the religious rulers against the disciples. He incites the religious rulers to have Peter and John arrested. But God's power is greater and He sends an angel to release them. Then God does one of those strange things that He so often does – He sends them right back where they were when they got arrested! Instead of getting them out of town or having them hang low for awhile, He puts them right back in the temple preaching. Sure enough, they get arrested again and brought before the religious rulers who again threatened them and tried to intimidate them.

**PERSECUTION RESULTS IN PERSISTENCE (29-41)** Persecution has refined and strengthened Peter and John, however, and again they stand without giving in. They preached about Jesus, which so angered the religious rulers that they wanted to kill them then and there. Gamaliel brought reason to the group by saying that if they were not from God then He would bring about their demise, but if they were they would be opposing Him. Let God handle it was his advice. They adopted this suggestion, but this time they had them flogged. They considered it a privilege to be scourged like Jesus was before His crucifixion, though, and persisted in faithfulness to God.

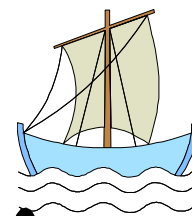
**PERSISTENCE RESULTS IN PRODUCTIVITY (42)** Instead of discouraging the early believers, this just encouraged them all the more to witness and speak of Jesus. They spoke to any who would listen about their Savior, one on one or in groups. God blessed their efforts and brought continued growth.

Hypocrisy brought judgment which brought purity which brought power which brought persecution which brought persistence which brought productivity. Where are we on that formula today? Where do we get off the path? Stay pure and God will use you for His glory!



## **7. WANTED: SERVANTS (Acts 6)**

Moses had 2 ½ million ex-slaves to lead and turn into a nation. Can you imagine the work load! He was overworked and stressed out. He was busy all day, draining himself with details. He wasn't able to do all that needed doing so the people were frustrated and complaining. What could be done? Moses' father-in-law suggested he delegate lesser chores to other competent men and focus on the major needs himself (Exodus 18:13-27). That's good prioritizing. It worked! It always does. When the early church faced a similar situation, they also followed Moses' example. It worked then, too.



# **ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH**

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**THE PROBLEM** It is the winter of 34 BC. The young church is 1 ½ years old. They have grown from 70 to 30,000 strong. They were all new believers. There were no established churches, grounded leaders, written books, or even a New Testament to turn to. They had 12 average men to lead this whole movement! Under perfect circumstances it might have worked. But when are circumstances ever perfect?

Remember, when a Jew became a Christian and showed that by being baptized in public, his or her family had a funeral. They buried all that had that belonged to him and never talked about or to them no matter what. Passing on the street, they would stare straight through them. For a Jew this excommunication was severe. Family and Jewish ties meant everything to them. They lost family, friends, loved ones, culture and traditions. They also lost their jobs, income and inheritance. Who could these new believers turn to but each other? Because of this those who had money or property contributed it for the welfare of those who had nothing (Acts 4:33-35). Barnabas was one such man (Acts 4:36-37). Ananias and Sapphira pretended to do the same thing for the glory (Acts 5). Because of their deceitfulness they died. Enough was contributed to meet the needs of thousands of needy new believers. Collecting it was one thing. Distributing it fairly was something else. That turned out to be quite a major job!

What made that all the worse was that there were actually two groups of Jews in the early church. Hebraic Jews were those who spoke Hebrew and were natives of Jerusalem. They were of the same stock as the Apostles, were networked, and knew their way around. If all the Jews in the early church would have been of this group there wouldn't have been a problem. Many Jews, though, grew up in the Greek culture and Greek was their native language. These were the Grecian Jews. They moved to Jerusalem for business, or were visiting on a Feast Day and accepted Jesus as Messiah so they stayed to learn more and grow. Whatever the case, they weren't able to communicate their needs as well, weren't known as well and weren't part of the local group. Thus they tended to be overlooked. They didn't think this was fair, and they started complaining about it. If this was the way they as Christians should have responded or not isn't the issue here. The Apostles knew something needed to be done. But what?

**THE SOLUTION** The Apostles know there was more of a problem than just some widows being left out. As it was they were so busy distributing food they weren't able to spend the time in prayer and Bible study and teaching that they wanted to. It was throwing their priorities off. So it wasn't a matter of them putting in more time in the food distribution area. There had to be better answer, and there was! It was 'delegation of responsibility'.

The solution was really very simple: assign others to take care of the food! Why didn't they think of that earlier?



Of course it couldn't be just any men. If it wasn't the right men the situation would just get worse, not better. They needed men (not women - I Tim 2:11-15) who were believers ("brothers") and who were committed to their body of believers ("among you"). They had to have a good reputation ("honest report") and be full of the Holy Spirit as well as full of wisdom.

Their ministry was to be one of "waiting on tables." The same Greek word root is used for "distribution" (v. 1), "wait on tables" (v. 2) and "ministry" (v. 4). The Greek word used is 'diakonia,' and is the word also translated (really transliterated) 'deacon' in the Bible. "Deacon" and "minister" both come from the root word that means "to wait on tables," for they are jobs of serving others. This is the main trait the Apostles looked for in men to help them, men who would be called 'deacons.'

The men chosen were all Greeks (Acts 6:5-6). This way there could be no mistake as to the Grecian widows being understood and cared for. Doing this kept unity in the early church. Satan does all he can to cause divisions and splits in a group, and had he been successful here it could have really slowed the spread of the church. There would have been competition and difficulties from then on.

**THE RESULT** With this roadblock gone the church experienced another growth spurt (v. 7). Even many of the priests put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

Another result was the emergence of Stephen as a leading force in the early church. A leading speaker and apologist, he didn't mind being given a job that seemed menial and difficult. He was willing to serve any way he could. God still used him to evangelize, though (v. 8). God even did miracles through him, as a way of showing those listening that he had God's power. Without these "great wonders and miraculous signs" no one could tell a man of God from a false prophet. Today we can look at a man's life, his 'fruit', to see if he has God's power or not. Then there wasn't time for the people to wait years to see changed lives. There were counterfeits everywhere right then. Something needed to be done right away.

**THE OPPOSITION** Whenever God works, Satan opposes. Actually this was Paul's home synagogue (v. 9) and they tried to win debates against Stephen. Probably Paul himself (still called Saul then) trying arguing with Stephen – and lost. (Later Paul will use the same approach and outline that Stephen used. Although he will silence Stephen, God will use him to replace Stephen.)

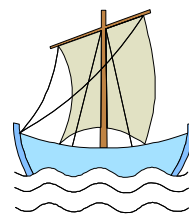
Since they couldn't silence Stephen any other way, they bribed men to say he blasphemed (it worked with Jesus, why not try it again now? Perhaps Stephen had said that man could worship God anywhere, he didn't have to only be in the temple to do so (v. 11).

**THE OPPRESSION** Everyone got stirred up against Stephen (v. 12). Obviously the religious rulers who refused to believe were just looking for an excuse to attack Christians. It was really Jesus they were opposed to (v. 14). Since Satan can't get at God Himself he is left at taking out his hate and anger on God's people. It is really a battle of light versus darkness, of Satan's kingdom versus God's kingdom.

Stephen was violently and cruelly seized (v. 12 in the Greek). The chapter ends with Stephen in the Sanhedrin, threatened with beating and death. Still, God gives him perfect peace. God's presence and glory was even visible in his face (v. 15). The next chapter then summarizes Stephen's defense of his preaching that Jesus is the promised Messiah (Acts 7).

Today, too, God is looking for those who have servant hearts to step in and help take the load from overworked leaders so they can focus on what is their top priority. Are you willing to do 'deacon' work, to 'wait on tables,' to serve in any menial way that is needed? Such people are invaluable to any church, family or group. There are never too many of them!

## 8. STEPHEN'S GRAVE (Acts 7)



# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

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Trying to defend ones self can be difficult as well as frustrating. I'm sure we've all had times when we've been misunderstood or falsely accused of something. We assume that as soon as we present the true facts everything will be all right. For some reason, though, the more we try to straighten things out the more knotted they become. Eventually we realize we'd have been better off not trying to defend ourselves. Nothing we say makes anything better anyway. It can be disconcerting to say the least!

**THE CHARGE: BLASPHEMY (7:1)** That's exactly what Stephen faced when falsely accused of blaspheming against God. For the past two years the early church was steadily increasing and sharing their faith in their risen Savior. Perhaps the top theologian and most successful debater and apologist among the early Christians was Stephen. By saying Jesus was God, Stephen opened himself up to the charge of blaspheming against God. He held his ground when challenged, even out debating those who challenged him (which included Saul of Tarsus). Since they couldn't out-argue him, they decided to silence him another way – kill him! So they arrested him and brought him before the Sanhedrin to be tried for blasphemy. Out of all those who were preaching, only God knows why Stephen was the one chosen to be charged and condemned. It was part of God's perfect plan.

**THE DEFENSE: JEWISH REJECTION OF GOD'S MESSENGERS (7:2-53)** Stephen doesn't try to explain what he said or meant. He knew that was a dead-end street. He knew that gossip and false accusations can't be tracked down and unraveled. It just won't happen.

Neither did Stephen try to prove Jesus was the Messiah, God Himself come to earth. If Jesus really was god then Stephen wasn't guilty of blasphemy at all, but of speaking the truth. Why didn't he try to prove Jesus was God? He knew it was useless. The religious rulers had more proof than anyone, starting with a firsthand report of the resurrection by the Roman soldiers. They knew it was true so they bribed the soldiers to lie about what really happened. They saw lame people healed. They knew of many of their own numbers who became believers in Jesus and left the priesthood to follow Him. They heard it all, over and over. There was no use telling them again. The problem wasn't ignorance, it was a hard, stubborn heart. They refused to humble themselves and yield to the truth. As God has often said, they were a "stiff-necked and stubborn people." This was what Stephen pointed out to them. His 'defense' was that they had a history of rejecting God's prophets, as they were doing with Stephen. It was a gutsy approach, not one calculated to get the charges against him dropped. It did make them all the more accountable and responsible for their actions, though.

What Stephen did was review Jewish history, something they already clearly knew. He wasn't teaching them history, but picking out certain events to show a pattern. They had wrongly rejected those whom God had sent before. In fact, they did this to each messenger God sent. Perhaps by seeing this pattern in their past they would stop it now and no longer reject Jesus or His messenger, Stephen. It was an argument geared to appeal to their mind, but they were going by their emotions. Jealousy, pride, anger and self-centeredness so controlled them that there was no room for rational, objective decision-making.

Stephen used the examples of Joseph and his brothers (v. 9-16) as well as Moses (twice: 17-38; 39-43) to show how the Jews had consistently rejected God's messengers. He quickly developed

this from history, supporting it with quotes from the prophets. Seeing his listeners were getting the point and were about to cut him off, Stephen hit home: "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him- you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it (7:51-53)."

**THE VERDICT: GUILTY AS CHARGED** (7:54-56) The religious rulers were 'furious' when they heard this. This Greek word could also mean that they were 'cut to the heart as with a sword' like when the Spirit convicted unbelievers of their need of Jesus in Acts 2. Here, though, the response was anger at Stephen. Silence his voice and the conviction wouldn't be felt!

An interesting note to this event is that Saul, later to be called Paul, was present. In fact, he may have been in charge of the trial and stoning of Stephen. That could be the significance of the witnesses laying their clothes at his feet (7:58). He might have set the arrest up and carried it out. As the leading theologian and debater among those opposed to Jesus, he would have been paying careful attention to what Stephen said. It's quite likely that God's Spirit brought all this to Saul's mind during those days when he sat blind after meeting the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. In fact, Paul himself used this same line of reasoning in Pisidia (Acts 13). He went on and completed what Stephen was unable to finish. God, in effect, used Stephen's death to bring about Paul's salvation. Paul actually became Stephen's replacement – the leading theologian and apologist of the early church.

**THE SENTENCE: DEATH BY STONING** (7:57 - 8:1) Stephen was filled with God's Spirit to help him through this difficult time. He looked up (not down) and, in what could be called a near-death experience, saw Jesus standing at God's right hand in heaven! Usually Jesus is seen sitting in heaven, a sign of His work being finished. Now, though, He is standing as if to help Stephen. God always provides dying grace for His people. When He calls on us to die, He is there is a special way to encourage and support us. Stephen was, in some ways, already in heaven! There was no fear for him, only God's magnificent peace. Imagine seeing Jesus in heaven about to help you!

When Stephen told those who were there what he saw, though, they only increased their charges of blasphemy. They "rushed at" Stephen. The same Greek word that is used here is used of the demon-possessed pigs rushing over the cliff into the water. The similarity is obvious.

Stoning was the official method of capital punishment used by the Jews. The victim would be pushed off a cliff used for this purpose, which was located right outside town. The law required there be two witnesses to affirm the guilt of an individual. These would be the first to drop rocks on the victim where he had fallen below. Others then would also drop rocks. It was a relatively quick and pain-free death, especially compared to crucifixion.

As he was dying Stephen prayed for those who were Killing him. Like Jesus, he asked God to not hold this sin against them. Then he fell asleep -- a beautiful word picture for death. Immediately his spirit and soul went to heaven while his body remained on earth. One day his body will be resurrected and transformed into an eternal body, replacing the temporary body God gives all those who die (see I Corinthians 15 for more information about this).

Why God chose to have Stephen, who was an excellent Christian man, die young as a martyr while allowing Peter, who denied him, have the privilege of living and leading thousands to salvation, only God knows. When we make ourselves available to be used by God in whatever way He chooses, we know that whatever He chooses for us is right and best (Rom. 8:28). Do you trust Him with your life and your death? You aren't ready to live until you are ready to die!

## **9. PHILIP PREACHING (Acts 8)**

Why is it that persecuting God's Church is like pouring gasoline on a fire to put it out? What causes believers to grow stronger under opposition? That has been true from the beginning and is also evident round the world today. The purpose of oppression is to cause believers to quit, and some do. However as a whole outside pressure strengthens, not weakens the church. Why?

I think the reason is because God's people then must turn to and depend on God in a way they wouldn't have had to otherwise. They are more receptive to His power working through them. They turn more completely to Him and need His more. Also, difficulties in this life cause a person to focus on what really matters. It helps one view eternal things as more important than daily, material objects. It gives a more realistic perspective of what is truly important in life. As others see this some of them are then attracted to God and want this same reality in their lives. Thus individuals grow and the church grows. That's always the way it has been, and the way it still is.



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**EARLY CHURCH PERSECUTION** The early church is a perfect example of this. "On that day (when Stephen was killed, Acts 7) a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:1,4) The Greek word for "scattered" is the word our word 'evangelize' comes from. It refers to sowing seeds. Thus the persecution caused believers to be scattered throughout the whole area. The purpose of the persecution was to stop the growth of the early church, instead it caused the church to grow ever more because people told about Jesus wherever they went. It's like throwing seeds all over to kill them instead of leaving them all piled up in one place. Or it can be seen as spreading a campfire throughout the woods to put it out. This helped the spread of the fire/seeds instead of stopping it.

The early Christians had been clearly told to take the gospel to the whole world and not stay in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:18). They hadn't done that, so God allows this to spread them and their message everywhere. Satan would have been better off to allow them to stay in Jerusalem keeping the good news to themselves. Instead the word spread everywhere. I guess he learned from that, for how many of us and our churches are guilty of keeping the wonderful news about Jesus to ourselves instead of scattering and spreading it? What will God need to do to spread His word today?

"All things work together for the good of those who love Jesus, who have been called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). That is true of persecution and opposition as well. God used Satan's attempt to destroy the church for His benefit. The church grew in quality (as individuals grew closer to God) and quantity (as they then spread the Gospel to those around them).

**EARLY CHURCH PERSECUTOR** Paul was God's instrument of persecution (8:3). As a wild animal, he ravaged the church in Jerusalem, tearing it apart in a frenzy (this is what the Greek word for "destroy" means). We must remember that his motive was right – to serve God. His action, however, was very wrong. God would soon reveal Himself to Paul, who will then say he had been "acting in ignorance" (I Timothy 1:13). It was the biggest regret of Paul's life.

**EARLY CHURCH PROTECTOR** The story now focuses on one of those who were scattered. Philip, one of the deacons ordained along with Stephen, went to Samaria and spread the Gospel

there (8:5). Because of the faithful witness of the woman at the well (John 4) 5 years before, there was a great response. God authenticated His message of spiritual healing by doing physical healings (8:6-7). This was God's way of showing He was behind the speaker. Today he uses the testimony of our changed lives to authenticate His words, but there wasn't time to wait for years as the church slowly spread.

Of all the people who responded, the story of one man, a man named Simon, is recorded in the Bible. He had used Satan's power to do things to impress others. He loved the attention of the people and the power he held over them. When he heard the gospel he responded and accepted Jesus as his Savior (8:13). Peter, who had the gift of discernment (Acts 5; 8:20-22), baptized him as a believer. The Bible clearly says that he was a believer (8:13) and Peter knew he was a believer or he wouldn't have baptized him. However his fleshly attachment to self-glorification and his pride caused him to want to have God's power for selfish reasons. He wanted the Holy Spirit's power (v. 19) for the wrong reason. While Paul did the wrong thing for the right reason (persecuting the church because he thought it was opposed to God), Simon did the right thing (wanting the Spirit's power) for the wrong reason (his own pride). God looks at our motives, not just our actions (1 Cor 3:11-15; Mt 7:22-23; Rom 7:6; Heb 4:12; Mt 6:1-4; widow with 2 mites, Cain and Able, etc.).

Jealousy and pride kept him from being used by God (8:21-23). He was a believer who was acting in the flesh, concerned with his own glory more than God's glory. Aren't we all guilty of that at times, too? To his credit, he repented when challenged with this (v. 24). His salvation wasn't in jeopardy, but his earthly usefulness was ("You shall have no share in this ministry" [21], but his salvation was intact).

Check your own motives. Make sure you aren't using spiritual gifts to impress others!

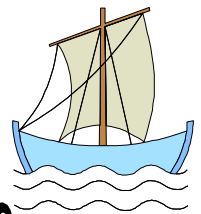
**EARLY CHURCH** Another example of the church growth that resulted from Paul's persecution is seen in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-39). God sent the evangelist, Philip, from the midst of a great revival in Samaria to go to speak to one man on the opposite side of Jerusalem (v. 26). This one man, however, was important to God. It wasn't just because he could and would influence his whole nation for Jesus, it was mainly because he was seeking and God always reaches out to and meets any soul that is seeking for Him.

The Ethiopian had been reading Isaiah 53 but didn't understand it, so Philip used that as an opportunity to witness to him. Of course he used the Old Testament, for there was no New Testament yet. We, too, can use the **Old Testament to present the gospel** to those who only accept it and not the New (especially Jews). We can show them that the heart is wicked (Jer 17:9 - worse than pork). We cannot earn our salvation, for all our righteousness' are like filthy rags (Isa 64:6). Our sin separates us from God (Isa 59:1-2) and we need someone sinless to intercede for us (Lev. 17:11). This perfect One had to be sacrificed (Isa 53:1-12) to pay for our sins so we could be reunited with God. The One to do this was the coming Messiah (Dan 9:29). He would suffer and die for sin (Psalm 22 - description of crucifixion). Salvation is provided by the Messiah, but we must put our faith in Him, believe and receive His free gift (Gen 15:6) for it to be ours.

Because he was a eunuch, the Ethiopian wasn't able to be baptized into Judaism, but he understood what Philip said about Jesus. He accepted that free gift and then wanted to be baptized as a Christian, so Philip did so. Immediately Philip was taken away, and the Ethiopian continued on his way home to spread the good news in court of Candace the queen.

Thus we see how God used the worst (Stephen's death) for the best (spread of Christianity everywhere). Romans 8:28 wasn't even written yet, but it was already happening. God used that to spread the early Christians and therefore the Gospel. Let's make sure we spread the word where we are, not keep it in our family or church. Like Philip, faithfully tell others about Jesus!

# 10. PAUL PERCEIVING (Acts 9)



## ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

From Pentecost to Revelation  
By Jerry Schroyer Copyright © 1999

Paul was one of those people who does everything 100%, whether he was opposing or supporting the church. He never did anything half way.

**ANCESTRY** Paul was his Latin (Roman) name and Saul his Jewish name, which was used at home. His great-grandfather, from the tribe Benjamin, left Giscala in Galilee to move to Tarsus.

**HOME TOWN** Tarsus was a prosperous, self-governing city-state of ½ million people. It was a leading center of finances and education. It was a very worldly city for a Jew to grow up in.

**PARENTS** Paul's father was a wealthy Pharisee. He made tents from the long black wool of local sheep. He was also a burgess of Tarsus and a Roman citizen, which was a proud privilege for anyone.

Not much is known about Paul's mother. Perhaps she was sickly, maybe having died when his sister was born. Somehow his sister ended up in Jerusalem, if could have been she was raised by relatives there when her mother died.

**EDUCATION** Paul was mainly home educated. In the synagogue he was taught Hebrew. By 13 he would have mastered Jewish history, poetry and prophets. He had an excellent mind and marvelous memory.

**LANGUAGE** Paul, as most everyone in his day, was multilingual. He knew Greek from infancy, it was the main language of the day. Aramaic was the common language Jews used in their homes. Hebrew was the scholarly language boys learned to study the Bible. He also had a good working knowledge of Latin.

**CAREER** Tent making was a humble occupation, but the Jews believed that all boys should learn a craft and know what it is to work. Tents were common and were used by caravans, nomads and armies. Paul would have spent many hours weaving cloth, pushing the shuttle back and forth. This would have left his mind free to think. His mind probably focused on God and Jewish beliefs.

**FAITH** While he lived in Tarsus, he didn't feel at home there. Baal worship, immorality, and persecution of those who worshipped God would have turned his heart to the land of his ancestors.

**HOME LIFE** Paul's home seemed to have been a haven of piety with obedience to God emphasized. Perhaps there was a stern over-emphasis on external conformity.

**GROWING UP** Paul went through mar mitzva at 13 which is probably when he took his first trip to Jerusalem. He would have gone with his father and other men who were making the trip for various spiritual and/or business reasons. This was not only a special time religiously, but Paul got to see his sister.

Some time later Paul returned for training and study with the famous Rabbi Gamaliel. Jesus had spent time with him when He went to the temple for His Bar Mitzvah several years earlier. Paul's training would have been long and hard. He would have to master not only the Hebrew Scriptures but also Jewish interpretations and commentaries on them: the Mishna, Gemerra and the Targum. He quickly outstripped his contemporaries with his intellectual giftedness. He had a very logical mind, and excellent memory, fertile imagination and analytical reasoning. Because he always expected much of himself and others, he didn't seem to have many close friends. Many others in training were only concerned about external conformity (hypocrisy) and impressing others. Paul was always concerned about doing the right thing for the right reason. Outside he seemed to attain perfection, but inside he struggled with pride, lust and materialism.

**RETURN TO TARSUS** In his early 30's Paul returned to Tarsus and became a leader in the synagogue there, teaching the Scriptures while supporting himself by making tents. Perhaps it was in tent making that he met Barnabas.

**PHYSICAL APPEARANCE** Paul seems to have been athletic, strong and in good physical condition. Tradition says he was under 5 foot, broad shouldered, with closely knit eyebrows and a thick beard. He had a long, crooked nose. He became prematurely gray and then bald. From his conversion experience he had eye



troubles. Friends said he was ugly, enemies preferred the term 'repulsive.' His great impact on the world didn't come from his physical appearance.

**MARRIAGE** While much in Paul's life is unknown, from information in his writings, knowledge of Jewish history, and traditions, we can piece together some things about him. It seems he was married at one time and probably had a son. Perhaps both died in an epidemic which so common in those days. How that must have broken his heart and depressed him!

It may have been that, along with the events of April 14, 33 AD, that caused him to return to Jerusalem. On that day it got dark everywhere at 12 noon. At 3 PM an earthquake shook the world and the light again shone. These things were obviously supernatural. When word from Jerusalem about the strange events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth came, Paul was intrigued. Being a strict Jew, Paul would have wanted to do anything he could to stamp out this new heresy. Perhaps all the hurt and pain, the depression and emptiness came out in anger and hate to those who saw this Jesus as the Messiah. Paul ended up in Jerusalem opposing this new movement with everything he had.

**PAUL THE PERSECUTOR** Throwing himself into this new venture would help him escape the memories of his lost family as well as give him a new challenge, something to fill the empty void inside. It was a reason to keep going. He lived and worked on the street of the tentmakers in Jerusalem but spent as much time as he could with the religious rulers. He became a leading Pharisee in Jerusalem. Men that he had admired and respected, such as Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Stephen, now became his hated enemies. Paul was one of the youngest Sanhedrin members, and thus one of the most influential men in Israel. His whole future was before him.

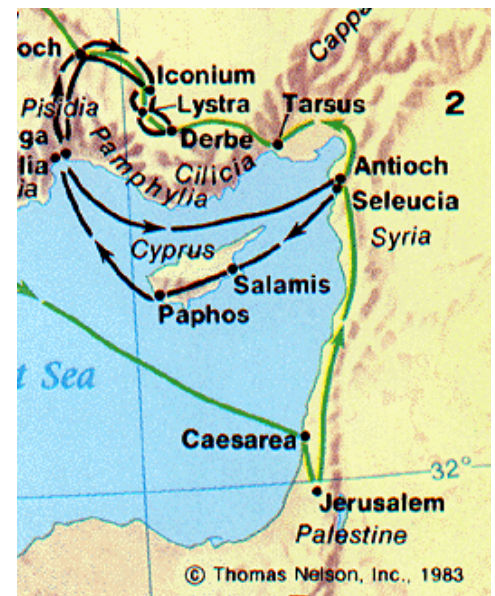
**SPIRITUAL YEARNINGS** Yet obviously Paul was empty, searching for real meaning and purpose in life. The harder he worked at being a perfect Jew the more he felt empty. Eventually he stopped striving after that elusive peace that evaded him. He felt crushed under the burden of the law and tradition, but knew of no other way to seek God. All these frustrations and fears he took out on those he saw as the enemies of Judaism. When they claimed to have the answers and the peace he was looking for he overreacted all the more against them, making it a personal battle against them.

**ONLY JESUS SATISFIES** Paul had everything the world could offer, everything one could want. He had a well-to-do, important, supportive and loving family. He had the finest education one could have in both Judaism (Hebrew) and secular (Greek) knowledge. He had a successful career as a tentmaker and also as a rabbi. He was in the Sanhedrin (the top 70 men in Israel world-wide with the power to govern in all areas of Jewish life). He was on the rise for he was still quite young. He was near perfect in his religion, exhibiting outward sinlessness. He seemed to have it all. But he was empty and searching inside. He missed the one thing that alone can satisfy – Jesus.

He had heard plenty about Jesus being the answer to his needs. His good friend Stephen told him often. At least they had been good friends from the same synagogue when Paul had been in Jerusalem before to study. Stephen was as mellow as Paul was abrasive. Stephen had the peace, and the answers that Paul sought. Paul couldn't counter Stephen's arguments proving Jesus as the Messiah. Paul grasped the full implication of it all, what it would mean to him personally and to Judaism as a whole if Jesus of Nazareth really had been the promised Messiah. It would take away the one thing Paul built his life on – Jewish law and practices. Finally, since he couldn't silence Stephen's words any other way, he used his authority as a member of the Sanhedrin to have Stephen stoned to death.

**FULL-BLOWN PERSECUTION** That didn't settle the matter for Paul, though. In fact things got worse. He attacked Christianity like a mad man. His choleric temperament, his zeal for the things of God, the pain from the loss of his wife and son, the emptiness he felt spiritually, and the jealousy he experienced towards Christians who seemed to have everything he sought, all drove him fanatically.

He would burst into homes and synagogues. He imprisoned or killed old men and women as well as children. Others were beaten and crippled. During all this, though, Paul was coming in deeper and deeper contact with the gospel. As he unfiltered their services and heard their defense at their 'trials,' he learned more





and more about this Jesus. He heard from those who were eye witnesses of Jesus miracles and who had memorized whole speeches Jesus had given. He saw that the great pain he inflicted on them didn't take away their joy. Nothing did. They had something he lacked and he hated them all the more because of it.

**CHRISTIANITY SPREADS** Finally the Christians in Jerusalem were driven out of town or so deeply underground that they couldn't be easily found. Jerusalem seemed safe from this new cult, but instead of putting it out Paul discovered he had just spread it around. Like kicking a fire apart to put it out, only to realize that each spark caught on and started a new fire where it landed, Paul realized that those who left Jerusalem were taking their message elsewhere. Not content to just purify Jerusalem, Paul wanted the belief totally eradicated everywhere. He knew that if he didn't stop it soon it would spread beyond his ability to destroy it. It was already getting a strong footing in Damascus to the north. If that was allowed to take root and grow there was no telling where this heresy would spread and what damage it would do!

**ON TO DAMASCUS** Damascus had a large Jewish population, which make it ripe for the spread of this new message. Paul got the official papers he needed, gathered Jewish soldiers (Levites) and other officials, and set out to move his headquarters to Damascus. There he end, once and for all, this blasphemy.

Damascus was a 4-day donkey trip to the north, 150 miles away. They traveled through Galilee, past the Golan Heights, then by Mt Hermon. These brought to mind the adventures of God with His people at these places. Why couldn't Paul find this victory and satisfaction in God that his ancestors seemed to find? He was filled with guilt, emptiness and no peace. He even had doubts about the eventual success of his mission, although he kept shoving them to the back of his mind every time they surfaced. He was grieved by the pain his persecution was causing so many people, but he justified it as necessary to rid Judaism of its enemies. Still, there was something about these Christians ...

**CONVERSION!** Suddenly a light greater than the sun, the Shekinah Glory itself, shown on Paul and the whole group he was traveling with. They all fell down before it. All heard a sound, but only Paul the words: "Why are you persecuting Me?" They were spoken by a Man about Paul's own age, and instantly Paul knew Who it was, even though he had never seen the Man before. To confirm his suspicions Paul asked, "Who are you?" The answer was what he expected, "I am Jesus."

In a second that seemed like an eternity Paul knew that He loved those whom he was persecuting, and He loved Paul. Immediately Paul broke in surrender. All his old theological arguments melted away. It no longer mattered what his Jewish contemporaries would think or what future in Judaism he was giving up. Stephen was right, Paul was wrong – it was that simple. Accepting that brought what Paul had been seeking his whole life, for instantly sweet peace flooded over his soul. He surrendered his life 100% to the authority of Jesus of Nazareth, the Jewish Messiah, God Himself come to earth as man. Paul had a new Master Whom he served with unswerving dedication the rest of his life.

**THE FIRST FEW DAYS OF NEW LIFE** Paul was blind for the next 3 days. In fact, his eyesight was affected for the rest of his life. It was a constant reminder of when God broke him, as Jacob's limp reminded him of a similar event in his life.

Those three days were spent without food or water, for he had no desire to eat. He was so focused, so overwhelmed with the newness of this it was all he could think about. Proud, independent, self-sufficient Paul had to be led by the hand into Damascus and cared for by others. He was no conquering hero, but a conquered prodigal. He had plenty of time to think. Stephen was a time bomb that detonated in his mind. He recalled point after point that Stephen made, word for word, and each one hit home like a sharp sword. How could he have been so blind? How could he have missed it? It was so clear, so very clear to him now. Guilt and remorse washed over him in waves, followed by grace and peace.

The words of Stephen would stay with him forever. They would become the framework, the basic structure for the words Paul himself would speak. Now Paul would be speaking Stephen's words. It was as if Stephen still lived – certainly his message lived on.

Then God sent a man named Ananias to Paul. That was quite an act of faith for Ananias who had been praying Paul wouldn't come, and if he did wouldn't find him! Through Ananias Paul received his sight and publicly showed his new faith by adult baptism (immersion).

Paul spent the next few days in Damascus and at once preached that Jesus was the Messiah in the synagogues. What a time that must have been! Some probably thought, though, that he was using this as a

truck to sneak into the church and find out who was a Christian so he could have them killed. Because of this uproar he wasn't able to stay in Damascus long, though.

**BASIC TRAINING** Paul spent the next two years in the Arabian desert, from the summer of 35 to the summer of 37 AD. He fled partly to protect his life but also to learn more about his new faith. He learned to depend on God during these years. God taught him spiritual truths and how to apply the information he already knew about the Old Testament to Christianity. He learned more, perhaps meeting with Jesus directly for instruction. He had time to think, reflect, digest and integrate this new world view into his life. He witness to and taught others he happened upon, learning to share his new faith. He had time to grow spiritually. Something similar happened to Moses in the same desert. God used this time for Paul to grow spiritually.

**APPRENTICESHIP** From the summer to the fall of 37 AD Paul spent back in Damascus for awhile, then in Jerusalem and finally in Tarsus. He started apply his new knowledge n practical situations, gaining experience teaching and preaching about Jesus.

Jerusalem was especially hard on Paul, for his conversion account wasn't believed by the Jews, who didn't trust him. Only his old friend Barnabas stood by him and encouraged the others to accept him as a brother in the faith. With the persecution now over and Paul helping spread the word, a period of peace and growth came to the church.

It seems Paul went home to Tarsus during this time, too. I wonder how his father and others there responded to this change in Paul's life? He must have really desired to see them put their faith in Jesus, but we don't know if any did or not. It seems he was scourged 5 times by the synagogue leaders, so he wasn't any quicker to quit than that were to believe. Some say this is what undermined his health and that he was bowlegged the rest of his life. A complete break from family and Judaism occurred here and now.

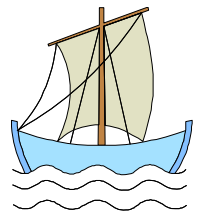
**BEGINNING MINISTRY** Then Paul went to Syria and Cilicia from the fall of 37 to spring of 43 AD – 5 ½ years. He ministered, but he learned as well. He traveled on his own as God was preparing him for the upcoming missionary journeys he would lead. He preached, planted and strengthened churches, and learned patience through suffering. He may have even experienced death and come back to life during this time (II Cor 12:1-10).

There was a complete, total change in his life and heart. Now he had the satisfaction and peace which had eluded him for so long. His life totally turned around. Outwardly he went from the top to the bottom (a leader in Judaism to a disciple of Jesus). Inwardly, though, things went from the bottom (turmoil and guilt) to the top (peace and satisfaction).

Eventually Paul ended up in Antioch where a very strong Christian church had begun, and where believers were first called 'Christians.' It was at this time and place that the story 'Ben Hur' takes place. Paul became a leader in the church there – not one of the top men but a leader in training. God was preparing him for the upcoming missionary outreach to Gentiles which Paul would soon spearhead.

**MEANWHILE, BACK ON THE RANCH ...** During these years the early church grew and prospered. They went through a time of consolidation and maturity in preparation for the next growth spurt.

In about 38 AD Peter was in Lydda ministering when God used him to heal a man named Aeneas (9:32-35). In nearby Joppa he brought a woman named Dorcas back to life (9:36-43). God used these things to get a hearing for the gospel. Note that these miracles were done with a word or touch. Healing was instantaneous and 100% total and forever. All were healed, not just some. Organic diseases were healed and the dead were brought back to life. As time went on, though, the testimony of a changed life lived among people became the proof that the gospel had power. In AD 35 all were healed (Acts 5:16). By 60 AD some were healed. Epaphroditus (Paul 2:25-27) and Paul's own thorn in the flesh were not healed. In 67 AD few were healed. Trophimus (II Timothy 4:20) and Timothy's stomach were not healed. Today God uses the testimony of a changed life as proof of His power to touch and changed lives. That's one reason it is so important for us to life a holy life for Jesus in this time.



# 11. PETER PIONEERING (Acts 10-11)

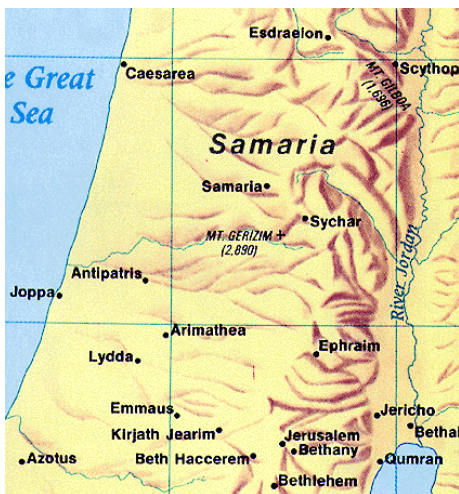
## ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

Gabriel said John the Baptizer would be a “light to the Gentiles.” Jesus Himself said He had “other sheep” to bring into the fold (John 6:37; 10:16). But if you would have told a Jew that their Messiah died for Gentiles as well as Jews, they would have been shocked. Jews saw Gentiles (called “goy”) as unclean, created by God only for the purpose of ‘stoking the fires of hell.’ A godly Jew would not touch a Gentile, drink milk from their animals, eat bread that they baked, or allow dust from their land to settle on his clothing. These would make them ‘unclean.’ To tell a Jew, then, to go invite them into the Kingdom as equal heirs with Jews was quite a cultural change!

**From Pentecost to Revelation**

By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 1999

Peter, who wasn't know for his open mindedness and tolerance, was God's choice to make the first breakthrough. Praise God it happened, though – or we would have to become Orthodox Jews before we would be eligible for salvation by Jesus!



**CAESAREA AND JOPPA** In 40 AD Peter was in a town called Joppa (10:5) which was Jerusalem's seaport, 38 miles away. It was an average sized city. Today it is called Jaffa. Our story, though, takes place in Caesarea (10:1), 30 miles (2 days travel) north of Joppa. It was a showcase city built by Herod the Great and the seat of government for Judea. It had the best port around. Philip settled here, and it had a strong church for centuries.

**CORNELIUS** Many Roman soldiers were stationed in Caesarea, and one was a man named Cornelius (10:1). He came from a distinguished upper class Roman family. He was a centurion, which means he commanded 100 soldiers. That would be like being a sergeant. Centurions were the backbone of the army. Like Abraham was chosen to be the first Jew, so Cornelius was chosen to be the

first Gentile in the Church. He believed in the Jews' God and helped those in need. He was a spiritual man who sought a close, personal relationship with God (10:2). God knew his heart and sent what he needed to develop that relationship. So God sent an angel to tell him to fetch Peter from Joppa and to listen to what he said (10:3-6).

**PETER GETS THE WORD** Before the messenger arrived at Peter's place, God prepared Peter for what was to happen. He was on the roof where it was cooler and more private, praying (10:9). This shows a change in Peter, for it's hard for a sanguine to have consistent devotions. God showed him a sheet coming down from heaven with all kinds of animals in it, clean and unclean (kosher and not kosher). God told Peter he could now eat all these animals (10:10-13). Peter said no, because he knew it was against the Old Testament laws (10:14). God, in effect, was negating those laws. It was so strong in Peter, though, that it was hard for him to give up. God has to repeat this three times for Peter to get the message (10:15-16).

God has been working in Peter in others ways. The very fact that he was staying in the house of a tanner (10:6) shows he was facing and working through his prejudices. Tanners were unclean because of the dead animals they constantly touched. They were socially ostracized and forced to

live apart from others purely because of the stench that came from their trade. Staying with one showed Peter was moving in the right direction.

**MESSENGERS ARRIVE** About this time the messengers showed up and God's Spirit told Peter to go with them (10:17-20). The old Peter wouldn't have had anything to do with a Gentile, much less go into one's house. Peter now invites these Gentiles into the home where he is staying (10:23). That is a major step by Peter, something he had never done before.

**PETER'S MESSAGE** For two days Peter walked and thought about all this until they got to Caesarea (10:23b-24). He took some Jewish Christians along. During this time Cornelius had gathered friends and family in anticipation of Peter's arrival (10:24b). He trusted God would provide and He did. Peter even entered the house with his Jewish brothers ((10:25-27).

Peter explained why he, a Jew, would do such a thing with a Gentile (10:28), then asked Cornelius why he sent for him (10:29). Cornelius replied that he didn't know, just that God had told him to do so (10:30-33). Peter put two and two together and realized that if Cornelius had been a Jew then Peter would have told him about salvation in Jesus. Because of God's revelation of the animals in the sheet, Peter realized that the Jew-Gentile line was removed and he should do the same for Cornelius as if he was a Jew. So he went ahead and told everyone present about Jesus' life, death and resurrection (10:34-43). Luke summarizes what Peter said here. The fuller version is recorded in the Gospel of Mark, for Mark records Peter's words in his gospel.

**CORNELIUS' CONVERSION** Before Peter was even done speaking God's Spirit came upon the Gentiles there (10:44). They had accepted Peter's words in their heart as he spoke and were born again while listening. All praised God because of the salvation of these, and that Gentiles were not one with Jews in Jesus (10:45-46). They were baptized (10:47). Peter stayed there several days talking with them and teaching them (10:48).

**RESPONSE OF JEWISH BELIEVERS** When the Jewish believers heard about this they were astonished (11:1). Peter went to Jerusalem to answer the questions of those who objected (11:2-3). Peter went through the whole account with them (11:4-17). Actually this event is recorded in detail three times in the book of Acts, showing how important it is! When Peter was done they all agreed that God has included Gentiles in his plan of salvation (11:18).

**SPEAKING IN TONGUES** To show that Gentiles are equal to Jews in the church, the exact thing happened to them as happened to the Jews at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit first came upon Jews – they spoke in languages they hadn't known. This hadn't been the pattern, for Peter says "the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning" (11:15). Peter had to go back to Pentecost to describe what happened. Speaking in tongues was not the normal way of showing salvation. In fact, we can see a real pattern in Acts. First the Holy Spirit came with the Jewish sign of tongues as a sign of judgment to the nation for rejecting God's messiah (2:3-11). Hearing the Gospel spoken to them in Gentile languages was a sign in Isaiah that they missed it! Then when the Holy Spirit Gentiles were added the exact same thing happened to show there were not two churches but just one. No account of anyone speaking in tongues between these two is given.

**CHURCH GROWTH SPURT** This brought a growth spirit for the next several years. A strong church developed at Antioch during the next several years (11:19-21). Barnabas asked Paul to come join him ministering and teaching there (11:22-26). This was Paul's training for when God would send him out as the missionary to the Gentiles.

When word came that the Jewish believers in Jerusalem were in financial trouble, the Gentile believers saw an opportunity to help them so they collected money and sent it by Barnabas and Saul (47 AD). Thus the Jews and Gentiles needed each other and worked together, as God wants us to continue to do so today. All we have is by His grace anyway!

## 12. PEOPLE PRAYING (Acts 12)

I moved the mouse, but nothing happened. I hit the enter key, but all was quiet. I typed in several letters, but still no response. Then all of a sudden, everything I had done happened in rapid succession. The computer had finally awakened! Many computers these days have a nice feature called the Energy Saver Mode. When there are no demands on the system, no instructions to be followed, no programs to execute, the computer will slip into a quiet restfulness that is designed to save electricity. The computer will stay in this suspended mode as long as it is left undisturbed, and will wake up (sometimes rather slowly) only when the user begins to initiate an action on the computer.

**JAMES DIES, PETER IS NEXT** It was the spring of 44 AD, only 11 years after the death and resurrection of Christ, and the Christians were experiencing some serious persecution. King Herod had arrested James and killed him (12:1-2). When he saw how well that went over with the religious leaders of the day, he arrested Peter with the same intent. Peter was kept in prison awaiting execution (12:3). He must have prayed to be released, but God seemed silent. Day and night he sat, awaiting his execution.

**PEACEFUL SLEEP** While he was there: "On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping" (12:6). He was sleeping?! One of his best friends had just been executed. He was next in line. The execution was only hours away. And he was sleeping?

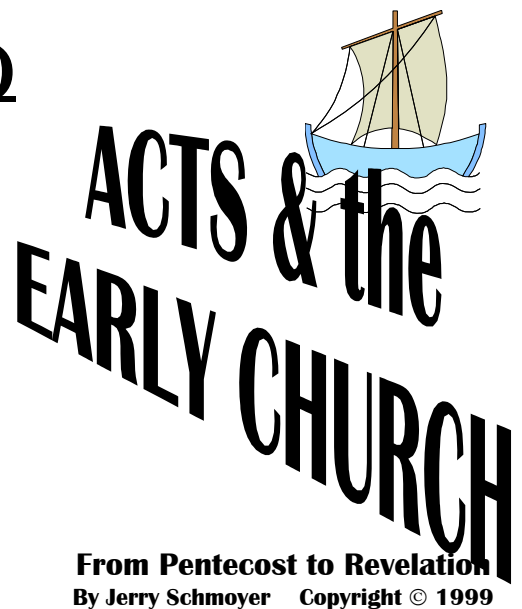
When do you sleep the worst? When a project is due the next day? When the bills on the kitchen table add up to more than the balance in the checking account? When your kids are out late? When you are nervous, stressed, worried? When do you sleep the best? When you are on vacation? On Friday evenings when you know you can sleep late the next morning? When your projects are completed and you are "ahead of the game?" When you are at peace?

"Peter was sleeping..." We toss and turn with thoughts of work and life. We stare wide-eyed at the ceiling wondering how we will make it till the end of the month. We lie awake, our head spinning with our responsibilities. Then we look at Peter and think: "How in the world could he have slept at such a time?" Perhaps he was remembering the words of Christ: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

"God, It is late in the evening, and I can't sleep. My mind simply won't slow down. I need Your peace. I need to be reminded that rest is found in you. That the security that allows sleep starts in You. That I can come to You, and you will give me rest. Work in my heart and in my mind and in my emotions. Give me Your peace. Lead me into Your rest. Amen."

**DELIVERANCE** Peter was sleeping so soundly it evidently took awhile for him to awaken! The angel had to tell him to get dressed (12:8). Peter was totally confused, unaware he was awake (12:9). The guards didn't even see them leave, they invisible to the guards' vision. When the angel left Peter out in the cool night air he fully awakened and realized God had delivered him (12:11).

What a tremendous experience that must have been! What peace Peter had, all from God's grace. If it had been God's will for him to die, he would also have experienced the same grace. Being in God's will means it doesn't matter to us what happens, as long as it is what God wants. James must have had the same peace when he was killed. Why was James killed and Peter spared? Why not the other way around, or both spared? No one knows but God. We don't need to know why God does what He does, we only need to know that it is His will that is taking place.



**ALL NIGHT PRAYER MEETINGS** How very human and like us believers then were! Peter goes to an all-night prayer meeting, where they are praying for him, but they don't believe it is Peter (12:12-15). They think it is his 'ghost.' Before we are too hard on them, though, remember that often we are so surprised when God answers a prayer of ours that we can hardly believe it!

Eventually Peter got in and told them what had happened, then went to report to another group of believers who was praying (12:16-17). I wonder how much knowing that groups of believers were gathered throughout the city praying for him helped Peter relax and sleep? Wouldn't it help if you knew people were praying for you! Maybe you need to let them know when you have a need and ask them to pray. They can't read your mind you know. Don't let pride rob you of a blessing!

**'NO SMALL COMMOTION'** In the morning, when it was discovered that Peter had escaped, everyone was in an uproar (12:18). A somber note is that the 16 guards assigned to watch Peter were all executed (12:19). The officials looked for a human explanation to what had happened but couldn't find one, so they took their embarrassment and frustration out on the innocent guards. They should have asked God what had happened, not the guards!

**HEROD'S 'GLORIFICATION'** The scene now shifts to Caesarea, where Cornelius lived. A difficult political situation was resolved (12:19b-20) and a special celebration was being held (12:21). Herod sat on his throne in royal robes and gave a speech. Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived shortly after this time, said it was a festival day to honor Claudius Caesar (August 2).

The speech was fine, the king impressive, sun reflected off the silver and gold trimmings, and everyone was in a good mood. The people said, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man" (12:22). Now it was up to Herod in his heart to decide how to respond to this praise. He took it as his own in his pride and didn't give God any credit for his health or position (12:23a).

What an awful thing it is when we steal God's glory! It's easy to do – just take credit for something God has done in your life. When someone complements you for a musical performance, meal, good grade, completed project at work, or whatever it may be, make sure that, in your heart, you share the glory with God. Recognize where you would be and what you would have without Him. What talent or gift do you have that hasn't come from Him? You can graciously say "Thank you" to the person, but inside pass on the glory to God! Herod didn't do that and he paid for it!

**HEROD'S HUMILIATION** "An angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died" (12:23b). God judged him for his pride. He was also guilty of persecuting the church, killing James and trying to kill Peter. Josephus says he suffered in terrible agony for 5 days before dying. God was humbling him and giving him time to repent and humble himself, but we have no record that he did so.

**CHURCH GROWS** All these things encouraged the new Christians and the church continued to grow (12:24). In the fall of 47 AD Barnabas and Paul went back to Jerusalem after having delivered the Gentile Christians' offering to the Jewish believers (12:25). John Mark went from Jerusalem up to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. God is gathering together His team for the first mission journey which will soon start (Acts 13). Gentiles are 'in' and now things are prepared for a larger push among the Gentiles.

**JAMES WRITTEN** It was during this time that James, the half brother of Jesus, wrote his letter to Jewish believers everywhere. That will be summarized in the next article.

## **13. JAMES: TRUE FAITH**



TITLE: Named for the author  
AUTHOR: James, half brother of Jesus  
DATE of WRITING: 45 AD (1<sup>st</sup> NT book)  
PLACE of WRITING: Jerusalem  
TIME COVERED: 45 AD  
RECIPIENTS: Jewish Believers everywhere  
KEY VERSE: *"You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?"* 2:20  
KEY WORD: "faith" (16 times); :works: (15 times)  
PURPOSE: For James to communicate with Jewish believers wherever they were. Since salvation wasn't by works, then what role did good works have in the Christian life?  
THEME: True faith produces true works.



# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

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Suppose someone in your church fell over and didn't move. How would you know if they were dead? You'd check for signs of life: a pulse and breathing. When there is breathing there is physical life, when there is no breathing there is no life. James says the same thing is true spiritually. How is one to know if a body has spiritual life? If there are good works there is life, if there are no good works there is no spiritual life. It's that simple. "Faith without works is dead" is James' theme.

A Christian man worked each day transporting tourists across a lake. On occasion he would present the Gospel and its implications for life in a most unusual way. He had painted the word "Faith" on one of the oars of his rowboat and "Works" on the other. When they got quite far from shore, he would stop, then, beginning to row with only the one oar marked "faith," he would cause the boat to go in circles to the left. Reversing the process, he would pull on the other oar marked "works," and they would circle in the opposite direction. By this time the bewildered passengers were waiting for an explanation. This afforded him a wonderful opportunity to give them the truth concerning discipleship and the Christian life. He always concluded by saying, "You see, neither faith nor works can stand alone. They are twins that cannot be separated!" (James 2:20)

**FAITH AND WORKS** James is the first New Testament book written. Four hundred years of silence are broken. Nothing has been inspired since Malachi. Now God's Spirit again moves man to write. Their first problem is the relationship of grace and works. The second book written, Galatians, is about this same theme. Each seeks to avoid an extreme.

Now that Jews could become Christians without having to keep all the Jewish laws, what is the place of holy living? If it doesn't gain salvation, why live a godly life? If salvation is free, what does it matter how we live? Good works don't earn our salvation, but they do show that we already have salvation. They are a sign of faith. If faith is true, it will be manifest in how one lives. Salvation by faith will result in changed priorities, godly motives, humility, love, a desire to witness, and a life like Jesus.

**JAMES THE MAN** was the brother of Jesus. He became the leader of the early church in Jerusalem, along with John, when John's brother James was killed. This James grew up with Jesus but didn't believe until he saw His half brother after the resurrection.

**I. TRUE FAITH AND TRIALS (1 - 2)** James starts by talking about faith in times of trials and testing. It's one thing to say we believe in God and trust Him, it's another to show it when life is painful and unfair. It's interesting that James should start the New Testament by dealing with the problem of pain. The first book in the Old Test., Job, is about the same subject! True faith will triumph over obstacles.



**II. TRUE FAITH AND TALK (3)** A second way true faith is shown is by our words. Since they show what is in our hearts, when our hearts change so will our talk. When we seek God's wisdom then we will become more like Jesus and our life will show it in all areas. In order for our life to show this, though, we must seek God's wisdom, not the world's wisdom. God's ways are different than man's ways. God's priorities and values differ from the world's.

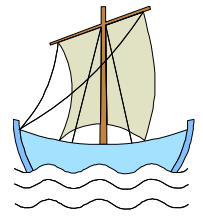
**III. TRUE FAITH AND TROUBLES (4)** Another evidence of spiritual life is how one faces temptation. All will be tempted, and temptation is not sin, but continual progress over sin in life will be seen when one lives by faith. There doesn't have to be total victory immediately, but there must be progress in that direction. Faith results in one turning from worldliness.

**IV. TRUE FAITH AND TRUST (5)** Staying on the theme of materialism, true faith sees things as temporary and not the main thing in life. True faith will result in patience, godly speech and prayer.

Now, can you prove that YOU are alive? OK, physically you are breathing, so you have physical life. What about spiritually? Do you have spiritual life? Are there good works in your life, fruit of the Spirit, Christlikeness being reproduced in you? If not, what needs to happen in your life now to bring about the good works God requires?

Billy Graham had this to say about faith and works and their relationship to each other: "There really is no conflict between faith and works. In the Christian life they go together like inhaling and exhaling. Faith is taking the Gospel in; works is taking the Gospel out. Actually, what James is saying is: you can't have one without the other. The book of James balances off this matter of faith and works, and reminds us that the Christian must have both. True, we are not saved by works, but James reminds us also that we are not saved if good works do not follow. Some people argue this point so vehemently that it almost becomes like the old argument of which comes first, the chicken or the egg. The word "believe" comes from two words, "be" and "live". Faith helps us to "be," spiritually. But after we receive life, it is to find expression in Christian works and deeds. To show that there is no conflict in the Scriptures between the two, Paul, the advocate of faith speaks of "being rich in works," and James, the exponent of works, says, "rich in faith." Why be content with either when God has provided for, and says we must have both."

# 14. PAUL'S 1<sup>ST</sup> MISSIONARY JOURNEY (Acts 13-14)



## ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

The church at Antioch found itself as the center of the new movement of believers in Jesus the Christ. Persecution had moved the central focus from Jerusalem, and it ended up in Antioch, where believers were first called 'Christians'.

God had assembled a leadership cadre from various nations and ethnic backgrounds to lead the fledgling church there. One of the lesser men in that group was a man named Saul. He had been brought there by Barnabas, perhaps the main leader, to help with the teaching (Acts 12:1).

**APRIL, 48** God has obviously already working in the hearts of some of them to take the Gospel to those who haven't heard. Perhaps Barnabas and Saul, who were friends from way back, had talked about going to Cyprus with the plan of salvation. Mountain ranges rimmed the north, desert the east, and Jerusalem was to the south. The natural direction to go was to the west.

When the church there was seeking God's guidance and worshipping His greatness, the Spirit showed them that they should send Barnabas and Saul on this journey (v. 2). The church prayed and fasted about this, committed them to the work, and committed themselves to pray for them and support them (v 3).

**APRIL - JUNE, 48** Barnabas and Saul went to **Seleucia, Cyprus** and **Salamis** (4-5). Wherever they went they preached, first in the synagogues then where ever people could gather (5).

**JUNE 48** While in **Paphos** they had a run-in with a Jewish sorcerer who worked by Satan's power, named Elymas (6-12). God blinded him in such a way that He was glorified and many came to faith (12). A change in leadership took place here, though. Verse 7 says "Barnabas and Saul" went there, then Saul was used by God to defeat Satan's forces (9-11). From here on we see Saul as the leader. "Paul and his companions" (13).

Saul (Hebrew name) is now called Paul (Roman name) because the focus of his ministry switches to Gentiles here. Naturally they would call him 'Paul.'

Paul's natural leadership skills came to the forefront and he took over leadership. Notice, though, that he waited patiently until the time was right for this transition. He didn't push himself to the front. Notice, too, that Barnabas wasn't competing with him and let the change naturally come. He didn't care if he was first or second, just so God's work was done and Jesus glorified. We certainly need more people like Paul and Barnabas today!

Not everyone then was like them, either. In fact, Mark, who came along to help, returned home shortly after that. Didn't he like Paul taking over leadership from his uncle Barnabas? Was the trip too long and hard for him? Was he homesick? Lovesick? Was he discouraged about the response? Did he not want to see Gentiles saved? Was he concerned about illness? It seems Paul



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may have contracted malaria at this time and was nursed back to health in Galatia. Did Mark fear this? Whatever the cause, his defection really hurt Paul who wouldn't let him come along on the second missionary journey. Barnabas took him and they went on their own trip. Later, however, Paul and Mark were reunited and again worked together for the cause of Christ.

**EARLY TO MID JULY, 48** Paul and Barnabas then sailed to **Perga** in **Pamphylia**, then to **Pisidian Antioch** (13-14). Paul gave a long message about Jesus to those in the synagogue here (14-41). It was typical of his messages to Jews that were living in Gentile cities. First he shows that a Savior is promised (16-25). He quotes Old Testament scriptures and uses historical examples to show a Savior is needed. Then he talks about a savior being provided (33-37). He explains about Jesus' life, crucifixion and resurrection. He concludes with an invitation to accept Jesus as their Messiah and Lord (38-41). He also warns them about what will happen if they don't turn to Jesus.

**MID JULY TO MID SEPT, 48** The response to this message was so positive that the people wanted to hear more, so Paul and Barnabas stayed in **Pisidian Antioch** for two months, teaching and preaching. The Jews rejected their message, but the Gentiles welcomed it (42-52). The word spread throughout the whole geographical area, including Galatia. Paul did some traveling there during this time, forming a close report with the people there. His malaria got so bad they had to nurse him back to health (Gal 4:13-15). These people were rough, independent and in many ways uncivilized. After Paul returned to Antioch at the end of this missionary journey, he wrote back to the people. It was his first letter that is recorded in the Bible, the book of Galatians. Eventually those who rejected the message had Paul and Barnabas sent out of town so they went to **Iconium**.

**OCTOBER 48 TO END OF FEB., 49 AD** At **Iconium** Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogue first, as was their pattern (Acts 14:1-5). Some Jews believed, but many rejected and stirred up the Gentiles against them. To avoid physical harm they fled.

**MARCH TO MID JUNE 49** Paul and Barnabas went to the **Lycoanian** cities of **Lystra** and **Derbe**. These were small, rural villages. The whole area was rough and primitive. Timothy, Lois and Eunice lived in Lystra. God used them to heal a crippled man in Lystra (8). The people believed that they were gods and wanted to offer sacrifices to them (9-13). Local tradition said that in the past Zeus and Hermes, the gods, came to Lystra, but were rejected so they destroyed the town. Folklore said they would one day return. Paul and Barnabas looked like them, and the miraculous sign seemed to prove it to the people.

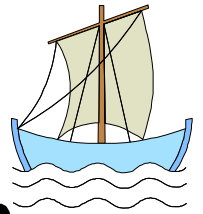
They denied their deity, though (14-18), and tried to point the people to Jesus. Still, they wanted to deify them. Then some Jews who had traveled 100 miles just to oppose Paul, Barnabas and the Gospel arrived and turned the crowd against Paul and Barnabas. They stoned Paul and drug him outside the city, leaving him for dead (20). It seems he really did die and God brought him back to life. Paul tells about this time in II Corinthians 12:1-5). What an encouraging, motivating experience that must have been for Paul!

**END OF JUNE 49** The next day Paul and Barnabas went to **Derbe**. The response there was great and positive (21). They could have took a short cut home through the Cilician Gates to Paul's home town of Tarsus, but retraced their steps so they could revisit, encourage and strengthen the churches they had just started (22-23).

**JULY - SEPTEMBER 49** They traveled through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch on the way (21), then Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga and Attalia. They were glad to see the churches they started growing.

**SEPT 49 - APRIL 50** Back in Antioch they told of how God had worked in Jews and Gentiles alike. They spent several months there. Paul wrote the Letter to the Galatians during this time. The time had been successfully spent, for many Gentiles had responded to the Gospel. Soon God would put it on Paul's heart to revisit those churches and travel even further until the Word spread to us now.

# 15. GALATIANS: CHRISTIAN LIBERTY



## ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

TITLE: Named for the recipients

AUTHOR: Paul

DATE of WRITING: 49 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Antioch

RECIPIENTS: Churches in Galatia (Asia Minor)

KEY VERSE: *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."* 5:1

KEY WORDS: "Christ" (43 times); "law" (32); "Flesh" (18); "Faith" (22); "spirit" (15)

PURPOSE: To show the readers that the purpose of the law is to lead us to Christ (3:24) and the purpose of Christ is to free us (5:1), bring Christian liberty.

THEME: To show that the believer is free from the law and legalism.

**From Pentecost to Revelation**

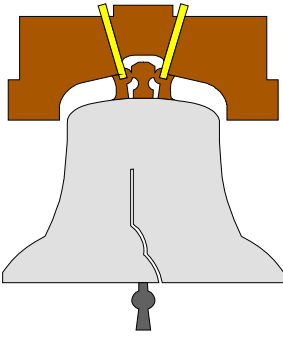
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When I was a new Christian I was invited to join the Mormon church as well as Herbert W. Armstrong's Radio Church of God. As I checked into these groups I found they each had at their core a set of practices that one must adhere to. The big things, even the little things in life, were regulated and specific responses were set for most any event. That didn't seem too unusual, though, because the Baptist church I was a member of was pretty much the same way. New members took their cue from the older ones about how to dress, act, talk and think in most any situation. If one didn't know they had only to ask and the answer was given. Everything was black and white. At first that nice because I didn't have to make decisions on my own. They were all made. As a new Christian I could act and look just like those who had been Christians their whole lives. Instant spirituality was available to any who would just follow the 'rules.' However before long I realized that my Christian life was being lived by and for other Christians, not Christ. Fear of what others would think motivated all I did. It was empty. Oh, it appealed to my pride, but where was the 'personal relationship' I so longed for?

Then in Bible College the first book of the Bible I studied in depth was the book of Galatians – just what I needed! Paul was writing to people who were facing the same dilemma I was. He had just completed his First Missionary Journey, going through Asia Minor into the area of Galatia in the middle of it. Several churches were started there, but after Paul left Jewish Christians who said one had to keep all the Jewish law in order to have salvation came in and misled the people. So when Paul got back to Antioch he wrote them to straighten them, and me, out about the relationship of law and grace. What he did was give three proofs why we are free from any form of law. These are as follows:

**I. BIOGRAPHICAL PROOF (1:10-2:21) - An Independent Revelation** First Paul talks in detail about himself, something he does in no other book. However in no other book is he writing to people who distrust him and his motives. He must prove that God is speaking through him or no one will listen to anything he has to say. Thus he gives his credentials first.

Paul points out that he got his message directly from Jesus, not Jewish rabbis, for they were opposed to him (1:10-14), nor from the apostles for they kept away from him (1:15-17). Neither did he get his message from the churches in Judea for he didn't learn from them (1:18-24) nor from anyone else (2:1-18). He himself had kept the law better than any of them ever could, yet he knew from experience that that was empty (2:19-21).



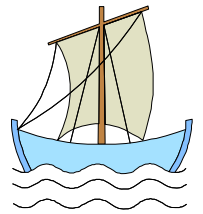
**II. THEOLOGICAL PROOF (3:1 - 4:31) - Failure of Legalism** Having shown that his readers could trust the source of the message (Paul) he now focuses on the message itself. He reminds them that if grace is how they were saved, that should be how they live the Christian life (3:1-5). Any system that focus on impressing or pleasing man or God fails because the focus is on outer actions, not inner attitude. Paul even uses Abraham as an example of salvation and Christian living by faith, before God gave him any laws (3:6-22). Actually the law makes us slaves, not free (4:8-31).

**III. PRACTICAL PROOF (5:1 - 6:10) - THE Effect of Liberty** After showing that trying to keep the law is an inferior way to live, Paul shows the superior way of following Jesus. Legalism is under God's judgment for it seeks to add to the finished work of Jesus. It elevates our work of the flesh and feeds our pride. God wants us to obey and serve Him out of love. When we obey and serve out of love the results will be evident in our lives: the fruit of the Holy Spirit, humility and meekness, faithfulness, perseverance, to name a few (5:25-6:10).

A woman worked for a man whose wife had died. Every day he gave her a list of chores and jobs to do and she did them because he paid her at the end of the week. Eventually they got to love each other and married. She found she was doing the very things he had paid her to do and more, but there was no list and no pay. She now did them out of love. Her motive had changed. What is your motive in serving God? If it isn't love, it isn't right/

# **16. JERUSALEM COUNCIL**

## **(Acts 15)**



# **ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH**

**From Pentecost to Revelation**

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We all know the words “salvation by grace,” but still we often add ‘conditions’ to salvation or the Christian life. When I was a new believer I was disciples by some fine Christians who unfortunately exposed me to some very subtle but strong legalism. What I came away believing was that if I did (or didn’t do) certain things I would be more spiritual. I could instantly be among the older, more mature believers if I talked and acted certain ways. I really didn’t have many decisions to make for it seemed everything had already been decided about Christian behavior. Dress, hair length and styles, activities, entertainment, use of time and money – all was clearly set down. I had only to follow.

God led me out of that, and I don’t want to be judgmental or critical. I do appreciate the grace I now have in Jesus. It’s funny, but my Christian life even now is outwardly very similar to the way it was then. It’s my inner motive for what I do that has drastically changed. I am acutely aware of the danger in doing things to impress others, to impress God or to impress myself. All I do must be done out of love and a response of faithfulness to Jesus. That must be my first and only motive for all I do. For me, any other motive is legalism. It includes me trying to earn or deserve something from God. There is absolutely NOTHING I can do to impress God. All I have or ever will have is by His grace. The only thing that ever impressed Him was the work of Jesus on the cross. Satan, in his pride, would feed into ours and have us think we can do something for God but we can’t. Satan will do whatever he can to keep the focus off of God’s grace and on man’s works instead.

I thank God for His amazing grace. I want to always live in it. I want to make sure I don’t in any way influence others to jump through hoops of legalism and externals. I can’t imagine what it would be like if we did have to do (or not do) certain things for salvation or the Christian life. God could have made it that way, but praise His name He didn’t.

**FALL, AD 49 -- CHURCH PROBLEM** All this is nothing new. Early Christians were Jews who grew up keeping the law, then accepting Jesus as Savior. Then as the kingdom spread many Gentiles started believing in Jesus, accepting His free gift of salvation. Some early church leaders, though, taught these Gentiles that they also had to keep the Jewish law (Acts 15:1). This means circumcision, dietary regulations, sacrifices and offerings, dress codes, festivals, tithes, Sabbath observances and every area of life. Paul and Barnabas greatly opposed this (v. 2a) for they had seen how God worked in Gentiles on their first missionary journey. The whole issue of if a Christian had to observe the Jewish law or not became such a big thing that they realized they would have to go to Jerusalem and consult the apostles and leaders there (2a). going to those in spiritual authority over you is always important. Let those who are more experienced and mature spiritually decide.

**MEETING #1** When they arrived in Jerusalem (v. 3) they were warmly welcomed (v. 4a). They told the apostles everything that happened on their missionary journey (v. 4b). This was a private meeting between Paul, Barnabas and the leaders. It seems Titus was with them as well (Gal 2:1-2). He was a Gentile who came to salvation in Jesus without the law.



**MEETING #2** Next was held a general, open meeting to discuss the problem. Those who said it was necessary to keep the law along with salvation spoke first (v. 5; Gal 2:3-5). Paul and Barnabas told of their experiences as well.

**MEETING #3** Then the apostles and leaders met alone to discuss and consider the question (v. 6). Peter shared his testimony about Cornelius and what God has showed him (v. 7-11). Barnabas and Paul shared what God had done through them as well (v. 12).

Then it was James' turn to speak. He was head of the early church, so the final decision fell to him. He based his decision on the Bible, not personal experience (v. 15-18). Too often today we are influenced by the person who has had this or that experience, when our final determining authority is the Word of God. James went back to the Word and based his decision on it.

He quoted Amos 9:11-12, stating that Gentiles can also find God. They don't have to become Jews to do so. James uses this for his decision. Note they didn't have everyone vote. Democracy is fine, but God's system of government has always been a godly sovereign, not rule by the majority of the people).

Anyway, James' decision was that Gentiles didn't have to keep the law for salvation or Christian living (v. 19). What a difference that makes for us today! If the decision would have been different we'd be living, eating, dressing, talking and acting like the Pharisees in Jesus' day! Can you imagine witnessing for that!

Still, they warned the Gentiles to now use their new freedom to set a stumbling block before their Jewish brethren. The Jews couldn't put a stumbling block (the law) before them, and they can't do that to their Jewish brethren. They had to be considerate (v. 20-21). They could not take advantage of their freedom, nor do anything that would offend the conscience of the Jews. We, too, must be considerate of other believer's consciences and not exert our freedom in a way that might cause them to stumble in their Christian life.

**MEETING #4** The word was spread, and men were chosen to take it to other churches (v. 22). Especially important was Antioch, for that was becoming the new center of Christianity and rapidly replacing Jerusalem.

To make sure everyone knew who was behind this decision, and people didn't just say Paul was making this up, they wrote a letter to send along (v. 23-29).

**WINTER, AD 49-50** Antioch was glad for the decision, and the church went through a new growth spurt (v. 30-35). It seems after every challenge they successfully faced there was a growth spurt. That's how God works.

It was during this time that Paul had to publicly reprimand Peter for compromising with those who were legalistic in their view (Galatians 2:11-14).

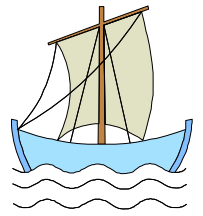
**APRIL, AD 50** With this issue settled Paul wanted to go back and visit the churches he had started, to encourage and strengthen them (v. 36). They sharply disagreed about taking Mark, so ended up splitting up (v. 37-40). Barnabas took Mark but Paul took Silas instead. The story in Acts follows Paul and Silas through Syria and Cilicia (v. 41).

While this 'sharp disagreement' obviously hurt these two friends, it just shows how human God's servants are. Later Paul was reconciled with Mark and did recognize his contribution to the ministry, but Mark had done a lot of growing by then, too. At least God was glorified and all things did work for the good, because now there were two missionary teams going out.

Be careful in your life, to make sure you don't put and faith or pride in anything you do. All we have and are is by grace alone. Don't ever judge others by outer appearances. We can evaluate fruit but never judge motives. Show others as much grace as you want God to show you!



# **17. PAUL'S 2<sup>ND</sup> MISSIONARY JOURNEY (Acts 16-18)**



## **ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH**



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Paul wasn't good at staying put. He always wanted to move ahead for God: spreading the good news, starting churches and encouraging believers. Six months after the return from the first missionary journey he was on the road again. During those 6 months he went to the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) and wrote to the Galatians. Now he wants to visit them again.

**MAY 50** Paul headed overland into Asia Minor this time, stopping at Derbe and Lystra (Acts 16:1) where Timothy joined them.

**LATE MAY TO MID JUNE 50** Paul, Silas and Timothy then went to Iconium (v. 2-3) and ministered there. He had Timothy, who was half Jew, circumcised so he wouldn't be a stumbling block to sincere, seeking Jews who might think they were flaunting their freedom from the law. They spent the next 6 weeks visiting churches in the area and telling them about the decision of the Jerusalem Council (v. 4). This brought another growth spurt in the church (v. 5).

**JULY 50** They traveled through Phrygia and Galatia (v. 6), stopping in places like Colossae, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Philadelphia, Sardis, Thyatira, Pergamum and Smyrna. They wanted to push on into northern Asia Minor but God's Spirit showed them that that wasn't His will (v. 6b-7). Instead they went to Troas (v. 8). There Paul had his well known vision of a man calling them over to Macedonia (v. 9-10) so that is where they went.

**AUGUST 50** The first place they stopped in Macedonia was Philippi (v. 11-12). When they went to the place where the Jews gathered they found only women (v. 13). Here was the well-trained and highly motivated Paul, clearly directed by God to enter the continent of Europe to spread the gospel there (although others had brought the gospel to Europe with them already). What kind of a reception does he get for all his labor and work? A handful of women are all that show up! We tend to notice such things too clearly. Paul didn't seem disappointed at all. He met the leader, Lydia, who listened to Paul's message, accepted Jesus and was baptized along with her whole household (v. 14). The men even stayed at her home (v. 15).

Others joined the new church there: a slave girl who was delivered from demons by Paul (v. 16-24) and the jailer who was life was spared when Paul and the others didn't escape prison after an earthquake (v. 25-34). Others became part of the church such as Clement, Euodia, Sytche and more. Paul left soon after the earthquake event, though (v. 35-40). It was time to take the gospel and plant it in other locations.

**NOVEMBER 50** In Thessalonica (Acts 17:1) Paul, as was his custom, went into the synagogue first (v. 2-3). Some Jews, many Gentiles who had been won to Judaism and a number of prominent women believed and followed Paul (v. 4). The Jewish leaders were so jealous they started a riot to have Paul and the others with him harmed (v. 5-9).

**FEBRUARY 51** Paul, Silas and Timothy slipped away at night to protect themselves (v. 10). They planned on returning as soon as things settled down but other events prevented that so Paul later sent Timothy back to help them (I Thes 3:2). Meanwhile they went to Berea, where there was a much more mature, open response to the gospel among the Jews. Many believed and became fine students of the Word (Acts 17:11-12). Soon, however, Jews came from Thessalonica and stirred people up against Paul so he again had to flee for his life while Silas and Timothy stayed to continue the work in Berea ((v. 13-15).

**LATE FEBRUARY 51** Meanwhile Paul went to Athens where their idolatry so distressed him that he spoke to them about Jesus being their 'unknown god' (v. 16-34). The response was small there, as often is the case in urban areas of higher education and 'enlightenment.'

**MARCH 51** Being very disappointed with the attitude of the Athenians, Paul moved on to Corinth (Acts 18:1). There he stayed and worked with fellow tent-makers Aquilla and Priscilla (v. 2-3). Every Sabbath he preached in the synagogue (v. 4). These were hard days for Paul. He was lonely, drained physically and emotionally, financially broke, sorrowful about so many rejecting salvation and upset about the immorality and idolatry in Athens and Corinth. Then Silas and Timothy rejoined him (v. 5) and the ministry improved. A new church began (v. 6-7) and many came to salvation.

Then God appeared to Paul in a night vision and encouraged him to keep on preaching in Corinth despite how bad things were (v. 9-10). Paul stayed there for 1 ½ years (v. 11). During that time he planted churches in Corinth, Cenchrea (Romans 16:21) and Achaia (II Cor 1:1). He wrote letters to Thessalonica. The first was in the early summer of 51. Timothy took the letter to them and stayed awhile. Paul wrote to them again later the same summer.

When the year and half were almost up Paul was brought to court but the judge kicked the case out (v. 12-17). Soon after that he left to head back home (v. 18).

**SEPTEMBER TO NOV 52** Paul had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken (v. 18b), then went to Ephesus (v. 19) where he left Priscilla and Aquilla to work. They wanted Paul to stay, and he wanted to spend more time in Ephesus, but told them he would return (v. 20-21).

Then he sailed to Caserea and greeted the church, then returned to Antioch (v. 22), where he stayed until the spring of 53.

**SPRING TO SUMMER 53** Paul just couldn't sit still! He continued to travel throughout Galatia and Phrygia (v. 23). Meanwhile Apollos, a gifted speaker of John the Baptizer's message, came to Ephesus, Aquilla and Priscilla updated him on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (v. 24-26). He became an outstanding evangelist for the early church (v. 27-28).

## **18. I THESSALONIANS: JESUS IS COMING AGAIN**

TITLE: Named for the recipients

AUTHOR: Paul

DATE of WRITING: 51 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Corinth

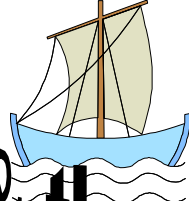
RECIPIENTS: Church at Thessalonica

KEY VERSE: *for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. (1:9-10)*

KEY WORDS: "comfort" (6 times); "coming (of the Lord)" (4)

PURPOSE: To commend the Thessalonian believers for their faith and to defend himself against criticism. He also instructs them in areas of difficulty: sexual purity, love & especially the Second Coming of Christ.

THEME: The Second Coming of Christ



# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

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When Gideon's 10,000 potential soldiers went to drink, only 300 of them were chosen. These were the ones who drank looking up. For us to defeat our enemies today we must be found 'looking up' as well. That's Paul's message to the Thessalonians.

Paul started a church in Thessalonica on his Second Missionary Journey. It was only the second church established on European soil. It had much opportunity but faced a lot of persecution. Paul wrote to them from Corinth to encourage them in their times of suffering.

**LOOK AWAY FROM: Troubles** (chapter 1) Paul starts off praying for them, encouraging them in faithfulness. He commends them for their fruit: receiving the gospel and passing it on. Their godly reputation had been spreading quickly. Paul wants them to look to God and what He has done for them, not to focus on their suffering and persecution.

**LOOK AWAY FROM: Temporal** (chapter 2) Then Paul defends himself against attacks and criticism some in Thessalonica have been spreading about him. He assures them that both his motives and methods were pure. His focus was on serving God, not on gaining money or a reputation for himself. He encouraged them, too, to not focus on this temporary world during the hard times they were facing.

**LOOK AWAY FROM: Temptation** (chapter 3) Paul tells them he sent Timothy to help them faithfully endure their trials, and Timothy's good report about them really encouraged Paul as well. He concludes this section praying that he will be able to visit them in person very soon. After telling them what to look away from, he then tells them what to look towards:

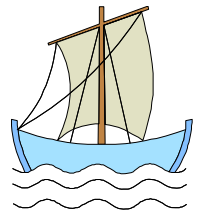
**LOOK UP TO: Trumpet** (chapter 4) Paul challenges them to be pure in their lives, for some of them continued in their old pagan immorality. He emphasized that they are to love each other. He corrected those who said they didn't have to work because Jesus was coming back soon. Then he gave the most complete description on the Rapture in the Bible (4:13-18). The trumpet will one day sound and those who have accepted Jesus as Savior will have their bodies instantly changed and taken to heaven. Those who have already died have temporary bodies in heaven and their earthly bodies will be raised at that time and taken to heaven, too. Thus we don't have to fear death nor grieve the loss of believers who die before us. Those killed in persecution just get to heaven first! Jesus could return any day, ending their earthly suffering. Thus they are to live looking up, awaiting the trumpet.

**LOOK UP TO: Triumph** (chapter 5) Immediately following the rapture will be the Tribulation. The persecution they were enduring was not the Tribulation. Believers are not under God's judgment ('wrath' v. 9; cf Rom 8:1). Until this time they must live victorious Christian lives, growing and ministering to others.

Paul concluded by praying for their total being. He prayed they would live a holy Christian life until Jesus returned for them. By knowing and remembering that Jesus was coming back for them, they could keep the sufferings of this life in proper perspective. He assured them that God would preserve them. Then he ended with his typical request for prayer on his behalf, a greeting, a charge and a benediction.

One day a business came to a school and promised the children that one day he would return and bring a special present for all who had their desks clean when he arrived. A certain girl in the class room really wanted to receive this prize so she committed herself to clean her desk every Monday morning. Knowing that it wouldn't stay clean long, for the girl wasn't normally a very neat person, the teacher asked her what happened if the man came on Friday. She decided to clean her desk Monday and Friday. Then when asked about if he would come on Wednesday, she decided she needed to clean her desk every morning. But what if he came at the end of the day? Finally she realized that what she needed to do was keep her desk clean at ALL times. Paul wants us, like the Thessalonians, to always be aware of and ready for Jesus' soon return. Don't focus on your problems or difficulties, but on His return!

# 19. II THESSALONIANS: JESUS IS COMING SOON



## ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

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TITLE: Named for the recipients

AUTHOR: Paul

DATE of WRITING: 51 AD, shortly after I Thessalonians

PLACE of WRITING: Corinth

RECIPIENTS: Church at Thessalonica

KEY VERSE: *This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (1:7b-10)*

KEY WORDS: "Day of the Lord"

PURPOSE:

<u>I THESSALONIANS</u>	<u>II THESSALONIANS</u>
Teaches the WHAT of the Rapture	Teaches the WHEN of the Rapture
Teach something NEW - Rapture	correct WRONG - time of Rapture
Mainly about the church	Mainly about Satan, Antichrist, world

THEME: to tell the Thessalonian believers Christ would return BEFORE the Tribulation, and to explain to them how they were to live until Christ came.

The truth of the Rapture is one of the most glorious of all Christian doctrines. It is wonderfully encouraging and uplifting. Knowing Jesus will return soon to take those who believe in Him to heaven to be with Him forever is comforting and motivating. Yet, despite its simple truth, much confusion and misunderstanding has arisen around this simple doctrine. It's easy to understand that Satan would do what he can to confuse and cloud this beautiful truth. He did the same thing in Paul's day, too.

Not long after Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, telling them about Jesus' coming back for them, wrong ideas started to develop which took away from the comfort of this truth. For instance, some false teachers in Thessalonica said the persecution they were then facing was the Tribulation which had already started. Yet Paul said the Rapture came before the tribulation. What was true? Who was right?

**I. THE ANXIETY ABOUT THE RETURN OF CHRIST** (chapter 1) Again Paul starts with thanksgiving for their faithfulness in times of suffering. He assured them that God was not unfair in permitting them to experiences the trials they were going through. He reminded them about what the future held if they didn't die before Christ returned. If they had accepted Jesus as Savior they would be taken to heaven immediately when Jesus returned. If they hadn't accepted Him they would live on into the Tribulation and fin themselves under god's judgment.

Paul then prayed God would continue to work out His will in their submissive lives, and they would glorify Him. He assured them they were doing right and weren't under God's judgment, for the Tribulation had not started yet. Then he goes on to prove that they couldn't already be in the Tribulation.

## **II. THE ANSWER ABOUT THE REVELATION OF ANTICHRIST (chapter 2)**

No, Paul says, you haven't missed the Rapture and entered into God's judgment. His proof is that the Antichrist has not yet been revealed and when the Tribulation really begins the Antichrist will be right there. In fact, he can't be revealed until after the Rapture, when the Church and the Holy Spirit are gone. The Antichrist couldn't possibly be revealed yet, for the Rapture must come first. The fact that they were still here proved the Rapture hadn't come.

Paul then builds on the many details given by Daniel and Ezekiel about the Antichrist and his actions on earth. Paul then gives thanks for their spiritual standing as seen in contrast to the deceived world around them. He encouraged them to stand fast in what he had taught them while there and in his first letter.

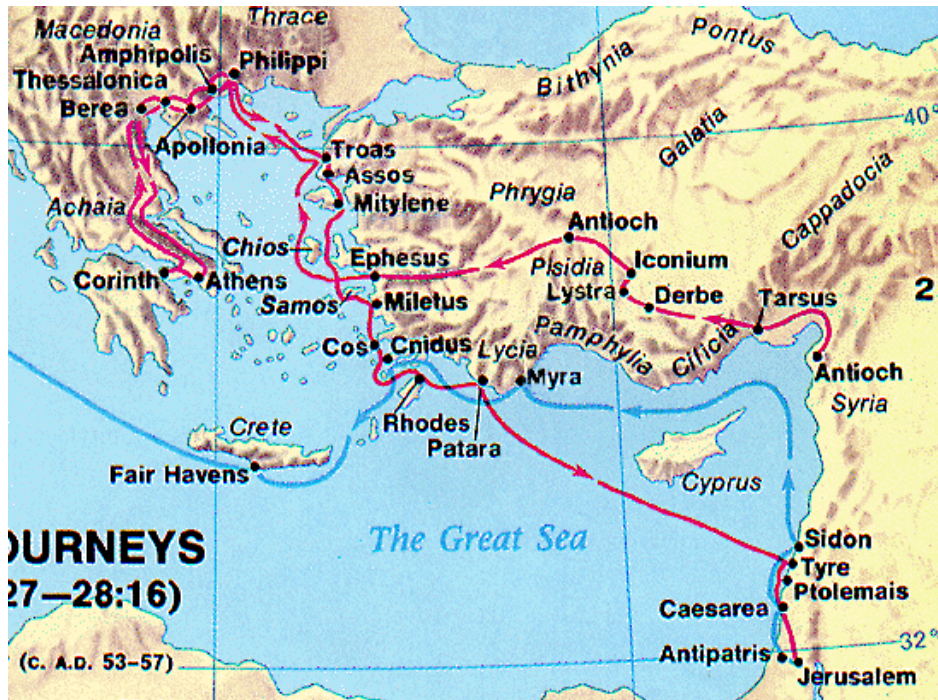
**III. THE APPLICATION ABOUT THEIR RETURN TO WORK (chapter 3)** Paul then tackled the final problem that had arisen about the Rapture. Some refused to work because the Rapture could come at any time, so why bother? Paul got very strong with them, telling them that if someone wouldn't do his share to support himself, no one should do anything to help him! That's how important it is for God's people to live a holy Christian life.

We can't and won't know exactly when it is time for the Rapture, but we can tell when the season gets closer (Matthew 24:36-39). Contractions can be felt earlier, but labor doesn't begin until the pains ('signs') come close and hard.

Paul then closed with prayer. He asked that they would be conscious of God's presence, peace and grace. After a final benediction and greeting, the book closes.



## **20. PAUL'S 3<sup>RD</sup> MISSIONARY JOURNEY (Acts 19-20)**



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When Paul returned from his Second Missionary Journey, he continued to travel in Galatia (Acts 18:23), but 6 months after getting back Paul again left for another missionary journey.

**SEPTEMBER 53** As he had promised, Paul went back to Ephesus to spend time with friends there. It was the largest, most important and influential city in Asia Minor and an important location for the church. In fact, the center of Christianity, which shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch, will soon move to Ephesus, and then finally to Rome. John and Mary, the mother of Jesus, will stay here, too.

While there some who had only heard of John's baptism believed in Jesus and received the Holy Spirit, uniting them with all Jews and Gentiles who also had accepted Jesus as Savior (Acts 19:1-7). Speaking in foreign languages they didn't know was the sign that they were included, just as the others who had received this sign: Jews (Acts 2), half Jews (Acts 8), Gentiles living in Palestine (Acts 10-11) and Gentiles living elsewhere (Acts 19). It was the last time this gift would be given, for no other mention is made of it except Paul's correcting of the Corinthians excesses.

**SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER 53** Paul spoke boldly in the synagogue for 3 months, until the Jews hardener their hearts against him, and then he left (Acts 19:8-9).

**DECEMBER 53 - DECEMBER 55** For 2 years Paul taught daily in a local lecture hall (v. 10). Everyone in Ephesus and its surrounding area was exposed to the gospel during that time. Miraculous things happened, showing that God's power is greater than the demonic power behind the idols they worshipped there (11-20). Tradition says Paul taught 5 hours a day in addition to discipline Apollos, Aquilla, Priscilla and others and witnessing in town (Acts 20:20f). He probably worked some at making tents for an income. He was instrumental in starting churches in Colossae, Laodicea, Hieroppolis, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and other places. He was jailed at least once (II Cor. 11:23-27). This is his longest recorded stay in one place.

Paul was no super-hero. He faced all the same problems and frustrations we do. He was plagued with the carnal Corinthians and wrote 2 letters to them, one lost and the other is our ! Corinthians. He wanted to take the money he had gathered to Jerusalem but wasn't able to do that

(v. 21-22). He had terrible trials and sufferings there, things he referred to as “fighting with beasts” (Acts 20:17-19; I Cor 15:30-32; II Cor 1:8-11). There was much opposition without and stress within (Acts 20:19). Still, he persevered one day at a time on God’s strength.

**SPRING 56** When a great disturbance arose against him from those who made idols of Diana, Paul realized it was time to leave and minister elsewhere (Acts 19:23-41). God often used riots and rejection to cause him to move on to a new group. Too often we quit all together when God just wants us to move on to work with someone else.

**SUMMER 56** Paul went to Troas where he wrote a third (lost) letter to the Corinthians. He was distracted by Titus’ failure to return from Corinth so he went to find him (II Cor 12:13).

**LATE SUMMER 56** Paul landed at Neapolis, then went to Philippi. The church there was the most fault-free, supportive church of all the ones he started so it must have been encouraging and helpful to spend time with them. Even though they couldn’t afford it, they kept sending money for his support. They were going through much persecution and many were being killed.

**EARLY FALL 56** Paul then moved on to Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 20:1-2). Timothy rejoined Paul, who was suffering much from his thorn in the flesh. He was depressed and distracted by the problems the Corinthian believers were causing. Then Titus arrived from Corinth with good news of the repentance of many in sin in Corinth. Still, many there were bitterly opposed to Paul.

Paul then went to Nicopolis, a better climate for his health, and wrote his forth letter to the Corinthians (II Cor.). He also visited Illyricum, which was a vast province which was out of his way and contained aggressive, warlike people with old pagan religions (Yugoslavia and Albania today).

**NOVEMBER 56** Paul returned to Corinth to spend the winter (Acts 20:2b). He encouraged the believers to be faithful and reach out to other churches in the area in Athens, Cenchrea, etc. His plan was to go on to Spain and Rome, but that had to be put off because he had to take the money collected for the poor, suffering believers to Jerusalem first. Therefore he wrote a letter to the Romans saying he would come a little later and containing a summary of the messages he wanted to give them. His disappointment is our blessing, for now we have the Book of Romans written down.

**MARCH - MAY 57** Even those plans changed because of a plot against his live (Acts 20:3) so he went back through Macedonia instead, which must have tried his patience. His interruptions are even interrupted. His change in plans have to be changed again and again. No one is immune from that. He did have friends come along for fellowship and protection (v. 4-5). **April 6** they set sail from Neapolis, the seaport for Philippi. It took 5 days to sail to Troas and they waited there **April 15-19** for others to join them. Then they ministered there **April 20-25**. This is when Eutychus fell asleep and fell out the window and died but God brought him back to life. Paul, Luke and others went by boat to Assos, Mitylene, Kios, Samos, Miletus and Ephesus **Monday, April 25 to Sat, April 30**. He stayed in Ephesus until **Monday, May 2**. During this time he had a long talk with the leaders. Leaving Ephesus was a hard, tearful event for all concerned. Paul took a ship to Tyre, arriving **Tuesday, May 10**. During his 7 days there he was urged to not go to Jerusalem because God was showing that troubles awaited him there. He traveled by foot to Caesarea (**May 20**) and stayed at Philip’s home. Agabus again warned him about being arrested but Paul followed God’s leading and arrived in Jerusalem on **Tuesday, May 27**. Paul’s last major missionary trip was over. God had an entirely new type of assignment awaiting him.

## **21. I CORINTHIANS: WORLDLY WISDOM**

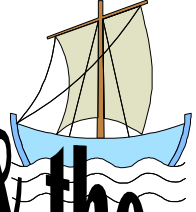
TITLE: Named for recipients  
AUTHOR: Paul  
DATE of WRITING: 55 AD  
PLACE of WRITING: Ephesus  
RECIPIENTS: Church at Corinth

KEY VERSE:: *For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. ... But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way. ... But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 14:33; 14:40; 15:57*

KEY WORDS: "Wisdom, love, resurrection, cross, Spirit, body, gifts, corruption"

PURPOSE: Address certain situations of worldliness that were defeating the Corinthian church.

THEME: To correct errors in Christian conduct by going by God's wisdom instead of man's worldly wisdom.



# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

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We generally think that the greatest danger to the church today comes from without: persecution, oppression, etc. The real danger, however, comes not from without but from within. We are often our own greatest enemy! That is especially true of the church in Corinth. They were believers, but they lived like unbelievers. The church wasn't influencing society. Society was influencing the church.

**CORINTH** The city of Corinth was in present-day Greece. It was Greek, but very 'Roman' since it was the capital of the whole area. It was large (1/4 million people) and full of pride and pleasure. It had a reputation for being very immoral. To call someone a 'Corinthian' was a great insult. Paul was there on his Second Missionary Journey, 50-52 AD. When he was kicked out of the synagogue he started a church and stayed 1 ½ years. He actually wrote 4 letters to the church there. We have the second (called I Corinthians) and fourth (called II Corinthians) in our Bible. Paul then visited them again for 3 months. It was a very worldly, carnal church. The people were believers, but their world view, their motives, their priorities and their thought processes were the same as they were before salvation. They were living by the world's ways and wisdom, not God's. That is why Paul writes to them.

**I. DIVISIONS (1 – 4)** Because of their ungodly viewpoints and values, they were having the same problems after salvation that they had before. They were comparing themselves with each other and putting down those who were different. They had groups based on who they followed: Paul, Apollos, Peter or Christ (the 'super-spiritual' ones claimed this). They also divided over social status and material means. They even made some spiritual gifts superior to others and had divisions over that. This undermined their unity and brought other problems.

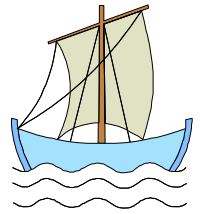
**II. DISORDERS (5 – 6)** In taking the world's outlook on things they opened themselves to sins. Incest, lawsuits against fellow believers, and immorality in general were tolerated and accepted. Paul has to warn them and show them how they are wrong in these things.

**III. DIFFICULTIES (7 – 14)** While only some were involved in the immorality and lawsuits, it seems everyone was affected in other ways. By still following their beliefs and views from before salvation, they were experiencing troubles in other areas. What about marrying someone who wasn't a believer? If one became a Christian and their mate didn't, could they leave that mate? Why not divorce when things got tough like the rest of the culture? What was wrong with sex before marriage or sex outside marriage? Was it OK to eat cheaper meat which had been offered to idols? Why should a woman have to submit to her husband? Why did a man have to take the lead in his family? What was wrong with observing the pagan love feasts and adding the Lord's Supper to them? Why wasn't one who had an impressive spiritual gift like tongues superior spiritually to one who didn't have that gift? What was wrong with showing off one's gift during the church service? On and on the list went.

**IV. DISBELIEF (15)** The culmination of these worldly thoughts and attitudes was that the resurrection was questioned. It didn't make sense to think of one coming back from death. But without the resurrection, what was left of their faith? If Jesus never raised from the dead there is no power, no hope, no forgiveness – nothing but another belief system which is no better nor any worse than the others. That's where their thinking was going, and that's why Paul was so concerted to writ to them as quickly and directly as possible.

What about you? What about your world view, your value and belief system? Does it line up more with the world or the Bible? I don't mean just what you profess to believe, I mean what you practice in daily life. How different are you from the unbelievers around you in values and goals, in priorities and motives? There are many modern Corinthian believers today – make sure you aren't one of them!

# 22. II CORINTHIANS: A GODLY MINISTRY



TITLE: Named for recipients

AUTHOR: Paul

DATE of WRITING: Late 55 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Ephesus

RECIPIENTS: Church at Corinth

KEY VERSE: *For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 4:5; 5:20-21*

KEY WORDS: "Ministry" (18 times), "glory, boast" (20 times)

PURPOSE:

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I CORINTHIANS	II CORINTHIANS
Objective & Practical	Subjective & Personal
Insight into the character of an early church	Insight into the character of Paul
Deliberate Instruction	Impassioned Testimony
Warning against pagan influences	Warning against Judaistic influences

THEME: Paul defends himself as a true minister of the Gospel and reestablishes a good relationship with the Corinthians.

**BACKGROUND** Paul spent 1 ½ years at Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey. He left for Ephesus and Apollos stayed at Corinth awhile. Then Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians condemning immorality and asking them to start a collection for the poor. We don't have a copy of this letter. As reports came to Paul in Ephesus about the problems arising in Corinth, he wrote to them the letter we call I Corinthians. Timothy went to Corinth to help get things settled, but more difficulties arose. To counter Paul's recent letter, his apostolic authority was being questioned. Timothy personally went to Paul with this matter and Paul stopped by Corinth for a short visit during which he was grossly insulted by someone in the church. After he left Paul sent a letter about the money they were collecting for Jerusalem, a letter we don't have. Titus delivered this letter and then was to bring a report back to Paul. Paul was so anxious to find out the news that he started out to meet Titus. They ran into each other half way, and Paul rejoiced in Titus' good report of their godly response to Paul's words. This made Paul so glad he immediately wrote another letter to them, which we call II Corinthians. Later Paul went there and stayed for 3 months, during which time he wrote the letter to the Romans.

II Corinthians is the most autobiographical of Paul's Epistles. It provides insight into his personal life and ministry not seen elsewhere. Because of the false charges against him, Paul reveals things about himself and his ministry he would never have written down. If it sounds like bragging, it's really just self defense. Paul knows they won't believe God's truth unless they see him as God's true messenger. Thus we get rare insight into the warm, human side of Paul. This letter comes from his heart, unlike Romans which comes from his head.

**I. COMMISSION OF PAUL (1:12 – 7:16)** False teachers caused Paul a lot of trouble. They often carried fake letters of commendation so they could minister in churches and be paid by those churches. While doing so they viciously criticized Paul's appearance and poor speaking ability. They said he didn't have apostolic authority since he wasn't one of Jesus' 12 disciples. Paul answers their charges and talks about what he had been doing and why. He shows that his words are from God, and that therefore they are correct in believing and accepting them. He shares from his heart about what he has been through and why.

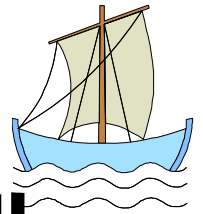
**II. CONTRIBUTION FOR THE SAINTS (8:1 – 9:15)** Wherever he went Paul encouraged the Gentile churches to collect money to send to Jerusalem to help their poor brothers there. The gospel came through the Jews to the Gentiles, and now they can help them back. Jews in Jerusalem who became believers lost their families, jobs, everything. Paul talked to the Corinthians about this, too, showing it is all of our responsibility to help believers in need.

**III. CREDENTIALS OF PAUL (10:1 – 13:10)** Paul answered charges about his being too easy on some in the church. He refers to Jesus' example of forgiveness and mercy. He is accused of not accepting support for his ministry, and he explains why he chose to not exercise that right. He even told them of a time he died and went to heaven before coming back to life. What a wonderful experience that was!

In conclusion Paul tells them to repent and turn 100% from false teachings and teachers to God so things would be fine when Paul got there. He said he wanted to come in love and joy, not with scoldings or disciplining. He promised he would come soon and prove beyond doubt that God supported him and his teachings.



## **23. ROMANS: SALVATION**



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TITLE: Named for the recipients

AUTHOR: Paul

DATE of WRITING: 56 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Corinth

RECIPIENTS: Church at Rome

KEY VERSE:: *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."*  
1:16-17

KEY WORDS: "Christ" (39 times), "faith" (37 times), "justify" 17 times

PURPOSE: To teach the basic truths of the Christian faith to a place he has long wanted to visit but hasn't been able to visit.

THEME: All about salvation and living the Christian life.

Every preacher's dream is to have one time in his life when he can say whatever he wants with no time limit and no interruptions. Perhaps that's why so many of us dream of writing a book. Most of us will have to wait until heaven, though, for the chance to preach and teach without a time limit. Few of us get that chance on earth. Paul is one of the fortunate ones. He was known to preach all night long, but he still had time constraints. He started in Athens giving his total overall teaching of salvation and the Christian life, but he didn't get to finish. Finally in writing to the Romans he was able to say it all!

**THE GREATNESS OF ROMANS** Romans is perhaps the finest book in the New Testament. Many would say that if they had to pick just one book of the Bible to keep and use it would be the book or Romans. It has led to more great revivals than any other book and, because of its breadth and scope, stands head and shoulders about other books. Paul's other writings were to address specific problems or doctrinal issues. In Romans he is free to choose his topic, and he chose salvation and its results in our life. There is no greater topic to be had.

**LIVING BY FAITH** Paul starts off stating his theme in 1:16-17: "The righteous shall live by faith." This is actually quoted from Habakkuk and led to Martin Luther's conversion and the Reformation. It is actually a play on words in the Aramaic by Paul. First he says that those who become justified shall have eternal life by faith, accepting God's free gift of salvation. That is expanded in Romans 1-4. Then he also says that those who have become justified by faith shall live their daily lives by that same faith. This is expanded in Romans 5-15. This not only summarizes the book but our own lives.

**I. SIN – guilt of all (1:18 – 3:20)** Before showing the solution, Paul shows the problem – sin. Those without God's revelation (Gentiles) are guilty of sin. Those with God's revelation (Jews) are also guilty of sin. In fact, ALL are guilty and condemned.

**II. SALVATION – provision for all (3:21 – 5:21)** God provided for our sins in the person of Jesus Christ (3:21-31). It is up to us to freely accept this gift of salvation by faith (4:1-25). When we do we have all the blessings and benefits of salvation (5:1-11). This is all freely given in Jesus (5:12-21). However the book doesn't end here. Salvation is just the start, then comes the command to live for Jesus.

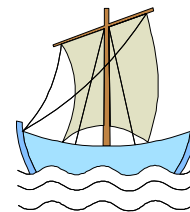
**III. SANCTIFICATION – provision for all believers (6:1 – 8:39)** After salvation we must live a holy life unto God. Our sin has been paid for and removed, so in actual practice we are to not live in sin (6:1-23). We are freed from the power of sin to control us. Grace is not an excuse to sin. We'll never have victory over sin by trying to keep the law, for that isn't its purpose (7:1-25). We have freedom only in Jesus (8:1-39). If Romans is the crown jewel of the Bible, then Romans 8 is the focal point of most beauty in this whole jewel. It is certainly a chapter well worth memorizing. It shows the victory we have in Jesus.

**IV. SOVEREIGNTY – provision for Jews & Gentiles (9:1 – 11:36)** With Gentiles now accepted by faith, what about Jews? God sovereignly chose them through Abraham. Even though they disobeyed and failed Him, He won't reject them. He may temporarily set them aside so Gentiles can come to salvation, but they will one day turn to Jesus for salvation and be restored as God's chosen people.

**V. SERVICE – provision for daily life (12:1 – 15:13)** Paul concludes, as he always does, by applying the doctrine he has just taught to daily life. He changes from teacher to preacher. He talks about our daily life (12:1-21), daily conduct (13:1-14), and daily relationships (14:1 – 15:13).

Spend time in this most special book. It's a treasure mine of special promises and blessings.

## **24. PAUL'S 1<sup>ST</sup> TRIP TO ROME** **(Acts 21-28)**



# **ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH**

This time in Paul's life could be called the beginning of the end. While he will live and minister for almost a dozen more years, he will no longer be the foremost evangelist and church planter. He will no longer be in the vanguard of the church as it grows and spreads. He will still write many important books, thus having a key role in formulating doctrine, but he won't be the point man as the church moves forward. No one man will replace him, but instead God will raise up a group of men such as Timothy, Titus, Mark and many others to work in various areas. The church is too spread out for any one man to coordinate and lead it all any more. Faithful Luke stays with Paul no matter what and records for us what Paul goes through (Acts 21-28) from 57 to 62 AD.

**FRIDAY, MAY 27, 57** Despite being warned that he would be imprisoned, Paul continued to Jerusalem to finish his mission. He delivered the offering money to help the poor Jewish believers there and reported to James about what God was doing among Gentiles

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throughout the world. Jewish believers in Jerusalem were very strict about believers having to keep the law. They were reluctant to move quickly from law to grace. This caused problems between them and Gentile believers. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) was to resolve such an issue. Because of his great involvement with Gentiles, and because his main emphasis wasn't to force them to obey the Jewish law, Jewish believers in Jerusalem were accusing Paul of telling them to NOT keep the law. This was not true, but rumors can be a terrible things to stop.

None of the leaders wanted the church divided into a Jewish church and a Gentile church. With Paul's high visibility, some would gravitate to him and others gather in opposition to him. Paul thought he could avoid this by doing something to show that he wasn't opposed to the keeping of the law, if it was done for the right reason (to honor God, not to earn salvation). Thus it was decided that he would pay for the sacrifices for four Jews who wanted to offer them but couldn't afford them. This should show he wasn't against keeping the law.

**SUNDAY, MAY 29** Saturday was the Sabbath so nothing was done in honor of keeping it free from work, but on Sunday Paul paid for the sacrifices for these men for 7 days.

**THURSDAY, JUNE 2** As was his habit, Paul went to the temple every day to study, teach, pray and worship. Some long-time enemies from Asia saw him in the temple. They had seen him in town earlier with an Ephesian Gentile and thus jumped to the conclusion that Paul still had the man with him in the temple. When this rumor spread a riot ensued, for the penalty of bringing a Gentile into the forbidden part of the temple was immediate death for the Gentile. No Gentile was found but the mob of those who were opposed to Paul because he was a Christian grew and spread out, until they found him and tried to kill him. Roman soldiers from Antonia rescued Paul and carried him away because he was too wounded from his beating to walk. The Romans thought Paul was a trouble maker and were surprised to find he was an educated Roman citizen. He got permission to speak to the crowd that had followed along and gave a short summary of his life. When he got to the part about God providing salvation for Gentiles as well as Jews the mob erupted again and tried to kill him, so the Romans put him in prison for safe keeping.

**FRIDAY, JUNE 3** The Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel, sent some leading men to tell the Romans why they hated Paul. Paul, not realizing the speaker was the high priest, verbally insulted him and a Jewish guard slapped Paul for it. When Paul realized who the man was he apologized. Then he started talking about the resurrection, which started the Sadducees and Pharisees, the 2 main political parties in the Sanhedrin, argue heatedly for each believed differently. That night, while sleeping, Jesus appeared to Paul and told him to take courage, for he would testify about Jesus in Jerusalem. That had been Paul's dream for many years. Little did he know how it would come about.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 4** Meanwhile, a group of 40 Jews banded together and pledged to not eat until Paul was dead. They conspired as to how they could easiest end his life. Somehow Paul's nephew, who was in Jerusalem, found out about this plot and told Paul, who told the Roman authorities. To protect his life, the Romans decided to transfer Paul to Caesarea where security was stronger and Jewish opposition lest severe. Paul was moved by night, guarded by a large detachment of Romans soldiers. They made one stop on the way and arrived in Caesarea safely.

**THURSDAY, JUNE 9** Felix was an ex-slave who sole his wife from her first husband. He was a fine military man but didn't make the transition to political leadership too well. Religious leaders and their fancy lawyers arrived from Jerusalem to press charges against Paul before Felix and his court. They accused Paul of treason and stirring up trouble. Paul gave his own defense. Felix said he would issue a decision later and placed Paul under house arrest so his friends could have access to him.

**MID-JUNE** Soon after that trial Felix help another trial with his wife Drusilla, who was a wild woman with some Jewish background. They heard Paul's testimony again, didn't make a decision, and said they would listen more later. They were stalling for a bribe, after which they would release him.

**JULY 59** Two years passed with Paul still under house arrest. Felix was replaced by Festus who was honorable, fair and good to the Jews, who were quite difficult to rule. The religious rulers in Jerusalem petition Festus to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem for trial as a favor to them, a show of good will. Paul refused, for he knew he would be ambushed and killed before reaching Jerusalem. When Festus wanted him to go to Jerusalem Paul appealed to Caesar, a special right that Roman citizens had, like appealing to our Supreme Court. Nero was the Caesar at that time.

**LATER IN JULY 59** Agrippa heard Paul's case, along with his sister/wife Bernice. Agrippa was a shrewd politician. His father had beheaded James. Festus asked his advice on how to handle Paul's appeal to Caesar, for there really weren't any charges against Paul except some religious ones by the Jews. He couldn't be sent to Caesar on those charges, but to release him would bring down the wrath of the religious rulers. That would not be a wise political move at all.

**THE NEXT DAY** Paul spoke to them all, giving his testimony again and inviting them to believe. They stalled and put Paul off. Now they couldn't release him because he had appealed to Caesar.

**MID AUGUST – OCT 4, 59** Paul sailed to Crete.

**OCTOBER 5** They arrived in Fair Havens. It was too late to sail to Rome because the weather became dangerous, but the centurion didn't want to wait until spring so decided to chance it.

**OCTOBER 10-24** Sure enough, they ran into a terrible storm which swept the ship onto a beach.

**OCTOBER – FEB 60** Paul and others spent the winter on Malta. Paul spent the winter ministering.

**EARLY MARCH 60** Paul arrived in Rome by the Appian Way. During his 2 years in prison there he write letters to Ephesus, Colossae, Philippi, and Philemon, letters in our Bible today.

# **25. EPHESIANS: IN CHRIST**

TITLE: Named for recipients

AUTHOR: Paul

DATE of WRITING: 60 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Rome (prison)

RECIPIENTS: Church at Ephesus

KEY VERSE: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ... As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 1:3; 4:1*

KEY WORDS: "In" (93 times); "grace" (12 times); "walk" (8 times); "body" (8 times)

PURPOSE: "In Christ" key phrase

Romans: We are justified "in Christ" (3:24)

I Corinthians: We are sanctified "in Christ" (1:2)

II Corinthians: We are vindicated "in Christ" (11:19)

Galatians: We are liberated "in Christ" (2:4)

Ephesians: We are exalted "in Christ" (1:3)

Philippians: We are exultant "in Christ" (1:26)

Colossians: We are complete "in Christ" (2:9)

Philemon: We are graced out "in Christ" (15)

I Thessalonians: We are hopeful "in Christ" (1:3)

II Thessalonians: We are glorified "in Christ" (1:12)

I Timothy: We are faithful "in Christ" (1:18)

II Timothy: We are triumphant "in Christ" (14:6)

Titus: We are made examples "in Christ" (2:7)

THEME: The heavenly position of the believer and the daily life which corresponds to this position.

Suppose you had a long lost relative who died leaving their whole estate to only you. The lawyers had tracked you down and re at this moment trying to contact you to tell you all these riches are now yours. It's already yours, you just don't realize it yet! It might seem impossible, but this is true. God is trying to contact you. Ephesians is the letter He is sending about all your inherited riches and blessings. Its not about material possessions with will decay and be left behind, its about something yours eternally.

**EPHESUS** The city of Ephesus was one of the top 3 cities of its day, similar to New York City. Paul spent 3 years there. It was a very strategic location for a church.

**US IN CHRIST (1 – 3)** Paul starts talking about salvation, how God the Father planned it (election past, present & future – 1:4-6) He was the Architect who drew the blueprint. Then Paul writes about God the Son who provided it (redemption past, present and future – 1:7-12). He is the builder Who followed God's blueprint. Finally he writes of God the Holy Spirit Who vapplied it regeneration past, present and future – 1:13-14). He is the One Who delivers the title deed to that which Jesus built according to God's blueprint.

Of course, this is all by grace (2:8-9). God loves us. He knows everything about us and loves us anyway. There is nothing we have done or can do to earn His love. It is given freely and unconditionally. This is grace. There is nothing we can do to earn His love or lose His love. If we



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wish, we may reject His love, or even reject God Himself. But He will never stop loving us. When we decide to recognize and accept His love, we will feel a joy like we've never known before.

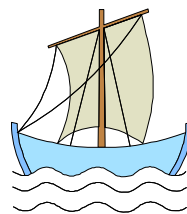
#### **CHRIST IN US (4 – 6)**

<b>(1-3) LIVE what</b>	<b>you ARE (4-6)</b>
POSITION of the believer	PRACTICE of the believer
Heavenly Standing	Earthly State
Our heritage in Christ	Our life in Christ
DOCTRINE	PRACTICE

As is his pattern, Paul applies in the second half of his writings what he teaches in the first half. Because of our position in Christ we should live like Him. We must live a holy life. WWJD. He applies this specifically to husbands, wives, parents, children, slaves and masters. He concludes with a most important section on spiritual warfare and our armor. Those who seek to live like Jesus and for Jesus better be prepared to fight for their spiritual growth for the enemy will oppose any attempts to grow spiritually.



# 26. COLOSSIANS: CHRIST IS SUPREME



## ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

TITLE: Named for the recipients

AUTHOR: Paul

DATE of WRITING: 60 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Rome (in prison)

RECIPIENTS: Church in Colossae

KEY VERSE: *and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. ... and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. 1:8; 2:10*

KEY WORD: "head" (3 times)

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PURPOSE::

	TO GIVE TRUE TEACHING	TO CORRECT FALSE TEACHING
ABOUT SALVATION	Romans	Galatians
ABOUT CHRIST	Ephesians	Colossians

THEME: Show the preeminence of Christ – the head not only of the church but of the whole universe.

In my hometown is a gray concrete building just off the main street. It's not the largest, nor the smallest building in town. I first remember seeing it when a child and often went past it but never paid much attention to it. Oh, I'd been inside a time or two, but didn't have any special memory of it. Then one Sunday I went inside to worship with a church that met there and I found good fellowship, times of praise and worship, and a source of learning and growth. Now the building has an entirely different meaning to me when I pass it.

There's a book in the New Testament that is quite similar. It's not the biggest nor the smallest. We all know it's there and go by it often, even stopping in from time to time. However we often don't take the time to really to see what's inside. It's the book we call Colossians.

**BACKGROUND** Colossae was a small town near larger Laodicea. Although he was in the nearby region we have no record of Paul's ever having gone to Colossae. The church there was started by some of the nearby churches which Paul had started. Paul wrote this letter to them while in prison in Rome. Because it is so similar in content to the book of Ephesians, it is often ignored and Ephesians chosen to be studied.

Paul wrote to encourage them to stay true to God and watch for the false teaching called "Gnosticism." Jude and I John also refute this heresy. Gnostics believed that an intellectually enlightened few were far above the masses of humanity. To them 'god' was an impersonal force and they rejected salvation for sin. Many of their lies Satan is recycling today under the label of 'New Age.' Paul refutes this heresy, not by showing its inconsistencies and inaccuracies but by showing the truth of Jesus. That's a good lesson for us, too. Instead of attacking another's false teaching, lift Jesus up as the Truth. Paul shows that Christ is Supreme over everyone and everything.

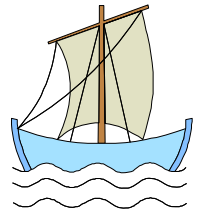
**I. THE EXALTED CHRIST (1:15-29)** Christ is exalted as the head of all creation and the church. He is also extolled as the reconciler of all things, the only One who reunites God and man. He points out that He did it by His work on the cross as our substitute. Paul says that true wisdom only comes by knowing Jesus, not through any counterfeit system which claims to have all the answers themselves.

**II. THE EXALTED CHRISTIAN (2:1-23)** Paul says that Christ is exalted over philosophy and appeals to them to totally turn from all false teachings and teachers. He points out that any system of legalism fails, that we are free from all that through Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Paul also shows Christ is greater than any mystical teaching or any system of asceticism.

**III. THE EXALTED CALLING (3:1 – 4:6)** Soon Jesus will return for us, so Paul says even now we are to be like Him for then we will be totally like Him. He then applies this to various areas of our lives: everyday life, family relationships, work responsibilities, and our own individual spiritual lives as well.

It's been said that if Christ is not Lord OF all, He's not Lord AT all. Make sure He is first in your life, the Supreme One who is exalted above all else. If He is not all in your life, He's not in His proper, deserving place!

# **27. PHILEMON: CHRISTIAN** **COURTESY**



## **ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH**

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TITLE: Named for recipient

AUTHOR: Paul

DATE of WRITING: 60 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Rome (in prison)

RECIPIENT: Philemon, a rich and influential  
believer in Colossae

KEY VERSE: *So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as  
you would welcome me. 18 If*

*he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it  
to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will  
pay it back-not to mention that you owe me your very self.  
17-19*

KEY WORDS: "Love," "beseech," "profitable," "servant"

PURPOSE: Paul intercedes with Philemon to be gracious to his  
slave Onesimus who ran away and is not returning to his service.

THEME: Christian courtesy and forgiveness

Several years Readers Digest printed the following. Talking with a friend recently, I remarked that status symbols are getting hard to come by. A great many people, if they want one badly enough, can have a new car, a fur coat, a Florida vacation, a boat, a cottage, a country-club membership, or even a college degree. "What's left," I asked, "to distinguish a man?" "Manners," he replied, "just good manners." The short letter of Philemon distinguishes Paul as a great man, a man of manners.

**BACKGROUND** Paul wrote to Philemon from prison just before his release. Onesimus, a slave of Philemon, ran away from Philemon after robbing him. He ended up in Rome meeting Paul, who led him to salvation. Onesimus stayed with Paul and helped him, becoming very useful to Paul while in house arrest. Philemon was a close friend of Paul. Paul had led him to salvation years before. He was one of the leaders in the church at Colossae. One of the house-churches that made up the church in Colossae met in his home. Now Paul is sending Onesimus back to his master with a letter asking for Philemon to forgive him. When the letter is closely studied one can see many ways in which Paul exercises Christian courtesy.

Paul begins by writing Philemon friend to friend. He doesn't 'pull rank' and use his apostolic authority. Courtesy is made up of petty sacrifices, putting others first. It must come from the heart, an attitude of true love for others.

**I. PRAISE OF PHILEMON (4-7)** Paul begins by praying for Philemon, asking God to bless him. He then praises him for all the good he has done for Paul and the Gospel. Complementing people is very important and shows very good manners. Criticizing people is easy and does no one any good.

Remember that this letter was first read before the whole church. It wasn't delivered just to Philemon, but was for the whole church. Having Paul praise him was good for Philemon, setting the groundwork for the request that was coming.

**II. PLEA FOR ONESIMUS (8-17)** Paul wants Philemon to have the same gracious forsaking of rights for Onesimus that Paul has for Philemon. He wants him, too, to be polite and kind, based on love. Paul is showing Philemon love by sending Onesimus back to him and not using force to make Philemon forgive him. Paul wants Philemon to show love to him by forgiving Onesimus and accepting him back. Paul even points out that Onesimus has been very useful to him in prison, and that accepting him back without pressing charges would be like accepting Paul himself. He is using every argument he can to make sure Philemon comes to a godly, courteous decision in this matter. He isn't trying to force or manipulate him, or he wouldn't have sent Onesimus back. He sincerely wants to make it easier for Philemon to do the right thing. Paul is treating Philemon as he would want to be treated in similar circumstances – the Golden Rule in operation.

Paul says he is Philemon's friend, fellow-worker, brother and partner. To reject Onesimus would be to reject Paul and such a thing is unthinkable. Notice Paul never tries to sort out the reason Onesimus left. Whose fault was it? What went wrong? It's very hard to get to the bottom of things that way, often it just makes things worse. Christian courtesy means forgiving without having to prove guilt or innocence.

**III. PROMISE OF PAUL (18-22)** Paul says he will even pay Onesimus' debt so Philemon doesn't have to take the loss. Of course Philemon would never charge Paul for such a thing. Paul is very positive in what he expects of Philemon, saying he knows he will do the right thing. That is much more effective than being critical or condemning. Paul concludes by saying he will come for a visit when released from prison, and he probably soon did come. Thus we see valuable insights into Paul the man and his relationships with other believers. It's a fine example for us, too. Remember, you can't be too courteous!

## 28. PHILIPPIANS: JOY



TITLE: Named for recipients

AUTHOR: Paul

DATE of WRITING: 60-61 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Rome (in prison)

RECIPIENTS: Church in Philippi

KEY VERSE: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 4:4*

KEY WORD: "Joy (rejoice)" 18 times; "Mind/think" 10 times

PURPOSE:

	GALATIANS	EPHESIANS	PHILIPPIANS
Style	Logical Arguments	Teaching & Application	Inform & Console
Main subject	Salvation (free from law)	Christ (possessions of believer 'in Christ')	Life of joy
Purpose	Correct	Instruct	Inspire
Tone	Sharp Rebuke	Calm, Victorious	Tender, Joyful

THEME: Rejoice in the Lord!

The famous German philosopher Nietzsche once said about Christians: "I would believe in their salvation if they looked a little more like people who have been saved!" The early church made a profound impression on their world because of their joy. Paul wrote to one of his favorite churches, the church at Philippi, to encourage them in their joy. There is no problem to correct, just joy to share – and Paul wrote it from prison!

**PHILIPPI** The city of Philippi was a near Thessalonica. It was a Greek city which Paul had visited on his third missionary journey, about 6 or 7 years before writing to them. When the believers in Philippi heard that Paul was in prison they sent Epaphroditus to Rome to see how Paul was doing and to deliver a gift of money. He needed money to pay for his quarters and food, for he was in house arrest and had to provide for these things himself. Epaphroditus realized Paul was needier than they thought so he stayed and worked for money to give to Paul. During this time he got sick and almost died. When he recovered Paul sent him back to Philippi with this letter. He wanted his friends there to rejoice that Epaphroditus was OK and that Paul was OK, too. Our book of Philippians is the letter Paul sent with him.

**I. JOY IN SUPPORT (1:3-11)** Paul begins by thanking them for their concern and support for him. He prays for them. Then he gets right to the heart of something he wanted to say.

**II. JOY IN SUFFERING (1:12-30)** They felt that prison had ended Paul's ministry, but Paul says NO! He pointed out clearly that his afflictions actually promoted the gospel for he had more time to pray, could witness to the guards and Caesar's household (many of whom became believers), and had lots more time to pray. Plus his being in prison had stimulated believers and churches everywhere to take up his work as well as to pray for him. Also, he used this time to write an important part of our New Testament: Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. Truly "all things work together for the good of those who love the Lord" (Rom 8:28).

In addition, Paul saw his sufferings as making him more Christ-like. He exhorted them to remain steadfast and fearless when they, too, faced suffering.

**III. JOY IN SUBMISSION (2:1-30)** Paul then calls on them to make his joy complete by putting Jesus first in everything. He calls them to unity, humility and self-sacrifice. He uses Christ, Timothy, Epaphroditus and himself as examples. No matter what life brings them, they are to submit to it as God's will for them. This will bring them great joy and peace.

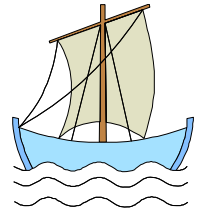
**IV. JOY IN SALVATION (3:1 – 4:3)** Paul warns them against the false teachers that are so prevalent everywhere. They aren't submitting to anyone and they don't have God's joy. Paul challenges them to follow his example, not the false teachers.

**V. JOY IN SUFFICIENCY (4:4-19)** Paul prays they will continue to have peace and joy in all they do. He rejoices at God's power to provide for him in prison and rejoices over their concern and sacrifice. He knows they can't afford to send him money but did. Their concern means more to him than the amount of money. He assures them that God will bless and reward them for their sacrificial giving and assures them he is well provided for.

Paul then concludes in typical letter-writing style for his day. He sends greetings and short messages to some of those in Philippi and passes on greetings to them from some of the men with him. His love for them is evident, as is their for him. Thus they rejoice in each other. What about you? Do others notice your joy and give Jesus the credit? Are you full of a joy that draws others to the Savior? If not, ask God for this fruit of His Spirit now!



## 29. FINAL TRAVELS OF PAUL



# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

**MARCH 60 – MARCH 62** Paul spent 2 years in prison in Rome before being released. Paul was able to teach some of the church leaders, for there already was a strong church established there. Many Jewish leaders came and listened with interest as he told his story to them, too. Timothy, Epaphras, Luke, Onesimus, Mark, Demus and others spent time with Paul there. He wrote letters which have become books in our Bible: Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon. Eventually he was released. The Jews never opposed his release, they knew they couldn't stop him.

**OTHER EVENTS** During this time other events were happening in the early church. Both Matthew and Luke wrote their gospels around 60 AD. In 62 AD James, the brother of Jesus, was martyred. At about that same time Peter went to Rome.

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**MARCH 62 – FALL 67** Paul was free during these 5 ½ years. He traveled and ministered, but time and trials had broken his health. Others were carrying the church forward, but God still had a place and job for Paul. While it's hard to tell with any degree of certainty, we can put together a rough itinerary of Paul's travels during this time.

**SPRING - FALL 62** Paul went to Ephesus with Timothy and left him there (1 Tim. 1:3).

**WINTER 62-63** Paul went to Philippi, his favorite Macedonian church (Philippians 1:26; 2:24). The only place he loved as much as Ephesus. He spent the winter here. During this time he wrote a letter to Timothy, who was struggling with the church in Ephesus. Strong-willed women and false teachers were causing his stomach to knot with stress, and he wanted permission to leave Ephesus but Paul told him to get tough and deal with the situation. He also gave lots of practical advice. Paul had planned on joining Timothy but wasn't able to, so he wrote the letter instead.

**SPRING 63 – SPRING 64** Paul spent this year in Asia Minor. First he went to Ephesus where he was able to assist struggling Timothy. Ephesus was the center for operations for all the churches in the area and a very key location. John and Mary were living in Ephesus, too. Nearby were other churches (the 7 churches in Revelation 2-3) and Paul visited them, too.

In Laodicea and Hierapolis Epaphras was the leader. He was a close friend of Paul, having visited Paul in prison. False teachers are rampant in the area and Paul went there to help solidify the truth in the churches. These two towns were in the same valley, 6 miles apart, with a river flowing between them. Colossae was somewhat further upstream, about 10 miles. Epaphras had delivered the letter to them after Paul wrote it, the book we call Colossians.

During this time Paul made his first-ever trip to Colossae, although he had already written to them. Epaphras founded the church there while Paul was in prison. Philemon lived there, and Paul said he'd come visit him when he could. Also Onesimus was there and Paul wanted to make sure he was OK and thank him for all his help during Paul's arrest in Rome. Apphia lived there as well, another close friend of Paul's. Archippus was one of the pastors there and he knew Paul as well. He was a son of Philemon.

**OTHER EVENTS** While Paul was in the Ephesus area important things were going on elsewhere. Luke wrote Acts to his friend Theophilus as a follow-up to the Gospel of Luke. On July 18, 64 AD fire broke out late at night at the northeast end of the Circus Maximus. This colonnade of shops was

highly inflammable and strong winds fanned the fire. For 5 days it raged, burning much of Rome. Rumor had it that Nero started it himself so he could rebuild Rome just the way he wanted it. To counter this he used the Christians as a scapegoat. A great persecution then began.

It was during this time, in 64 AD, that Peter wrote the letter we call II Peter shortly before he was martyred by Nero.

**SPRING 64 – SPRING 66** To please Nero local officials everywhere started killing Christians. Leaders were especially sought, and Paul above all others. For this reason he went to Spain, a trip he had been wanting to take for some time anyway. It was God's time for Peter to die but not Paul. His work in Macedonia and Asia Minor was done. Other pastors were now in leadership and doing a fine job. The persecution put things underground for the time anyway. Thus Paul sailed from Asia Minor to Massilia (today Marseilles), Spain.

There were Jews and God-fearers there in all the main cities. Paul wanted a fresh start to start a new work where there was none, he didn't want to build on someone else's foundation. He found that in Spain. There were some believers there but no organized church with outreach.

**OTHER EVENTS** While Paul was in Spain the letter to the Hebrews was written, quite possibly by Paul's student Priscilla. The Jewish war or rebellion against Rome also started. It would end in 70 AD with the Jews defeated and their nation destroyed.

**EARLY SUMMER 66** Paul then went to visit Titus on Crete and helped organize the weak churches there. Judaism was flourishing and heresy was strong. Paul couldn't stay long enough to really do all that needed doing, but got things started.

**SUMMER 66** Next Paul went to Miletus to join with Trophimus, an Ephesian who left Greece with Paul for Judea. In Jerusalem he was the innocent cause of Paul's arrest, the one they said Paul brought into the inner court. He got sick while there and couldn't travel on with Paul.

Paul then went to Ephesus where Onesiphorus helped him. Once again he risked himself to help Paul, as he had when Paul was in prison. Timothy was there, too. Hereical teachers named Hymenaeus and Philetus were there, too.

While there Paul wrote back to Titus, encouraging and advising him in the problems Titus faced. That letter is the book of Titus in our Bible.

**FALL 66** Paul visited Carpus while there and left his cloak, books and parchments there. Then he traveled to Corinth to see Erastus who was helping lead the struggling church there. The plan was to have Titus join Paul at Nicopolis where they would winter together.

**WINTER 66 – 67** Nicopolis was a good place to reach out to the surrounding area during the winter. Paul worked with all the churches of Illyricum during that time. Artemas and Tychius were there with him helping him.

**SPRING – FALL 67** Paul next went to Macedonia and Greece. It would be his final place of ministry. It was nice he got to see his beloved Philippi churches one more time.

It's obvious God was behind the growth of the early church. He chose, trained and placed the leaders. He decided who would live and who would die. It is His church. He is the Head. Paul was willing to play whatever role God chose for him, great or small. He had a servant's heart and was a faithful worker for the kingdom – a fine example to us today.

# **30. I TIMOTHY: CHURCH ORDER**



TITLE: Named for recipient

AUTHOR: Paul

DATE of WRITING: 62 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Macedonia

RECIPIENT: Timothy, a young pastor friend

KEY VERSE: *if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. ... But godliness with contentment is great gain. ... But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ... Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, 3:15; 6:6, 11-13, 20*

**From Pentecost to Revelation**

**By Jerry Schroyer Copyright © 2000**

KEY WORDS: "Good" (22 times); "godliness" (8); "doctrine" (8); "teach/teacher" (7)

PURPOSE: Paul is providing guidance for his young trainee as a pastor. He warns him about false teachers and explains how he should operate a church.

THEME: Correct church order.

Before we even knew if our firstborn would be a boy or girl, God laid it on both of our hearts to name him 'Timothy' because he would be a young pastor. Timothy in the Bible is a fine example for anyone to follow. Born to a Greek father and Jewish mother, he was led to salvation in Jesus by Paul on his first missionary journey. Both his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, had had a fine godly influence on him. Because of his spiritual gifts and rapid maturity, and also because he naturally got along very well with him, Paul asked Timothy to come with him and help on his second missionary journey. He helped Paul establish churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth. Paul sent him anywhere and everywhere as his official 'trouble-shooter,' to straighten out tough situations in churches which Paul himself was unable to visit. His went on for years. Timothy and Paul were very close to the very end. He was probably with Paul in Rome the second time Paul was imprisoned there. This arrest ended in Paul's execution. Timothy himself died as a martyr, killed by the Roman government.

**BACKGROUND** I Timothy was written about 3 years before Paul died. Timothy had been sent to Ephesus to iron out problems there while Paul ministered elsewhere. Paul expected to join him in Ephesus but was delayed, so he wrote this letter to Timothy instructing him how to carry on until he got there. Thus we have Paul's insight into how a church should run. Not being able to get to Ephesus was frustrating to Paul and Timothy, but certainly to our benefit.

**I. ORDINATION OF TIMOTHY (1:3-20)** Evidently things weren't going smoothly for easy-going Timothy. False teachers, domineering women, and church conflicts had him asking Paul if he could please leave Ephesus. It was so bad it was causing him stomach problems! Paul told him in no uncertain terms to stay and face up to the opposition. While that would not have been hard for Paul, Timothy was obviously natured quite differently. Thus Paul encourages and supports Timothy in this difficult assignment. He gives him advice and guidance as well as reminding him of his obligation to stay and do the job. The church needed order and he was the one to bring it.

**II. ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH (2:1 – 3:16)** Paul then talks about the importance of prayer in the church and that it should be led by men. He exhorts that Christian women should be marked by the inner adornment of the soul, not by the outward dress of the body. Their lives should express modesty and good works. Men are to be the leaders, women the supporters. Evidently that wasn't happening in Ephesus.

Paul then told Timothy what the qualifications should be for elders and deacons. The male leadership needed straightening up there, too. Who to choose for church leadership is always a very important subject. Since Paul wasn't able to visit there as soon as he had hoped, he instructs Timothy about how to choose and use leaders.

**III. OPERATION OF TIMOTHY (4:1 – 6:19)** This last section of I Timothy relates to Timothy's own walk and work within the church. Paul warns him about false teachers and reminds him of his duty to be a godly teacher. Paul talks about the church as a family and encourages Timothy to treat the church people as he would treat family members: with respect and honor.

How does your church stack up against Paul's standards as listed in I Timothy? If it isn't meeting those principles something is wrong. If Paul were alive he'd come straighten things out. He isn't and he won't, but God is and He will. Be a Timothy and bring order to your church.

# 31. TITUS: DAILY WALK

TITLE: Named for recipient

AUTHOR: Paul

DATE of WRITING: 62 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Corinth

RECIPIENT: Titus, a young pastor Paul is training for ministry

KEY VERSE: *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope-the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. ... But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. 8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. 2:11-14; 3:4-8*

KEY WORDS: "Good" (11 times); "good works" (6 times); "sound" (5 times)

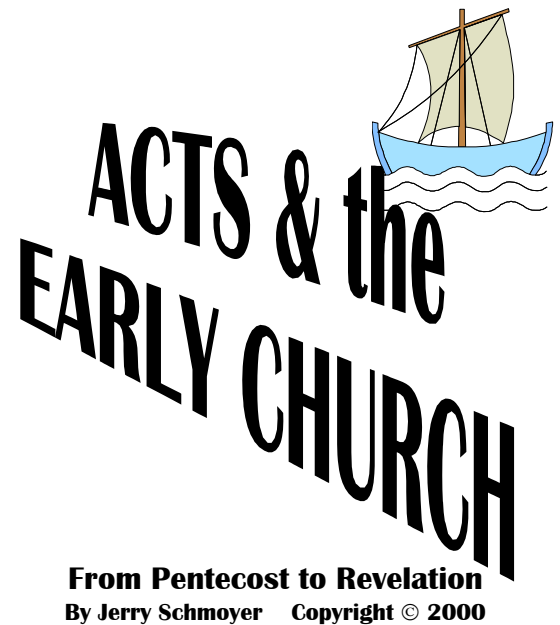
PURPOSE:

I TIMOTHY	TITUS	II TIMOTHY
Mostly pastoral	Less pastoral	Mostly pastoral
Guard the gospel 6:20	Practice the gospel 3:8	Preach the gospel 4:2

THEME: How to live a godly life

After his third missionary journey Paul went to Jerusalem where he was falsely accused and arrested. For his safety he was taken to Caesarea where he spent 2 years in house arrest. Paul appealed to Caesar and was taken to Rome. On the way he was shipwrecked. Eventually he was released because the Jews couldn't prove any charges against him. Paul then went to Ephesus and left Timothy there to help churches in that whole area. Paul continued on to northern Greece and wrote back to Timothy, encouraging him in his work and explaining about church order and organization (I Timothy). Next Paul went to Crete and left Titus there to supervise those churches. Soon Paul left Crete and went to Corinth. From there he wrote back to Titus encouraging him. Eventually he ended up in Ephesus again where he was arrested for the second time and taken back to Rome for the crime of being a Christian. From prison there he wrote to Timothy again (II Timothy).

**BACKGROUND** Sandwiched between I and II Timothy is the book of Titus which is very similar to I Timothy. Titus was a Gentile whom Paul led to salvation. Paul took him to the Jerusalem council to show the leaders a Gentile could be saved without being circumcised. At the end of the third missionary journey Titus again is mentioned. Paul sent him to Corinth to deal with delicate problems there (much the same as Timothy was sent to Ephesus). Mainly, though, Titus worked with the churches on Crete, just as Timothy worked with the churches in Ephesus.



**I. CONDUCT OF THE LEADERS (1:5-16)** Paul begins by reminding Titus how the church leaders were to live and act. Qualifications and requirements were given for deacons and elders. Paul also warns them about false teachers and their danger. Titus couldn't be everywhere on the island of Crete so he needed dependable leaders to oversee the various house-churches there. This was the same set-up used in all the cities where there churches.

**II. CONDUCT OF THE LAITY (2:1-10)** Paul tells Titus how all believers are to live. Older men are to be self-controlled, women reverent and faithful, younger men are to be sensible. All are to set godly examples for others. Servants, too, are to live godly, submissive lives.

In all things they are to live by grace. They are to turn from ungodly lusts and desires. They are to live remembering that Jesus could come back for them at any time and they are to always be ready. Holiness must characterize God's people.

In relationship to the government they are to be good citizens. To all people they are to be ready to do what is good, honest in all they say and do, gracious and forgiving to all, and considerate and humble at all times. This will show others what a Christian really is. They are to avoid stiff and contentions among themselves.

Any who don't follow these principles are to be disciplined so they repent or are removed. This will show the seriousness of sin and keep the church pure. Living the Christian life is mandatory, not optional. It is a requirement, not suggestion. How are you doing?



## **32. I PETER: SUFFERING**

TITLE: Named for the author

AUTHOR: Peter

DATE of WRITING: 63 AD

PLACE of WRITING: 'Babylon' (Rome?)

RECIPIENTS: Jewish believers scattered everywhere

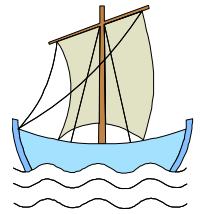
KEY VERSE: *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 4:12-14*

KEY WORDS: "Suffer" (16 times, implied 6 more); "glory" (16 times); "grace" (10 times)

PURPOSE: Peter wants to console persecuted Jewish believers Who are scattered everywhere.

He also wants to prepare them for the trials that are still ahead. He does this by showing them the wonderful hope that lies ahead (1:13) and by Christ's example to us (2:21-23).

THEME: Encouragement to persecuted and suffering Christians



# **ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH**

**From Pentecost to Revelation**

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When you suffer for doing something wrong, like breaking the speeding limit and getting a ticket, it's relatively easy to bear the consequences for you know you are getting what you deserve. But when you suffer for doing something right, like getting fired from your job for telling the truth, that is much harder to bear. We have two options in how to respond: like the world (revenge, retaliation, bitterness) or like Jesus.

Many early Christians suffered unjust persecution for their beliefs. Jewish believers had it especially hard for they also were persecuted by Judaism and lost their family, friends and income. Peter writes to all, but especially to Jewish Christians, to help them stay faithful despite this persecution.

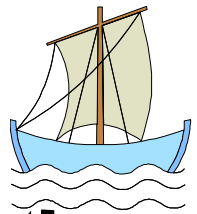
**I. SALVATION (1:1 – 2:10)** First Peter goes back and reminds them of their salvation and all they have in Christ. When you suffer always remember what you get FAR outweighs what you lose! See the copy of the letter on the other side for an outline of this section.

**II. SUBMISSION (2:11 – 3:12)** Throughout 2:11 – 3:12 two themes run side by side: submission and suffering. Peter encourages them to submit to their government, wives to husbands, other believers, church leaders and even to unbelievers to have a good testimony to them. Because we have salvation we are to submit no matter what happens.

**III. SUFFERING (2:11 – 3:12)** Suffering is a natural result of submitting instead of being hard and revengeful. We suffer even when we don't submit, but when we do we often suffer all the more. Jesus is our example. Peter says that suffering for Christ brings God glory and that we must trust in and depend on God to get us through it. Every Christian must come to grips with the Christian world view of suffering. It is to make us more like Jesus and to bring God glory as we trust Him through it. Is that true of you? It certainly should be!



# 33. II PETER: KEEP THE FAITH



TITLE: Named for the author

AUTHOR: Peter

DATE of WRITING: 64 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Unknown (Rome?)

RECIPIENTS: Jewish believers scattered everywhere

KEY VERSE: *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them-bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2:1*

KEY WORDS: "Knowledge" (16 times); "judgment" (4 times)

## ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

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PURPOSE:

I PETER	II PETER
Suffering from without (persecution)	Suffering from within (false teachers)
Consolation	Warning
Hope to face trials	Knowledge to face errors
"Christ" – title of redemption	"Lord" – title of dominion
Suffering of Christ	Glory to follow

THEME: To strengthen and confirm believers against attack by false teachers.

Peter was the first leader of the early church, Paul the second. The first half of the book of Acts is about Peter, the second about Paul. Sanguine Peter nursed the newborn church along so it could get established and start to grow. Choleric Paul whipped the adolescent church into shape and protected it against false teachers and those who would mislead it. Peter was with Jesus when He lived on earth, Paul was not. Peter was a common fisherman, Paul a well-trained upper class religious leader. Peter ministered mainly to Jews, Paul mainly to Gentiles. Yet despite these differences they served the same Lord at the same time. Both were martyred in Rome during the first great persecution. Peter was crucified upside down, Paul beheaded (an easier death because he was a Roman citizen). Each of them wrote their final book shortly before their deaths. Paul's was II Timothy, Peter's was II Peter. Both of them knew they would soon die when they wrote and gave encouragement to their followers to stay faithful no matter what happened. Both expressed deep faith and confidence in God. Both warned against apostasy in those 'last days.' The theme of II Timothy is 'Faithful Service.' The theme of II Peter is 'Keep the Faith.'

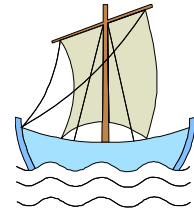
Peter wrote I & II Peter to the same audience – Jewish believers wherever they may be. In I Peter he talked about suffering from without the church: persecution, etc. In II Peter he talks about suffering from within the church: false teachers and apostates. This 'poison in the pew' is the worst kind. The only defense is to 'keep the faith.' Stay faithful to true Bible doctrine. The best defense is a strong offense. That's true against false teachers, too.

**I. CONVICTIONS OF THE FAITH (1:3-21)** Peter pleads with his readers to continue to walk with God no matter what. He says this is the only way to be for now, and it will bring rewards for all eternity. He uses his own testimony as well as the authority of Scripture to back this up. When they are healthy and sound in their beliefs, false teachings won't be able to get a foothold among them.

**II. CONTENTION FOR THE FAITH (2:1-22)** Peter reminds them that there always have been and always will be false teachers. They counterfeit the truth, making what they teach seem like the truth. They secretly undermine the truth and subtly replace it with error, ever so slightly here and there until it finally takes hold. Peter says they will be judged and condemned, like the angels which fell with Lucifer, like the people in Noah's generation, like those in Sodom and Gomorrah. However in all these cases God spares the godly. He exposes their conduct, their claims and their converts.

**III. CONSUMMATION OF THE EARTH (3:1-18)** One of the major heresies of the false teachers was the denial of the second coming of Jesus. If Jesus doesn't return it means He lied, He isn't God, unbelievers won't be punished and believers won't be rewarded. Peter goes into detail telling what that Day of the Lord will be like. He reassures his readers that those who are believers will be spared but others will be judged. He tells them that the only reason it hasn't happened yet is God's mercy, waiting for more to repent. Peter concludes by using this as motivation to stay faithful. Be ready, he says – Jesus will return at any minute! Are you ready? Are you living in light of Jesus' soon return? What if He came today? Are you ready?

## **34. PAUL'S 2<sup>ND</sup> TRIP TO ROME**



# **ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH**

It is not part of God's plan to reveal to us the time or manner of our homecoming. That is hidden in the heart of God. It's just as good we don't know. Often, though, we can read the signs and see it coming. Such was the case with Paul. God allowed him to surmise his coming death from the circumstances he was in.

**FALL 67** Christians weren't safe anywhere. They were no longer protected as a sect of Judaism. They were arrested and killed, or sent to Rome for entertainment in the coliseum. Leaders were especially sought after. Paul still had the largest reputation of any Christian alive, so his capture was a real prize.

While in Ephesus a cooper-smith named Alexander saw a chance to get revenge and riches both, so he betrayed Paul and then testified against him for a fee.

Because of his status Paul was sent directly to Rome. The short ship trip was difficult in winter, and Paul was old and worn out. He felt betrayed, deserted, alone and rejected. Demas forsook him for the love of this world. Crescens went to Galatia the same way. Titus had to go to Salmatia to minister. Faithful Luke, however, stayed with Paul.

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**PAUL IN ROME** It was a different Rome Paul entered this time, and a different Paul who entered it. He knew the end was near and he was ready. He fire had changed Rome, physically and mentally. Nero had brought persecution, fear and terror everywhere (like Hitler in Germany). Much of Rome was still in ruins. Other parts had newer, bigger buildings and streets.

Prison was more severe, too. This was no house arrest but chains in a foul cell. A few friends courageous visited him, putting themselves and their families at great risk. No one dared stand by him at trial, though, or they would have died as well. All were needed alive to preach and teach.

Paul's mind was still strong, but he knew his body was used up. He was content with his life and how he had used it. There were some things he would have done differently, like not kill Christians, but once he saw the light he followed it.

He knew his trial would not be fair, that the sentence of death had already been passed. It was just a matter of time. No one was looking for the truth, just for an excuse to kill Paul. Because his cell was cold, dark and boring Paul asked to have his cloak, books and parchments brought to him. He wanted to spend his final days studying God's Word.

Because he was Public Enemy #1 Paul was kept in the Carcer (later called Mamertine) prison. It was at the foot of Capitoline Hill. Paul himself was in a subterranean chamber, accessible only by a hole in the roof. There were no lights except what a friend might bring. Food was dropped in through the hole in the roof.

Knowing it would mean their deaths as well, Paul didn't want others to visit him and die. Each one was needed to keep the church healthy and growing. Tychius who was with him in prison last time now was in Ephesus. Erastus was in Corinth. Trophimus was in Miletus, Titus in Dalmatia (Illyricum) and Crescens in Galatia. Demas had left God's word for the world. Phygellius and Hermogenes had become apostates and were working against Paul. Loyal Luke was the only one still with Paul. What a bonding they must have developed over the years and all they had been through together. What comfort they must have brought each other. I'm sure God blessed Luke equally with Paul for all he did to help and support Paul. Without Luke Paul wouldn't have been able to do all he did. One role is as important as the other. If you are in leadership realize those who

support you are crucial to your success. If you are supportive remember that your role and reward is as great as the one you support.

That's not to say Paul didn't miss the others, especially Timothy and Mark. Timothy was in Ephesus, doing his best to get to Paul in Rome before Paul died. He was imprisoned awhile himself because of his association with Paul. Mark had reunited with Paul years ago after their parting on the first missionary journey. Both had matured and grown greatly since then.

**PAUL'S TRIAL #1** Paul was acquitted of the charge of leading Christians to burn Rome for there was no evidence against him. Alexander the Coopersmith came all the way to Rome to testify against Paul. He was paid for his false testimony. Paul said, though, that he felt Jesus' presence with him in a special way, as we all will if put in such difficult circumstances. He didn't have any opportunity to preach or defend himself at this trial, however.

It was about this time, the fall of 67, that Paul wrote his final letter – to Timothy of all people. It was very interesting and even more important because of their relationship and feeling it might be their final contact. What a blessing those words were preserved for us today! “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” (2 Tim 4:6-8)

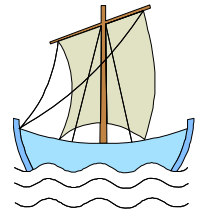
**PAUL'S TRIAL #2** Before Paul was tried by magistrates, now by Nero himself. Nero was at the end of his life, at his worst. He was stained with every crime: murderer of his mother, wives and best friends. Picture Paul in prisoner's clothes, bent, white-haired and bald, giving his life for the glory of God and man. How ironic that someone like Nero should be judging someone like Paul! That's how things go in this world, but not in the next! Paul had a godly attitude about it all, not one of self-pity or bitterness. “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). We don't know if Paul had one final chance to share his faith at this trial, but knowing how God works I wouldn't be surprised if God gave him this one final privilege.

**SPRING 68 - PAUL'S DEATH** “So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life-not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.” (2 Tim 1:8-12) “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. 10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. 11 Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; 13 if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.” (2 Tim 2:8-13)

Because he was a Roman citizen he couldn't be tortured. Paul was decapitated by sword beyond the city walls. He was well protected to make sure Christians didn't attack to free him. Unbelieving onlookers saw it as his defeat, but in reality it was Paul's triumphant procession of victory. Of interesting not is that Nero himself died a few months later. Two years after that Jerusalem fell (September 2, 70 AD) and with it the end of one era and the start of another. God's torch passed from the Jews to the Christians (temporarily).



# **35. II TIMOTHY: FAITHFUL SERVICE**



## **ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH**

**From Pentecost to Revelation**  
**By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 2000**

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TITLE: Named for recipient

AUTHOR: Paul

DATE of WRITING: 64 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Rome (prison #2)

RECIPIENT: Timothy, a young pastor

KEY VERSE: *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction. 3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. 4:1-5*

KEY WORD: "Good" (5 times)

PURPOSE: Paul is providing more guidance for the young man he is training in the pastorate.

He tells him how to live as a true servant in a time of apostasy. He also asks timothy to come to him quickly, as he was about to be executed.

THEME: Paul's final words are to faithfully serve God.

Paul has been serving God faithfully for over 30 years. It's been 20 years since his first missionary journey. He has suffered much, sacrificed much, and been near death often. His brilliant, gifted mind and strong personality has led the early church through its tough growing years when false teachers and jealous political leaders tried all they could to destroy it. Now he is in prison again. In the 5 years since his first imprisonment Paul has been able to travel to see churches he has started as well as go start new ones in places he had never been. Now the end is near and Paul knows it. God has raised up a new generation of local leaders to take over the guidance of the church. Paul is worn out physically. He writes one final letter, to the one person (other than faithful Luke who was with him to the end) he loves more than anyone, his son in the faith Timothy. II Timothy contains Paul's dying words, his final communication as he faces death. If a news reporter had interviewed Paul at this time they would have asked him if he had any doubts about how he spent his life. "Paul, was it worth it?" "Yes!" Paul would affirm, "and much more." "What final parting words do you have for your followers out there?" the reporter would ask. Paul answered "Be faithful." That, in effect, is the message of II Timothy. "Be faithful!"

**BACKGROUND** Persecution is getting worse for believers. Thousands are being martyred. They are considered enemies of Rome with no rights to a fair trial. Then when Nero burned Rome and blamed it on the Christians things got worse. Everyone started blaming them for everything. Peter is also in prison, soon to be crucified upside down. Paul is public enemy number one. He was betrayed and deceived while in Ephesus, and thus he now finds himself in prison in Rome. He is not under house arrest but in a dungeon awaiting execution. This strips away all pretense and gets right to the heart and core of what is in a person. When one faces death all façade is stripped away. That's what makes II Timothy such a revealing letter.

**I. FAITHFUL TO GOD (1:3-18)** Paul begins by encouraging Timothy to stay faithful to God and use his spiritual gift of teaching for God's glory. With all the oppression going on, it seems Timothy was fighting depression and Paul does his best to encourage and motivate him to stay faithful to God and not be ashamed

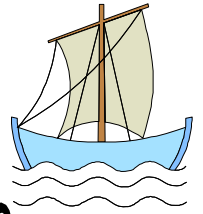
of the gospel. Paul doesn't want Timothy to feel badly because of his own sufferings. He says that it's a real privilege to suffer for the gospel. Many are defecting under pressure, but Paul tells Timothy to make sure he remains faithful to Jesus.

**II. FAITHFUL TO SELF (2:1-26)** Paul then uses seven illustrations of faithfulness as examples to Timothy: a teacher, soldier, athlete, farmer, workman, vessel and slave. Knowing that things will actually get much worse for Timothy, Paul wants to make sure he stays true.

**III. FAITHFUL TO OTHERS (3:1 – 4:15)** Despite how bad the circumstances are, Paul tells Timothy to stay faithful to God and his ministry. He assures him that he is in God's will and tells him to live so he will be glad of it when he dies. Keep things in eternal perspective is Paul's message. Paul concludes with complements for those who have been faithful to him. He wants to see Timothy one more time before he dies if possible. We don't know if he got there in time or not. Some say he was arrested himself when he tried to see Paul. If so he was released and ministered in Ephesus for some time with John until being martyred for his faithfulness.

Paul would tell us the same thing today – be faithful. That was Jesus' request of His followers as well. What about you. Are you faithful? Are you passing the test? Make sure!

# **36. HEBREWS: CHRIST IS SUPERIOR**



## **ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH**

TITLE: Recipients are Hebrew Christians

AUTHOR: Unknown (Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Priscilla, etc.?)

DATE of WRITING: 65 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Unknown

RECIPIENTS: Jewish Believers

KEY VERSE: *For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." 4:4*

KEY WORDS: "Eternal" (13 times); "heavens" (13); "better" (12); "perfection" (11); "partakers" (7); "faith" (31)

PURPOSE: Encourage Jewish believers to stay faithful to Jesus and not give in to persecution and go back to Judaism for salvation.

THEME: Christ is superior to all things (including the Old Testament, Judaism, angels, etc.)

**From Pentecost to Revelation**

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Becoming a 1<sup>st</sup> Century convert to Christianity could definitely be "hazardous to your health." There was rejection, persecution and even cruel death. It was especially hard if you were a Jewish believer because your family and friends would turn on you. Your whole support system would put tremendous pressure on you to revert back to Judaism. You would lose your job, your family, your savings, your inheritance and your hope through Judaism. Because of this extra pressure many Jewish believers who had put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah later recanted and went back to Judaism. This book was written to show them that Jesus is the **ONLY** way and that He is superior to everything in Judaism. It is essentially a commentary on Genesis through Deuteronomy showing how Jesus fulfill and supercedes all the laws and practices written therein. The Old Testament is but a shadow, Jesus is the real thing.

**I. SUPERIORITY OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST (1:1 – 4:16)** In a majestically constructed opening paragraph the author introduces his readers to the surpassing greatness of Jesus. Without a standard opening the author jumps right into his subject. Jesus is greater than the **Old Testament Prophets (1:1-4)** because He is the creator and sustainer of all things, the express image of God and the One seated beside the Father in heaven.

Next the writer shows that Jesus is greater than the **angels (1:5 – 2:18)** as well. He is superior because He is God and because He alone provided salvation. Jesus died for human sin as a man and thus defeated the most powerful angel, Lucifer. By becoming lower than the angels Christ lifted men up to a position spiritually superior to the angels.

Jesus is also superior to **Moses (3:1-6)**, the greatest Old Testament man to the Jews. Moses was a servant in God's house but Jesus was the builder of that house. In addition, Jesus is greater than **Joshua (3:7 – 4:16)**. Joshua may have led the Jews into the Promised Land, but even he didn't lead them into permanent victory or peace.

**II. SUPERIORITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST (4:14 – 9:39)** First the writer shows that Jesus is superior to **Aaron's priesthood (4:14 – 6:20)**. The Jewish high priest was in God's presence only one day a year, Jesus is continually there. He has unlimited access. He has no sin of his own to contend with as the Jewish priests did. They offered sacrifices for themselves and others, Jesus offered Himself as the sinless sacrifice for all and that ended the need for any sacrifices by any Jewish priests.

Jesus is even superior to **the priesthood of Melchizedek (7:1 – 8:13)**. He was a priest as well as a king, Jewish priests were never kings. Jewish priests were only priests from the age of 30 until their death, Melchizedek's priesthood was eternal, no beginning and no end.

Thus Jesus is superior to **all priesthoods (9:1 – 10:39)**. His sacrifice is a one-time offering that totally removes all sin and guilt forever. His work is finished. He is seated in God's presence. Jewish priests can't compare to that at all.

**III. SUPERIORITY OF THE POWER OF CHRIST (11:1 – 13:19)** Jesus is greater than **faithlessness (11:1-40)**. Examples of those with faith are listed in chapter 11. It was their faith that brought God's approval, not their keeping of the Old Testament system. All were rewarded for their faith, and the writer wants his readers to be rewarded for theirs as well.

Following Jesus is greater than **hopelessness (12:1-29)**. Don't be like Esau he warns them, and sell their future spiritual blessing for a moment of physical relief from distress. When they see their error later it will be too late.

Finally he shows how Jesus is superior to **lovelessness (13:1-19)**. He says that Jesus motivates His followers to treat each other in love.

Interspersed throughout the book are 5 warnings to them to not go back. Some use these to show that salvation can be lost, but that's not the context they are written in. They are written to Jews who have realized that Jesus is the Messiah but, under pressure, have decided to go back to Judaism. Before they knew about Jesus, when they were in their ignorance, Judaism was all right and God didn't hold them accountable for what they didn't know. Now that they know, however, they are responsible to act on that and they can no longer go back to their ignorance. Jesus is superior. Is there anything in your life that you have above Him?

## **37. JUDE: APOSTASY**

TITLE: Named for author

AUTHOR: Jude, half-brother of Jesus

DATE of WRITING: 70 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Unknown

RECIPIENTS: All believers everywhere

KEY VERSE: *Dear friends, although I was*

*very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I  
felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith  
that was once for all entrusted to the saints. 3*

KEY WORD: "Ungodly" (6 times)

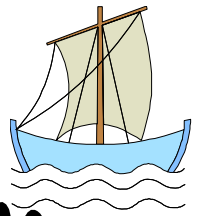
PURPOSE: Jude wanted to write about their "common  
salvation" but the Holy Spirit led him to

write about the false teachers who were creeping in.

They are clearly described, and so is their doom. Jude  
comforts and encourages the true believers

THEME: All about apostates and apostasy.

# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH



**From Pentecost to Revelation**

**By Jerry Schmoyer Copyright © 2000**

<b>II PETER</b>	<b>JUDE</b>
Warning against false teachings & teachers	Warning against false teachings & teachers
False teachers WILL come	False teachers HAVE come
Dark picture painted of false teachers	Darker picture painted of false teachers

Attacks from without are obvious, clearly seen attempts to defeat us and turn us from faithfulness to Jesus. Attacks from within are not as black and white. They are more subtle and deceptive. Guess which are most effective? Guess which Satan uses more? Persecution makes the church stronger and it grows in quality and quantity. False teaching within weakens it bit by bit, until it is diluted and ineffective.

We are not immune from this effective tactic of Satan's today. Some forms include adding works of any kind to salvation. It can be legalism or anything based on fear. The other extreme is the teaching that God is love so everyone will go to heaven, no one will be condemned. Then there are those who say you can lose your salvation unless you do certain things, of the Satan has no influence on us today, or that man doesn't sin after salvation. Other false teachings make certain spiritual gifts more 'spiritual' than others or base healing and prosperity on our having enough 'faith' to 'claim' it. The list goes on and on.

In the opening to his short book (v. 1-2), Jude assured the readers that their spiritual position was eternally secure and that God's abundant provision for daily living was available to them. Then he talks about apostasy (turning from the faith).

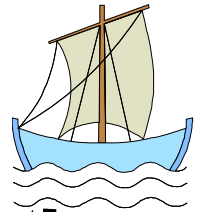
**I. ANALYSIS OF APOSTASY (3-4)** Jude encourages his readers to contend (literally "agonize") for the true faith and avoid any and all counterfeits. He says they sneak in the back door, they don't parade in with the label of false teachings on them. They sneak in, like a little arsenic in food or a little spark in a gas tank.

**II. ANATOMY OF APOSTASY (5-16)** Jude refers to many Old Testament events. He talks about the Israelites (v. 5 – Numbers 13-14); fallen angels (v. 6 – II Peter 2:4); Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7 – Genesis 18-19); Cain (v. 11 – Genesis 4); Balaam (v. 11 – Numbers 22-24); Korah (v. 11 – Numbers 16); Enoch (v. 14 – Genesis 5:18-24). He uses many of these as examples of past apostates whom God did judge. Let this be a warning! Jude says they are spiritually blind but speak about spiritual things as if they have the only and final answer to everything.

Jude also uses illustrations from nature to picture apostasy. He says it is like hidden reefs under the water's surface which a ship doesn't see but which sinks it. He says it is like clouds who look promising but don't hold any water. Also it is like autumn trees that have leaves but no fruit. He equates them to wild waves of the sea which make lost of motion but don't accomplish anything. Finally he says they are like wandering stars: brief, aimless and then darkness. Contrast this with Jesus who is the Rock of our Salvation instead of hidden rocks which shipwreck our faith. Jesus comes with clouds to refresh forever, He is the Tree of Life producing eternal fruit, He leads beside still waters, not wild seas. He is the Bright and Morning Star heralding the day.

**III. ANTIDOTE FOR APOSTASY (17-23)** Jude wants them to remember the warnings about apostasy being a sign of the last days and to watch out for it. He encourages them to keep their eyes on the truth and keep growing spiritually. That is the best antidote to false teaching. He says that they are to try to rescue those who fall into false teaching, but in such a way that they are very careful they don't get hurt. It's like treating a hamburger patty that falls into the coals. You rescue it quickly, gently and carefully so you don't get burnt.

# 38. I JOHN: FELLOWSHIP



## ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

From Pentecost to Revelation  
By Jerry Schroyer Copyright © 2000

TITLE: Named for author

AUTHOR: John

DATE of WRITING: about 90 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Ephesus

RECIPIENTS: Believers everywhere

KEY VERSE: *He who has the Son has life;*

*he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the  
Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal  
life. 5:12-13*

KEY WORDS: "Love" (45 times); "know" (35); "world" (23); "life"  
(15); "light" (6)

PURPOSE:

GOSPEL	I JOHN
Written to arouse faith (20:31)	Written to establish certainty regarding that faith (5:13)
The Good News Historically	The Good News Experientially

THEME: How to have fellowship with God and others, and to know you have assurance of salvation.

It's 25 years since the persecution that killed Peter, Paul, Timothy and thousands of others. It's 90 AD. John is the only disciple not martyred. He still lives in Ephesus where he took care of Mary for so many years, as Jesus had asked him to do. He writes a letter to no one particular place, just to believers in general. He had something he wanted to say to everyone so he wrote a letter that would be copied and spread everywhere.

The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) have been written to keep the record for future generations, after the eyewitnesses have died. They were circulated so all would know the truth and not be misled by false teachers. John wrote his gospel 2 or more years after the others. He wrote to show his readers how to have eternal life in Christ (20:31). Now he is writing again to tell them how they can know they have eternal life and enjoy it now. He tells them this takes belief in Christ, obedience and love. False teachers attacked these 3 so John defends and explains them. The key, John says, is fellowship with God and then with man.

The false teachers were the Gnostics which Paul wrote against in Colossians. They made knowledge the greatest virtue, denied the Bible, said everything material is evil but we are spiritual, so our body can sin all we want and it won't affect our immaterial part which will be reincarnated one day anyway. Much of these false ideas have reemerged in 'New Age' belief.

**I. CONDITIONS OF FELLOWSHIP (1:5 – 2:2)** John starts by explaining the conditions of fellowship. We can't be close to God when we have sin in our lives (despite what the Gnostics say). Sin breaks relationships – man to man as well as man to God. The solution is not to be perfect and sinless, for that will never happen. The solution is to confess (admit, agree with God about the sin) the sin and accept His forgiveness.

**II. CONDUCT IN FELLOWSHIP (2:3-27)** John, the disciple of love whom Jesus loved so very much, said that they couldn't love God if they didn't love each other. If you truly love someone, you will love their children as well. If you aren't kind to their children, you really don't love them. The same is true with God and His children. The love John is talking about is agape love – unconditional love, love in spite of. It's love that is the fruit of the Spirit, the love that comes only from God. It's not phileo love – conditional love, 'liking' someone because of what they do (or don't do).

John also tells them they can't love God and love the world, for they are



diametrically opposed world views with no common ground. It's one or the other. If you love God you will go against the world system. If you love the world system you will go against God. If you say you love God but live by the world's values and priorities, you don't really love God. Loving God will show itself in how you live. We can't have fellowship with God and the world, its one or the other.

When John says we can't love the world, he is not talking about nature but about the Satan-inspired system of self-centered goals and motives, values and principles.

**III. CHARACTERISTIC OF FELLOWSHIP (2:28 – 3:24)** The condition for fellowship with God is no unconfessed sin in our life. The conduct of fellowship is to obey Him in love. The characteristic of that fellowship is living a holy, righteous life. That is what will happen when we obey Him in love. Our life will not be marked by continual habitual sin. We will reject the world's prideful, selfish, pleasure-first ways and the world will reject us. We will have a sincere love for God and fellow believers which will show itself in how we live and act.

**IV. CAUTIONS OF FELLOWSHIP (4:1-21)** John warns his readers to watch out for false, lying, deceiving teachers. These people they are to have no fellowship with.

**V. CONSEQUENCES OF FELLOWSHIP (5:1-21)** John concludes reminding them to have love for each other and trust Jesus to give them victory over the world. He reminds them that Jesus is God and man in one, something the false teachers strongly deny (as they do today, too). He also assures them of eternal life, that their salvation is secure and certain.

There are many practical truths in I John for us today. It is a book to ready and apply. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, make sure there is no sin in you life. Make sure you obey Him in love, and show that love for God by loving your fellow believers.

## **39. II JOHN: GO IN TRUTH**

TITLE: Named for author

AUTHOR: John

DATE of WRITING: about 90 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Ephesus

RECIPIENTS: Christian lady & her children

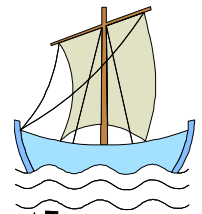
KEY VERSE: *Anyone who runs ahead and*

*does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. 9-10*

KEY WORDS: "Truth" (5 times); "walk" (3 times)

PURPOSE: 1. To give a Christian lady a good report about her children. 2. To warn and instruct her with regard to compromising with false teachers. She is told how to avoid being deceived (v. 9) and how to treat deceivers (v. 10-11).

THEME: Warning against receiving deceivers and false teachers.



# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

**From Pentecost to Revelation**

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II John is similar to I John, only shorter. It was written just after I John. John addresses it to a Christian lady, probably a church. In those days of persecution he was protecting them from danger. Immediately he gets to the point: stay faithful to God and avoid false teachings and teachers.

**I. GO (4-6)** He tells them to go and grow in truth. Their testimony of obedience to God has spread to John and he is encouraged by it. John also commends them for their love, which is their motive in obedience. If we love God we will obey Him. Love alone is weak and undisciplined. Obedience alone is cold and mechanical. Together there is a real balance of beauty. Do you have love and obedience? Which are you strongest in?

**II. CAUTION (7-11)** John warns them to avoid anyone who isn't obeying God in love. He specifically warns against anyone who does not see Christ as 100% God and 100% man in One. He is the God-man Who came to die for our sins and rise again.

Notice how virtually off of the later New Testament books warn against false teachings? Why does God allow so many false teachers and teachings – then and now? For one thing, that motivated the disciples to write down the truth to keep it true and clear (so we have the New Testament). Another reason is to weed out the professors from the true possessors. It gave people a choice, and those who didn't want to accept Jesus as the God-man and live for Him had plenty of alternatives to turn to. God always gives man a free will choice. He never forces anyone. Another reason is that God allows the false teachers time to discover the error of their beliefs and repent. He doesn't force their free will, either, but does give them time to turn to Him for mercy and forgiveness.

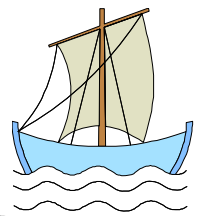
John warns his readers that if they turn from the truth in Jesus to false teachings they won't lose their salvation but will lose reward. They can't lose the rewards they already have laid ahead, but can fail to earn any more and thus not get their full potential of reward.

**III. STOP (9-11)** John in effect says the same thing here that he said years before in John 15 – abide/remain in Christ. The message has not changed. Abiding and obeying are inseparable. Abiding in Christ calls for a firm response against those who don't abide. If someone doesn't have that John says we aren't to do anything to in any way encourage them, including letting them into our home (9-11).

In those days teachers and preachers traveled by foot and relied on local people for lodging and hospitality. There were no hotels or inns to stay in. It was the duty of believers to provide hospitality to these people (Ill John is about this very thing). However if someone isn't totally committed in belief and actions to Jesus as God and man in One, the only way of salvation, John says to have NOTHING to do with them. Don't even invite them in to debate them. Why? That is enough to encourage them in their wrong ways. Others will see you invite them in and could take it for acceptance. It is bad stewardship of ones own time. Also, the chances of them planting seeds of doubt in you are much greater than the chances of you straightening them out. It's often our pride that says we are too strong to be swayed and we are smart enough to show them their wrongs. Today we are too tolerant of religious differences. As long as someone appears 'sincere' we back off. "Who are we to 'judge' someone else?" we think. Paul, Peter, John and Jesus Himself would be very stern with us. They'd call it compromise and sin!

Always find out clearly where someone stands on the deity of Jesus and salvation by the shed blood of Jesus only. If they dance around it or are vague, watch out! Also have them define their terms. Roman Catholics and Mormons alike talk about 'salvation through faith by grace' but define their terms differently than we do. Watch out!!!

# 40. III JOHN: HOSPITALITY



TITLE: Named for author

AUTHOR: John

DATE of WRITING: about 90 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Ephesus

RECIPIENTS: Gaius, a faithful convert of John's

KEY VERSE: *We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth. 8*

KEY WORD: "Truth: (7 times)

PURPOSE: John had sent some faithful servants of God to minister to his church. Diotrephes,

a leader, refused to be hospitable to them and he threatened to cast out of the church anyone who showed them hospitality. John warns against this and says he will come straighten it out. In the meantime, Gaius is to show hospitality to Demetrius, a visiting minister.

THEME: The importance of showing hospitality to true believers.

## ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH

From Pentecost to Revelation  
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I JOHN	II JOHN	III JOHN
FELLOWSHIP	WALK IN TRUTH	HOSPITALITY
Jesus The LIFE	Jesus The TRUTH	Jesus The WAY
Fellowship with God (is crucial)	Fellowship with enemies (is forbidden)	Fellowship with Believers (is important)
FAITH	HERESY	HOSPITALITY
These "went out" (2:19)	These want to get in (10)	These want to cast out those who should be in (10)

Do you have a guest room in your house? If you do, then you have turned your home into a 'hospital'. 'Hospital' in Latin means 'guest room'. Every time you extend hospitality to someone, technically that person has been 'hospitalized.' Now the word is used of medical centers, but really it should be something all of us do. Often it is a lost art today. We send people to hotels or motels and we take them to restaurants instead.

To the Jews it was considered a sacred duty to receive, feed, lodge and protect any traveler who might stop at your door. Strangers were treated as honored guests. Men who thus ate together were bond to each other by the strongest ties of friendship, which descended to their heirs. Hospitality was a religious duty, even commanded by the law of Moses (Lev. 19:33-34). No one was to consider their house as theirs alone. It was always to be open to whoever may need a place to stay and they passed by.

**THE CAST** **Diotrephes** dominated the church but wasn't hospitable. He was a jealous, controlling person who threatened to excommunicate any in his church who were hospitable to traveling preachers or teachers. **Demetrius** carried this letter of III John. He was a traveling preacher in need of a place to stay. **Gaius** was a believer in Asia Minor and was urged to show hospitality to Demetrius no matter what Diotrephes said or did. Thus III John is the only New Testament book that was private and personal. It was a letter addressed from John to Gaius, never intended for anyone else to read, much less be part of the Bible. The themes of love and truth again dominate, as they did in John's other letters, I and II John. III John is very short, more like a post card than a letter!

**I. PROSPERITY SHOULDERS HOSPITALITY (GAIUS) 2-8** John, who probably enjoyed Gaius' hospitality himself, encouraged him to show the same consideration to Demetrius. He complements and encourages him in his spiritual growth. He says that all this love shown in hospitality brings honor and glory to God. Also, the one helping someone else do God's work shares in the reward that one gets. This is true if we give of our time, talents or treasure to help someone in God's work. It includes missionaries and pastors, but also anyone we help.

**II. PRIDE SHOWS HOSPITALITY (DIOTREPHESES) 9-10** It seems John had already contacted Diotrephes about his control and self-centeredness, but there was no change. Pride and control can be a temptation for anyone in leadership. John says he will come and deal with the problem of Diotrephes personally when he can, but that now he wants to make sure Gaius is cared for.

**III. PRAISE SHOWS HOSPITALITY (DEMETRIUS) 11-12** One's conduct clearly reflects one's relationship with God. Demetrius is a godly man that John can highly recommend. He assures him that Gaius isn't a false teacher – probably that is the excuse Diotrephes used in denying traveling pastors hospitality. John says that isn't so.

So why is this short private letter in the Bible with books like Romans and Revelation? Because God wants us to know that showing hospitality is still very important. Do you do it?

# **41. REVELATION: PROPHECY**

TITLE: Start of book, "revelation of Jesus Christ"

AUTHOR: John

DATE of WRITING: 96 AD

PLACE of WRITING: Isle of Patmos

RECIPIENTS: 7 churches in Asia Minor and all believers

KEY VERSE: *Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. 1:19*

KEY WORDS: "I saw" (49 times); "angel" (70); "seven" (59); "lamb" (29)

PURPOSE:

# ACTS & the EARLY CHURCH



**From Pentecost to Revelation**

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GOSPELS	ACTS & EPISTLES	REVELATION
PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
Christ as PROPHET	Christ as PRIEST	Christ as KING
Setting: ISRAEL	Setting: CHURCH	Setting: UNIVERSE
Founder of Christianity	Fundamentals of Christianity	Fulfillment of Christianity
Introduction	Application	Realization

THEME: Reveal the future tribulation and related events to mankind.

GENESIS	REVELATION
Creation of heaven and earth	New heavens and earth
Paradise Lost	Paradise of God regained
Sorrow, pain enter	Sorrow, pain gone forever
First Adam and his wife	Last Adam and His Bride (church)

**I. PERSON OF CHRIST (PAST) 1:3-20** John is imprisoned on Patmos. He is old, for it's 60+ years since the crucifixion. An angel comes to reveal these things to him.

**II. POSSESSION OF CHRIST (PRESENT) 2 – 3** God first reveals messages for seven churches in Asia Minor that John was familiar with. They are listed in the order they would receive the letter as it traveled the circular mail route in Asia Minor. The carrier would read the letter in one city then move on to the next. The cities were Ephesus (John's home town), Smyrna, Pergamus, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Only Smyrna and Philadelphia didn't receive any condemnation. All received some commendation from the Lord except Laodicea.

**III. PROGRAM OF CHRIST (FUTURE) 4 – 22** The majority of the book of Revelation is about the coming 7-year tribulation. First the tribulation is seen from the view of heaven (judgment), chapters 4-11. Then it is gone through from beginning to end again from the earth's perspective (warfare), chapters 12-19.

First, 7 seal judgments are unleashed on the earth. These start with the Antichrist bringing peace, but soon turn to war, family, death to 1/4 of the world population, and tremendous changes to nature. Many believers are martyred during this time. God sets aside 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes (144,000) as special witnesses and evangelists. They come to salvation at the start of the tribulation (for all true believers are raptured before the tribulation).

Following this are 7 trumpet judgments which affect the earth's vegetation, the sea and fresh water and the sun, moon and stars. Locust-like demons torture all who haven't turned to God for salvation. In the middle of this tribulation God raises up 2 special witnesses who will even do miracles and who cannot be killed. God always has His witness for man.

Satan will have his counterfeit trinity to oppose God and rule the world, as he has always wanted to do. Satan counterfeits God, the power behind it all. The Antichrist will counterfeit Christ. He'll bring peace and set himself up to be worshipped, then by Satan's power counterfeit his own death and resurrection and kill all the believers he possibly can. The False Prophet, Antichrist's assistant, will head up the apostate church until it is destroyed. He will kill any who do not wear the 666 in recognition of the Antichrist as God.

Seven bowl judgments complete God's judgment on man for rejecting Jesus. This culminates with the battle of Armageddon, when Jesus returns with the armies of heaven (us) and totally and instantly destroys all of feeble man's resistance to His authority.

Following this tribulation comes a thousand year period called the Millennium (Rev. 20). Jesus will rule on earth on David's throne as prophesied and all will return to Garden of Eden conditions.

Following a final revolt by Satan, who is consigned to hell forever along with his demons and those who haven't accepted God's free gift of salvation, God will create a new heavens and new earth (Rev 21-22). There we will dwell with Him for all eternity. Are you ready? I hope so!



