

# ACTS

## CHAPTER ONE

In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus did and taught from the beginning of His ministry 2 until the day he ascended up to heaven after giving his apostles further instructions by the power of the Holy Spirit.

3 During the forty days after the Passover - when Jesus had suffered and died on the cross, he appeared to the apostles a number of times, proving to them in many ways that he was actually alive, and teaching them many things about authentic Christianity and the way things work in the Kingdom of God [The Church].

4 At one of these times, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised - the one I told you of. 5 John the Baptist baptized his disciples with water, but in just a few days - on the Feast of Pentecost - you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

6 The last time his Apostles were gathered together with him, they asked him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and reestablish our nation?”

7 He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. 8 But I want you - after the Holy Spirit comes upon you and fills you - to be my emissaries, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the rest of the world.”

9 After giving them this charge, as they watched in amazement, he began to rise, and continued to ascend until they lost sight of him in the clouds. 10 As they strained to keep sight of him, suddenly, two white-robed men appeared standing before them. 11 “People of Galilee,” they addressed them, “there is no point in continuing to stare up at the sky: Jesus has returned to Heaven. But, someday, a long time from now, your beloved Savior will return to this very spot, in the same body and in the same way you just saw him leave.” 12 So, they left the Mount of Olives and returned to Jerusalem - a distance of about a half a mile.

13 When they arrived, they went to the upstairs room of the building where they had been staying — Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the zealot), and Judas (son of James). 14 They, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus, continued to assemble here, united in heart and in sincere prayer.

15 During this time, when about 120 believers were gathered, Peter stood up and addressed them. 16 “Brothers,” he said, “the Scriptures had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. 17 Judas was chosen to be an Apostle, just as we were, and shared in the ministry with us.

18 “Judas bought some land for himself with the money he received for his treachery. But he fell headfirst off a precipice on his property, hit the ground below, and his belly burst, killing him. 19 The news of his death spread quickly throughout Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name Akeldama, which means “Field of Blood.

20 “This was predicted in the book of Psalms, where it says, ‘Let his property become desolate, with no one living on it.’ But the Bible also says, ‘Let someone else take his position.’

21 “So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus— 22 from the time he was baptized by John until the day he ascended into Heaven. Whoever is chosen will join us as a missionary, telling others of Jesus’ resurrection.”

23 So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. 24 Then they all prayed, "O Lord, you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen 25 as an apostle to replace Judas in this ministry, for he has lost his place with us and gone where he belongs." 26 Then they took a vote, and Matthias was selected to become an Apostle with the other eleven.

## **ACTS 2**

On the day of Pentecost - 50 days since the Resurrection of Jesus, and 10 days since His ascension - the believers were all assembled in one place, united in heart and mind. 2 Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. 3 Then, what looked like little flames of fire appeared and settled on each of them. 4 And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in different languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

5 Because of the celebration of Pentecost, there were at that time devout Jews from all the surrounding countries staying in Jerusalem. 6 As the news that this group of people was speaking in many foreign languages spread, a great crowd gathered, and they were mystified to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

7 They were amazed and wondered, “How can this be? These people are all from Galilee, 8 and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! 9 Here we are— Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, 10 Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has recently done!” 12 They stood there amazed and perplexed. “What can this mean?” they asked each other.

13 But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, “They’re just drunk, that’s all!”

14 Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and addressed the crowd, “Fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Let me tell you about this. Listen. 15 These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o’clock in the morning is much too early for that. 16 No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:

17 “ ‘In the last days,’ God says,  
‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.  
Your young men will see visions,  
and your old men will dream dreams.

18 In those days I will pour out my Spirit  
on all my followers—men and women alike—  
and they will prophesy.

19 And I will display extraordinary signs in the heavenly  
bodies above your heads and meteorological phenomena  
and signs on the earth below—  
blood and fire and clouds of smoke.

20 There will be eclipses of both the sun and the moon  
just before I bring the Great Tribulation upon the earth.

21 But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord  
will be saved.’ ”

22 “People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus  
of Nazareth by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and  
signs through him — as you well know. 23 But God knew  
what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried  
out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless  
Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. 24 But  
God released him from the horrors of death and raised  
him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip. 25  
King David said this about him:

‘I see that the Lord is always with me.

I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.

26 No wonder my heart is glad,

and my tongue shouts his praises!

More than this, I can face death unafraid,

27 for you will not leave my soul among the dead  
nor allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.

28 You have shown me the way of life,  
and you will fill me with the joy of your presence.’  
29 “Dear brothers, I respectfully say this about the  
patriarch, David: he wasn’t referring to himself, for he died  
and was buried, and his tomb is still here among us. 30  
But he was a prophet, and he knew God had promised  
with an oath that one of David’s own descendants would  
be *the Messiah* and reign in his place. 31 David was  
looking into the future and speaking of *the Messiah’s*  
resurrection. He was saying that God would not leave *the*  
*Messiah’s body* among the dead nor allow *the Messiah’s*  
body to rot in the grave.

32 “Now, the very Jesus whom you crucified has been  
raised by God from the dead, and we are all witnesses of  
this fact. 33 He is, right now, exalted to the place of  
highest honor in heaven, at God’s right hand. And the  
Father, as Jesus had promised us, has given him the Holy  
Spirit to pour out upon us. *That* is what you are seeing  
and hearing here, this morning. 34 For David himself  
never ascended into heaven - as we saw Jesus do!, yet he  
said,

‘Jehovah said to my Lord,  
“Sit in the place of honor at my right hand  
35 until I humble your enemies,  
making them a footstool under your feet.”’

36 “So, let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has certified that this Jesus — the very person you crucified — is both Lord and Messiah!”

37 Peter’s words pierced their hearts, and they asked him and the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”

38 Peter replied, “Turn from your sins to God, and be baptized as believers in Jesus Christ - accepting his death on the cross as the atonement for your sins. Then you, too, will receive this gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For salvation is promised by God to you, to your children, and even to people in other countries — to as many as the Lord our God shall call.” 40 Peter continued testifying and exhorting for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, “Don’t align yourselves with those who crucified the Messiah! Accept Jesus as your Savior!”

41 Those who understood and believed what Peter said were filled with joy. They were baptized in the river and filled with the Holy Spirit. So, that day, about 3,000 people became Christians and were added to the Body of Christ.

42 All the believers remained devoted to listening to the apostles’ teach, and to fellowshiping with each other, and to eating meals together, and to praying together.

43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, as they saw the apostles perform many miraculous signs and wonders

- authenticating their message. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their extra properties and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They met together at the Temple each day, invited one another to each other's homes for meals, which were characterized by laughter and harmony — 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the townspeople. And each day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

### **ACTS 3**

Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the three o'clock prayer service. 2 As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in. Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the Temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for some money.

4 Peter and John looked at him intently, and Peter said, "Look at us!" 5 The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting some money. 6 But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I *do* have. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, be healed! — stand up and go wherever you please."

7 Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man's feet and ankles were instantly healed and strengthened. 8 He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them.

9 All the people saw him walking and heard him praising God. 10 When they realized he was the lame beggar they had seen so often at the Beautiful Gate, they were absolutely astounded! 11 They all rushed out in amazement to Solomon's Colonnade, where the man overwhelmed with gratitude and joy was hugging Peter and John.

12 Peter seized the opportunity and addressed the crowd. "People of Israel," he said, "why is this so surprising to you? And why are you gawking at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or godliness? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of all our ancestors — has done this to focus attention on his son, Jesus — the very same Jesus whom you handed over and rejected before Pilate, despite Pilate's desire to release him. 14 Instead of releasing the only person who is truly holy and righteous, you rejected him! And, worse than that, you demanded that a murderer's life be spared, 15 and you murdered the Prince of Life - the One who created life and gives life to all!

But God has raised him from the dead. And we are witnesses of this fact!

16 “This man was healed by Jesus - by believing on His name — and you all know how crippled he was before. Faith in Jesus’ name has healed him before your very eyes.

17 “Friends, I realize that what you and your leaders did to Jesus was done in ignorance. 18 But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had foretold about the Messiah—that he must suffer these things. 19 But now that you know this, repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be totally blotted out! Then God will fill *you* with the same joy this man is feeling, 20 until, someday, God once again sends Jesus, your appointed Messiah, back to you. 21 For he will remain in heaven until the time arrives for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets. 22 What Moses told our ancestors was true: ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people. Listen carefully to everything he tells you. 23 Anyone who will not listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from God’s people.’

24 “Samuel, and every prophet since, spoke about what is happening today. 25 You are the children of those prophets, and you are included in the covenant God promised to your ancestors. For God said to Abraham,

‘Through your descendants all the families on earth will be blessed.’ 26 So, God— having raised His son, Jesus, from the dead — is still blessing you people of Israel, before He turns to anybody else, by inviting each of you to repent from your sins and be saved.”

## **ACTS 4**

While Peter and John were speaking to the people, they were confronted by the priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and some of the Sadducees. 2 These leaders were very disturbed that Peter and John were teaching the people that through Jesus there is a resurrection of the dead. 3 They arrested them and, since it was already evening, put them in jail until morning. 4 But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so the number of men who believed now totaled about 5,000.

5 The next day the council of all the rulers and elders and teachers of religious law met in Jerusalem. 6 Annas the high priest was there, along with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and other relatives of the high priest. 7 They brought in the two disciples and demanded, “How did you heal the crippled man? Who gave you permission?”

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of our people, 9 are we being questioned today because we’ve done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed?

10 Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, and by His power — the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. 11 For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says,

‘The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.’

12 And He is the only one who has the power to deliver anybody — whether nation or individual! In all the world, there is no other name God has given that can save anyone!”

13 The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus. 14 But since they could see the man who had been healed standing right there among them, there was nothing the council could say. 15 So they ordered Peter and John out of the council chamber and conferred among themselves.

16 “What should we do to these men (to put an end to this new movement)?” they asked each other. “There is no doubt that they have performed a miraculous sign — everybody in Jerusalem knows about it! So, there’s no

way we can simply deny it! 17 To keep their propaganda from spreading any further, let us threaten them with severe punishment if they speak to anyone in this name [Jesus] again.” 18 So they called the apostles back in and commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

19 But Peter and John replied, “You will have to decide whether God would rather we obey you or Him. 20 We are morally bound to tell others the truth we have both seen and heard.”

21 The council threatened them some more, but, in the end, had to release them, because they didn’t know how to punish them severely enough to stop them from talking about Jesus without starting a riot. For everyone was praising God for this miraculous sign— 22 the healing of a man who had been lame for more than forty years.

23 As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. 24 When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God:

“O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them— 25 you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying,

‘Why were the nations so angry?

Why did they waste their time with futile plans?

26 The kings of the earth prepared for battle;  
the rulers gathered together  
against the Lord  
and against his Messiah.’

27 “In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. 28 But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will. 29 And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. 30 Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders continue to be done through the name of your holy Son, Jesus.”

31 After this prayer meeting, the whole building shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

32 All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. 33 The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s great blessing was upon them all. 34 There were no needy people among them, because all who owned extra land or

houses sold them 35 and entrusted the money to the apostles to give to those in need. [Note: It may well have been the case that the believers, expecting the imminent overthrow and destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, felt it sensible to sell their *primary* properties.]

36 For instance, there was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means “Son of Encouragement”). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus. 37 He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles.

## **ACTS 5**

But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. 2 He and his wife conspired to keep some of the money and give the rest to the apostles, but claiming it was the full amount.

3 Then Peter said, “Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, while keeping back some of the money from the sale of the property? 4 The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to do with as you pleased. Why have you lied? You weren’t trying to deceive only us, but God, too!”

5 As soon as Ananias heard these words, he dropped dead. Everyone who heard about it was filled with holy

fear. 6 Some of the young men present got up, prepared him for burial and took him out to bury him.

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had taken place. 8 Peter asked her, “Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?”

“Yes,” she replied, “that was the price.”

9 And Peter said, “How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? Here come the young men who just finished burying your husband. Now they can bury you.”

10 Instantly, she dropped dead. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 Sincere holy fear filled the entire body of believers and everyone else who heard what had happened.

12 The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon’s Colonnade. 13 No one outside their group dared to join them, even though all the people had high regard for them. 14 More and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women, 15 to the extent that sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter’s shadow

might fall across some of them as he passed by. 16 Crowds came, also, from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they were all healed.

17 Because of all that was happening, the high priest and his officials, who were Sadducees - in charge of temple worship, were filled with jealousy. 18 They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 19 But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, brought them out and told them, 20 “Go right back to the Temple and continue to give the people this message of life!”

21 So at daybreak the apostles entered the Temple, as they were told, and immediately began teaching people about Jesus.

When the high priest and his officials arrived, they convened the high council—the full assembly of the elders of Israel. Then they sent for the apostles to be brought from the jail for trial. 22 But when the Temple guards went to the jail, the men were gone. So they returned to the council and reported, 23 “The jail was securely locked, with the guards standing alertly at their posts, but when we opened the cell, it was empty!”

24 When the captain of the Temple guard and the leading priests heard this, they were completely baffled, and

wondered what was going on. 25 Then someone arrived with startling news: “The guys you arrested and put in jail are standing in plain sight at the Temple, still talking to the crowds about Jesus!”

26 The captain went with his Temple guards and arrested the apostles, but without violence, for fear of being stoned by the people. 27 Then they brought the apostles before the high council, where the high priest confronted them. 28 “We gave you strict orders never again to teach in this man’s name!” he said. “Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and are trying to turn everyone against us for his death!”

29 But Peter and the apostles replied, “First of all, we must obey God rather than any human authority. 30 Secondly, the God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead — whom you, in fact, murdered by crucifixion. 31 But God has exalted him to the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did all this so the people of Israel would turn back to God, repent of their sins, and be forgiven. 32 We are His witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him [in other words: to us and all the believers, rather than to you].”

33 When they heard this, the high council was deeply offended - cut to the heart - and decided to kill them. 34 But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was

an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the apostles be sent outside the council chamber for a while. 35 Then he said to his colleagues, “Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men! 36 Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him. But he was killed during the revolt against the Roman government, and all his followers disbanded. The whole movement came to nothing. 37 After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He drew quite a following, but the Romans killed him, too, and all his followers were dispersed.

38 “So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, they will soon be overthrown by the Romans. 39 But if this movement is from God, you will not be able to defeat them; you will find yourselves in a losing battle against God.”

40 His advice made sense to the rest of the council. They had the apostles brought back in and flogged. Then they ordered them to never again speak in the name of Jesus, and released them.

41 The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. 42 And every day, in the Temple and wherever they

were, they continued to teach and proclaim, “Jesus is the Messiah.”

## **ACTS 6**

But as the number of believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Gentile believers complained about the Jewish believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

2 So the Twelve called for a meeting with all the believers. They said, “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. 3 And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them. 4 Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.”

5 Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following men: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). 6 These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them and ordained them to their new job.

7 So God’s message about salvation by grace through faith in Jesus continued to spread. The number of

believers in Jerusalem greatly increased, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.

8 Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people.

9 But one day some men from the Assembly of the Libertines, as it was called, started to debate with him. They were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia. [Note: characterized by a philosophy of freedom from tradition and restraint, particularly in regards to morals] 10 None of them could stand against the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit with which Stephen spoke.

11 So they persuaded some men to slander Stephen, saying, "We heard him blaspheme Moses, and even God." 12 This inflamed the people, the elders, and the teachers of religious law. So they arrested Stephen and brought him before the high council.

13 The hired slanderers said, "This man is always speaking against the holy Temple and against the law of Moses. 14 We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple and uproot the traditions Moses handed down to us."

15 The members of the high council looked at Stephen, and his face appeared to them to be angelic.

## ACTS 7

Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these accusations true?”

2 This was Stephen’s reply: “Gentlemen — brothers and elders, listen to me. Our glorious God appeared to our ancestor Abraham in Mesopotamia before he settled in Haran. 3 God told him, ‘Leave your native land and your relatives, and go to the land that I will show you.’ 4 So Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran until his father died. Then God brought him here to the land where you now live.

5 “But God gave him no inheritance here, not even one square foot of land. God did promise, however, that eventually the whole land would belong to Abraham and his descendants—even though he had no children yet. 6 God also told him that his descendants would live in a foreign land, where they would be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. 7 ‘But I will punish the nation that enslaves them,’ God said, ‘and in the end they will come out and worship me here in this place.’

8 “God also gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision at that time. So when Abraham became the father of Isaac, he circumcised him on the eighth day. And the practice was continued when Isaac became the father of Jacob,

and when Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs of the Israelite nation.

9 “These patriarchs were jealous of their brother Joseph, and they sold him to be a slave in Egypt. But God was with him 10 and rescued him from all his troubles. And God gave him favor before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God also gave Joseph unusual wisdom, so that Pharaoh appointed him governor over all of Egypt and put him in charge of the palace.

11 “But a famine came upon Egypt and Canaan. There was great misery, and our ancestors ran out of food. 12 When Jacob heard that there was still grain in Egypt, he sent his sons—our ancestors—to buy some. 13 The second time they went, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, and they were introduced to Pharaoh. 14 Then Joseph sent for his father, Jacob, and all his relatives to come to Egypt, seventy-five persons in all. 15 So Jacob went to Egypt. He died there, as did our ancestors. 16 Their bodies were taken to Shechem and buried in the tomb Abraham had bought for a certain price from Hamor’s sons in Shechem.

17 “As the time drew near when God would fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. 18 But then a new pharaoh came to the throne of Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. 19 This pharaoh exploited our people and oppressed them, forcing

parents to abandon their newborn babies so they would die.

20 “It was during this time that Moses was born—a beautiful child. His parents cared for him at home for three months. 21 When they had to abandon him, Pharaoh’s daughter adopted him and raised him as her own son. 22 Moses was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was powerful in both speech and action.

23 “One day when Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his relatives, the people of Israel. 24 He saw an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite. So Moses came to the man’s defense and avenged him, killing the Egyptian. 25 Moses assumed his fellow Israelites would realize that God had sent him to rescue them, but they didn’t.

26 “The next day he visited them again and saw two men of Israel fighting. He tried to be a peacemaker. ‘Men,’ he said, ‘you are brothers. Why are you fighting each other?’

27 “But the man in the wrong pushed Moses aside. ‘Who made you a ruler and judge over us?’ he asked. 28 ‘Are you going to kill me as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?’ 29 When Moses heard that, he fled the country and lived as a foreigner in the land of Midian. There his two sons were born.

30 “Forty years later, in the desert near Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to Moses in the flame of a burning bush. 31 When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight. As he went to take a closer look, the voice of the Lord called out to him, 32 ‘I am the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses shook with terror and did not dare to look.

33 “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. 34 I have seen —oh, yes, I have seen the oppression of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their groans, so I have come down to rescue them. Now go, for I am sending you back to Egypt.’

35 “So God sent back the same man his people had previously rejected when they demanded, ‘Who made you a ruler and judge over us?’ Through the angel who appeared to him in the burning bush, God sent Moses to be their ruler and savior. 36 And by means of many wonders and miraculous signs, he led them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and through the wilderness for forty years.

37 “Moses told the people of Israel, ‘God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people.’

38 Moses was with our ancestors, the assembly of God’s people in the wilderness, when the angel spoke to him at

Mount Sinai. And there Moses received life-giving words to pass on to us.

39 “But our ancestors refused to listen to Moses. They rejected him and wanted to return to Egypt. 40 They told Aaron, ‘Make us some gods who can lead us, for we don’t know what has become of this Moses, who brought us out of Egypt.’ 41 So they made an idol shaped like a calf, and they sacrificed to it and celebrated over this thing they had made. 42 Then God turned away from them and abandoned them to serve the stars of heaven as their gods! In the book of the prophets it is written,

‘Was it to me you were bringing sacrifices and offerings during those forty years in the wilderness, Israel?

43 No, when I freed you from Egypt, you carried your pagan gods along with you—

the shrine of Molech,

the star of your god Rephan,

and the images you made to worship them.

So I will carry you away into exile -

even further away than Babylon.’

44 “Our ancestors carried the Tabernacle with them through the wilderness. It was constructed according to the plan God had shown to Moses. 45 Years later, when Joshua led our ancestors in battle against the nations that God drove out of this land, the Tabernacle was taken with

them into their new territory. And it stayed there until the time of King David.

46 “David found favor with God and asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who actually built it. 48 However, the Most High doesn’t live in temples made by human hands. As the prophet says,

49 ‘Heaven is my throne,  
and the earth is my footstool.

So how can you possibly build a temple large enough for me?’

asks the Lord.

‘What makes you think I need you to build a house for me?’

50 Didn’t my hands make both heaven and earth?’

51 “You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That’s what your ancestors did, and so do you! 52 Name one prophet your ancestors didn’t persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah, and now *you* have even betrayed and murdered *Him!* 53 You deliberately disobeyed God’s law, even though you received it from the hands of angels.”

54 The Jewish leaders were extremely insulted by Stephen’s accusation, and they bared their teeth at him in

rage. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. 56 And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

57 Then they began shouting, covered their ears with their hands and attacked him. 58 They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man present, named Saul.

59 As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with *this* sin!" And with that, he died.

## **ACTS 8**

Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen.

A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. 2 (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.) 3 But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.

4 But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went. 5 Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. 6 Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did. 7 Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.

9 A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, amazing the people of Samaria and claiming to be someone great. 10 Everyone, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as “the Great One—the Power of God.” 11 They listened closely to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic.

12 But now the people believed Philip’s message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God [Authentic Christianity/The Church] and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. 13 Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed.

14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God’s message, they sent Peter and John there. 15 As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. 16 The

Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given when the apostles laid their hands on people, he offered them money to buy this power. 19 “Let me have this power, too,” he exclaimed, “so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!”

20 But Peter replied, “May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God’s gift can be bought! 21 You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. 22 Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, 23 for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin.”

24 “Pray to the Lord for me,” Simon exclaimed, “that these terrible things you’ve said won’t happen to me!”

25 After testifying and preaching the word of the Lord in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem. And they stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way to preach the Good News.

26 As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, “Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.” 27 So he started out, and he met the treasurer of

Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

29 The Holy Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and walk along beside the carriage.”

30 Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

31 The man replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.

32 The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.

And as a lamb is silent before the shearers,  
he did not open his mouth.

33 He was humiliated and received no justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”

34 The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” 35 So beginning

with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.

36 As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?” 38 He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the town of Azotus. He preached the Good News there and in every town along the way until he came to Caesarea.

## **ACTS 9**

Afterwards, Saul, incensed against believers in Jesus - whom he believed to be an imposter - and eager to eliminate any of His followers, went to see the high priest. 2 He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of Jesus found there. He intended to bring them —both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains for trial.

3 As he was approaching Damascus - 223 miles from Jerusalem - on this mission, a bright light suddenly shone down upon him, making his horse rear up in fright. 4 Saul

fell off his horse and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?”

5 “Who are you, sir?” Saul asked.

And the voice replied, “I am Jesus, the one you are so determined to annihilate! 6 Now get up and continue on into the city, and there you will learn how *you* are going to suffer for *my* sake, from now on.”

7 Saul’s travel companions stood speechless, for though they heard the sound of someone’s voice, they didn’t see anyone speaking! 8 Saul picked himself up off the ground to discover that he was totally blind. So he was led by the hand by his companions into Damascus. 9 He remained there, blind, and did not eat or drink for three days.

10 Now there was a man in Damascus who believed in Jesus, named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a dream, calling, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord!” he replied.

11 The Lord said, “Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus, named Saul. He is praying to me right now. 12 I have shown him, in a dream, a man named Ananias coming to the house to lay hands on him and pray for him so he can see again.”

13 “But Lord!” exclaimed Ananias, “I’ve heard many people talk about the terrible suffering this man has brought upon Christians in Jerusalem! 14 And he has been authorized by the chief priests to arrest people like me who believe in you!”

15 But the Lord said, “Do as I say, for I have specifically chosen Saul. He is uniquely equipped to be an evangelist, not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles in the surrounding nations and to their highest officials. 16 And I will be giving him a preview of all the suffering he will have to experience for being a Christian now, himself.”

17 So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

18 Instantly, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was publicly baptized as a believer in Jesus. 19 Afterward, he ate some food and recovered his strength.

Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for the next few days. 20 And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is indeed the Son of God!”

21 All who heard him were amazed. “Isn’t this the same man who created such havoc among Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem?” they asked. “And didn’t he come here to arrest Christians and take them in chains to the chief priests?”

22 Saul’s preaching became more and more convincing, and the Jews in Damascus couldn’t refute his scriptural proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah as prophesied throughout the Old Testament scriptures. 23 Before long, some of them made plans to murder him. 24 They watched for him day and night at the city gate so they could kill him as he left the city. But Saul was made aware of their plot, 25 so, one night, some of the believers helped him leave the city through a window high up in the city wall, by lowering him in a large basket.

26 When Saul arrived back in Jerusalem, he wanted to meet with the believers there, but they didn’t trust him and were afraid he planned to arrest them. They did not believe he had truly become a believer! 27 So, Barnabas introduced him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus, and related to them what the Lord had said to Saul. He also reported to them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus while in Damascus, at the risk of his own life.

28 So Saul lodged with the apostles and went all over Jerusalem in their company, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 He disputed with some Greek-speaking Jews, who determined to murder him. 30 When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea, seventy-four miles west, on the Mediterranean coast, and sent him by ship to Tarsus, his hometown, 567 miles north.

31 The Church at that time was enjoying peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and the believers were growing in spiritual maturity. As they continued to honor the Lord in their personal lives, the Holy Spirit honored them, and consequently the church grew rapidly in number.

32 Meanwhile, as Peter traveled from town to town, he made a visit to the believers in the town of Lydda. 33 There he met a man named Aeneas, who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. 34 Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you! Get up, and roll up your sleeping mat. You won’t be needing it!” Aeneas was healed instantly. 35 And when the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw Aeneas walking around, they all believed in Jesus!

36 There was a Jewish believer in Joppa named Tabitha, — known as Dorcas to her Gentile friends. She was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor.

37 About this time, she became ill and died. Her body was prepared for burial and laid in an upstairs room. 38 But the believers had heard that Peter was nearby, about fourteen miles away, in Lydda, so they sent two men to entreat him to return right away with them to Joppa.

39 Peter did return with them; and as soon as he arrived, the believers took him to see Dorcas in the upstairs room. The room was filled with widows who were weeping and showing him the coats and other clothes Dorcas had made for them. 40 Peter asked them all to leave the room; then he knelt and prayed. Then turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, wake up," and she opened her eyes! When she saw Peter, she sat right up! 41 He gave her his hand and helped her off the table where she had been lying. Then he called the widows and all the believers back into the room, and he presented her to them, alive.

42 The news of this miracle spread through the whole town, and many believed in the Lord. 43 Peter stayed there in Joppa for quite a while, lodging at the house of Simon, the hide tanner.

## **ACTS 10**

Now, in Caesarea, about thirty miles north of Joppa, there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. 2 He was a devout, God-

fearing person, as was everyone in his household. He gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God. 3 Praying, about three o'clock one afternoon, as was his habit, he had a vision in which an angel of God appeared to him. "Cornelius!" the angel said.

4 Cornelius gaped at him in terror. "What do you want, sir?" he asked the angel.

The angel replied, "God has taken special notice of your prayers and gifts to the poor. 5 In answer to your prayer, He directs you to send some of your servants to Joppa to fetch a man named Simon whose name has been changed to Peter. 6 He is staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore. Peter has some very important information for you."

7 As soon as the angel vanished, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, one of his personal attendants. 8 He told them about his vision and sent them off to Joppa to find Simon Peter.

9 The next day as Cornelius's messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat rooftop to pray. It was about noon, 10 and he was very hungry. But while his kosher Jewish lunch was being prepared in the home downstairs, he lay down and soon fell asleep. 11 He had a vision of the sky opening and a large container - like a tarp with its four corners all tied together - descending. 12 In

this container were all kinds of wild animals, reptiles, and birds — none of them kosher. 13 Then a voice said to him, “Wake up, Peter; here’s some lunch for you. Prepare yourself a meal.”

14 “No way, Lord!” Peter declared. “I would never dream of eating any of these things that our Jewish laws have declared to be impure and unclean!”

15 But the voice spoke again: “When God makes something clean, don’t you call it unclean!” 16 The same vision was repeated three times. Then the container departed back up into the sky.

17 Peter was very perplexed. The vision obviously was meant to teach him something, . . . but what? Just then the three men sent by Cornelius found Simon the tanner’s house. Standing outside the gate, 18 they asked if a man named Simon whose name had been changed to Peter was staying there.

19 Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the meaning of the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, “Three Gentile men from Caesarea have come looking for you. 20 Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don’t fret about associating with Gentiles, for I have sent them.”

21 So Peter went down and said, “I am the man you are looking for. Why have you come?”

22 They said, “We were sent by Cornelius, a Roman officer. He is a devout and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jews. A holy angel instructed him to summon you to his house to talk to him.” 23 Hearing this, Peter invited the men to come on in and spend the night. And the next day he left with them on the journey to Caesarea, accompanied by a few curious Jewish believer friends from Joppa.

24 The party arrived in Caesarea the following day. Cornelius had been expecting their arrival and had gathered together his Gentile relatives and close friends.

25 At the entrance to his large home, Cornelius fell at Peter’s feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter pulled him up and said, “Stand up! I’m just an ordinary human being, like you!” 27 Then, engaged in conversation, they made their way inside the house, where Peter discovered the large roomful of Gentiles whom Cornelius had gathered together to meet and hear him.

28 Peter said to them, “You are undoubtedly aware that our Jewish laws strictly forbid us to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with Gentiles like you. But God recently showed me in a vision that I should no longer think of people who are not Jews as impure or unclean. 29 Because of this, I was able to come here without objection as soon as I was asked. So, now, tell me: why have you sent for me?”

30 Cornelius replied, “Four days ago, I was praying in my house, about this same time - three o’clock in the afternoon. Suddenly, a man in bright white clothes was standing in front of me. 31 He told me, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your gifts to the poor have been noticed by God. 32 Send servants to Joppa, and ask a man named Simon — whose name has been changed to Peter — to come to see you. He is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, who lives near the seashore. When he arrives at your house, he will tell you some very important things.’ 33 So I sent for you at once, and I am so thankful you have come! All of us Gentiles are gathered here, waiting with humble hearts before God, eager to hear whatever it is God wants you to tell us.”

34 Then Peter replied, “Now, I clearly see that the saving grace of God isn’t limited to just the Jews. 35 I now realize that, no matter what one’s nationality may be, God accepts *any* who put their faith in Him!

36 So, then, . . . The message God wants me to give to you is the same Good News God has already given to the Jews—that all of us can be reconciled to God because of what Jesus, The Messiah, did for us on the cross. He is the Savior of *all* who believe!

37 Most likely, you all know about all that recently took place throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John

began preaching his message of baptism. 38 And you are probably aware that God anointed a man named Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, so that he went around performing miracles and healing all who were oppressed by the devil — proving that God was with him. 39 I and the other apostles witnessed everything he did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem.

But despite all these miraculous signs, the Jews had him crucified.

40 But the wonderful Good News is that God resurrected him on the third day!, and proved Him to be alive — 41 not to the general public, but to many of us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses. We even ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead! 42 And he instructed us to go everywhere and to testify that He, Jesus, is indeed the Messiah — the one appointed by God to be the Final Judge of everybody — both the living and the dead. 43 Jesus is the one all the prophets throughout the Old Testament Scriptures wrote about when they said that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven.”

44 Now, as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit filled all who were listening to his message. 45 The Jewish believers who had come with Peter were amazed to see evidence that the Holy Spirit was being given to the

Gentiles, too. 46 For they heard them praising God in languages they knew they had not learned previously.

Then Peter asked, 47 “Who can possibly object to these Gentiles being baptized as followers of Jesus, when it is obvious that they have been given the Holy Spirit exactly as we were at Pentecost?” 48 So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Following their baptism, the new Gentile believers begged him to stay with them for a few more days.

## **ACTS 11**

Soon the news reached the apostles and other believers in Judea that the Gentiles were believing the Gospel and becoming Christians. 2 But when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, the Jewish believers there criticized him. 3 “You entered the home of Gentiles, and even ate with them!” they said.

4 Then Peter told them exactly what had happened. 5 “I was in the town of Joppa,” he said, “and while I was praying, I fell asleep and saw a vision. Something like a large tarpaulin was let down by its four corners from the sky. And it came right down to me. 6 When I looked inside it, I saw all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. 7 And I heard a voice say, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat them.’

8 “No, Lord,’ I replied. ‘I have never eaten anything that wasn’t kosher according to our Jewish laws.’

9 “But the voice from heaven spoke again: ‘Do not call something unclean, if God has made it clean.’ 10 This happened three times before the tarp and all it contained was pulled back up to heaven.

11 “Just then three men who had been sent from Caesarea arrived at the house where I was staying. 12 The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to worry that they were Gentiles. These six brothers here accompanied me, and we soon were welcomed into the home of the man who had sent for us. 13 He told us how an angel had appeared to him in his home and had told him, ‘Send some of your servants to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon who is now called Peter. 14 He will tell you how you and everyone in your household can be saved!’

15 “Soon after I began telling them about Jesus,” Peter continued, “they were filled with the Holy Spirit, in the exact same way we had been in the upper room at Pentecost. 16 Then I recalled the Lord telling us, ‘John baptized his followers with water, but my followers will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 So, since God treated these Gentiles in the very same way that he treated us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to

stand in God's way and forbid them to be baptized in Jesus' name?"

18 Having heard Peter's explanation, they were satisfied and began praising God. They said, "It is clear that God has given the Gentiles, too, the privilege of repenting of their sins and receiving eternal life."

19 Meanwhile, the believers who had been scattered during the persecution after Stephen's death traveled as far as Phoenicia [292 miles], Cyprus [254 miles], and Antioch of Syria [about 300 miles]. Everywhere they went, they proclaimed the Good News about Jesus, but only to Jews. 20 However, a few of the believers who went to Antioch, in Turkey, from Cyprus [358 miles] and Cyrene began preaching to the Gentiles, as well, about the Lord Jesus. 21 The power of the Lord was with them, and a large number of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord.

22 When the church at Jerusalem heard about it, they sent Barnabas to Antioch, about 300 miles north. 23 When he arrived and saw this evidence of God's blessing, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged these new Gentile believers to commit themselves to remaining faithful to the Lord. 24 Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith, and God used him to bring many Gentile people to a saving faith in the Lord.

25 Later, Barnabas traveled to Tarsus, about 87 miles northwest, to look for Saul. 26 When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the body of believers for a full year, teaching large crowds of people. And it was at Antioch that believers in Jesus as the Christ [the Messiah] were first called Christians, or Christians.

27 During this time, some Christians with the spiritual gift of prophecy traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them named Agabus stood up in one of the meetings and predicted by the Holy Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world - which later came to pass, during the reign of Claudius. 29 So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the believers in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could. 30 This they did, entrusting their gifts to Barnabas and Saul to take to the elders of the church in Jerusalem.

## **ACTS 12**

It was around this time that King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some of the Christians. 2 He had the Apostle James (John's brother) put to death with the sword. 3 When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter. (This took place during the Passover celebration.) 4 Then he imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the

Passover. 5 But all the time that Peter was in prison, the church was praying very earnestly for him.

6 The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, shackled by his wrists to a soldier on either side. Other soldiers stood guard at the prison gate. 7 Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord appeared at Peter's side. The angel thumped Peter on his side to awaken him, and helped him to his feet, saying, "Quick! Get up!" The shackles fell off his wrists. 8 Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." So he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered.

9 So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all this time he thought he was just dreaming. 10 They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the city, which opened for them all by itself. So they passed through and walked about a block before the angel suddenly left him.

11 Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!" he said. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!"

12 He considered for a moment what to do next, and decided to go to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where, as it happened, many were gathered,

praying for him. 13 He knocked on the locked door in the gate, until a servant girl named Rhoda came to ask who was there. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of unlocking the door to let Peter in, she ran back inside and excitedly told everyone, "Peter is out there!"

15 "You're crazy!" they said. But she kept on insisting that it was true. So, they decided, "It must be his angel."

16 All this time, Peter kept knocking. When they finally opened the door and saw him for themselves, they were amazed. 17 Motioning with his hands for them to quiet down, he told them how the Lord had delivered him from prison. "Tell James and the other believers what has happened," he said. Then he left that house and went to another home.

18 At dawn, when the soldiers awoke, they were greatly disturbed to find Peter, their prisoner, missing. 19 Herod Agrippa ordered a thorough search for him. When he couldn't be found, Herod interrogated the guards, then sentenced them to death.

Afterward, Herod left Judea to stay in Caesarea for a while.

20 Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they sent a delegation to make peace with him because their cities were dependent upon

Herod's country for food. The delegates won the support of Blastus, Herod's personal assistant, 21 and an appointment with Herod was granted. When the day arrived, Herod put on his royal robes, sat on his throne, and made a speech to them. 22 The people trying to curry favor with him, gave him a great ovation, shouting, "It is the voice of a god, not of a man!"

23 Because Herod accepted the people's worship instead of giving the glory to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, on the spot, with terrible pains. Soon, being consumed by internal parasites, he died.

24 Meanwhile, God's Good News was spreading rapidly, and there were many new believers.

25 So, when Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission to Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch, taking John Mark with them.

## **ACTS 13**

Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called "the black man"), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul. 2 One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I

have called them.” 3 So after more fasting and prayer, the other men ordained them and sent them on their way.

4 So, Barnabas and Saul, following the leading of the Holy Spirit, went down to the seaport of Seleucia and, from there, sailed for the island of Cyprus. 5 There, in the town of Salamis, they went to the Jewish synagogues and taught, from the Old Testament Scriptures, the Good News about Jesus, the Messiah. All this time, John Mark accompanied them as their assistant.

6 Afterward they traveled from town to town across the entire island until finally they reached Paphos, where they met a Jewish sorcerer, a false prophet named Bar-Jesus. 7 He had attached himself to the governor, Sergius Paulus, who was an intelligent man. The governor invited Barnabas and Saul to visit him, for he wanted to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas, the sorcerer (as his name means in Greek), interfered and urged the governor to pay no attention to what Barnabas and Saul said. He was trying to keep the governor from believing.

9 Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked the sorcerer in the eye 10 and said, “You child of the devil, full of every sort of deceit and fraud, and enemy of all that is good! So: you don’t intend to stop interfering with the preaching of the Good News about Jesus? 11 Alright! Jesus is going to interfere with you. He is going to make you blind: you will totally lose your sight for a while.”

Instantly his vision faded until he could see nothing but total darkness, and he began groping around, begging for someone to take his hand and lead him.

12 When the governor saw this, he became a believer, for he was most impressed by this verification of the message about Jesus.

13 Paul and his companions then sailed from Paphos for Pamphylia, landing at the port town of Perga. It was there that John Mark deserted them and returned to Jerusalem.  
14 But Paul and Barnabas traveled inland to Antioch of Pisidia.

On the Sabbath, they went to the synagogue for the services. 15 After the usual readings from the books of Moses and the prophets, those in charge of the service gave them this invitation: “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, come and give it.”

16 So Paul stood, lifted his hand for quiet and started speaking. “Men of Israel,” he said, “and all others who reverence God, listen to me.

17 “The God of this nation of Israel chose our ancestors and made them multiply and grow strong during their stay as foreigners in Egypt. Then with a powerful arm he led them out of that country. 18 He put up with their poor conduct through forty years of wandering in the

wilderness. 19 When he had destroyed seven nations in Canaan, He gave their land by lot as an inheritance to the tribes of Israel. 20 All this took about 450 years.

“After that, God gave them judges to govern them until the time of Samuel the prophet. 21 But, then, the people begged for a king, so God gave them Saul, son of Kish, from the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years. 22 Then God removed Saul and replaced him with David, a man about whom God said, ‘I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart. He will do everything I want him to do.’

23 “Of this special seed, God, just as He promised to do, has raised up a Savior for Israel — Jesus!

24 Before he came, John the Baptist preached that all the people of Israel needed to repent of their sins and turn to God and be baptized. 25 As John was finishing his ministry he asked, ‘Do you think I am the Messiah? No, I am not! But he is coming soon—and I’m not even worthy to untie the sandals on his feet!’

26 “Gentlemen and brethren— whether sons of Abraham, or God-fearing Gentiles—we have been sent to give this message of salvation to you. 27 For the people in Jerusalem and their leaders, in failing to recognize Jesus, and in failing to comprehend that all the prophets were speaking about him — though they hear these scriptures read every Sabbath — fulfilled the prophets’ words by

condemning him to death. 28 They found no legal reason to execute him, but they insisted that Pilate have him put to death anyway.

29 “When all that the prophecies said about him had been fulfilled, they took his dead body down from the cross and placed it in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead! 31 And for many days following he was seen by many who knew him very well from having spent time with him from the beginning of his ministry in Galilee until his death in Jerusalem. These are the very ones who are now his witnesses to the people of Israel.

32 “So, now we have some very Good News for you. The promise God gave to our ancestors, 33 He has now fulfilled for us, their descendants, by raising Jesus from the dead!

This is what the second psalm means when it says:

‘You are my Son.

Today I have become your Father.’

34 And concerning God’s promise to raise him from the dead, never to die again, he said, ‘I will give you the *eternal* blessings I promised to David.’

35 Another psalm explains it more fully: ‘You will not allow your Holy One to decompose in the grave.’

36 This is not a reference to David, for after David had done the will of God for his own generation, he died and was buried with his ancestors, and his body decayed. 37 But Jesus, whom God raised from the dead, experienced no decay.

“Therefore, gentlemen and brethren, please understand that we are here to proclaim that through this man, Jesus, there is forgiveness for sins! 39 Everyone who simply believes in him is made righteous in God’s sight— something obeying the law of Moses can never do for you. 40 But be careful! Don’t let the prophet’s words apply to you. For he said,

41 ‘Look, you scoffers!  
Be amazed and die!  
For I am doing something in your own day,  
something you will not believe  
even though someone tells you all about it.’ ”

42 After the Jews had exited the synagogue, the Gentiles asked Paul and Barnabas to speak to them again the following week about these things. 43 And though the meeting was ended, many Jews and devout Gentile converts to Judaism continued to follow Paul and Barnabas to learn more from them. The two men urged them to continue to trust in the grace of God, rather than in their adherence to the Jewish Laws, for salvation.

44 The following week, almost the entire city turned out to hear them teach the Word of God from their new, exciting perspective. 45 But when some of the Jews saw the crowds, they were jealous; so they contradicted whatever Paul taught and slandered him.

46 Then Paul and Barnabas courageously declared, “It was preordained that we should first proclaim the Gospel to you Jews. But since you spurn it, and consider this message of eternal life to be beneath your dignity, we will now offer it to the Gentiles, instead. 47 And this is just as the Lord planned, as we read in Isaiah 49:6,

‘I have made you to be a light to the Gentiles,  
to bring salvation to the farthest corners of the earth.’ ”

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were overjoyed and thanked the Lord for the message of his gracious salvation; and all whom God had chosen for eternal life became believers. 49 And through them, the message of salvation through faith in Jesus spread throughout that region.

50 Then the Jews stirred up their most orthodox and influential city officials - both men and women - then, with their support, incited a mob against Paul and Barnabas, which drove them out of their district. 51 Paul and Barnabas shook the dust from their feet as a witness against them and proceeded to the town of Iconium. 52

But despite oppression and harassment of this sort, all the believers in Jesus were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

## **ACTS 14**

The same thing happened in Iconium. Paul and Barnabas went to the Jewish synagogue and preached so effectively that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers in Jesus. 2 Some of the Jews, however, spurned God's message and poisoned the minds of the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas. 3 Nevertheless, the apostles stayed there a long time, preaching boldly as the Lord enabled them, confirming their message about His grace by permitting them to do miraculous signs and wonders. 4 But the people of the town were divided in their opinion about them. Some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.

5 Then a mob of Gentiles and Jews, along with their leaders, made plans to assault and stone them. 6 When the apostles learned of it, they escaped to the region of Lycaonia—to the towns of Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding area. 7 And there they continued to proclaim the Good News.

8 In Lystra there sat a helpless man whose feet were deformed. He had never walked, having been crippled since birth. 9 He listened so intently as Paul preached that

he attracted Paul's attention. Paul could see that he had faith to be healed. 10 So, in a loud voice, Paul said to him "Stand up!" And the man literally jumped to his feet and started walking around.

11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they began exclaiming in their local dialect, "These men are gods in the flesh!" 12 They all thought Barnabas was the Greek god Zeus, and Paul was Hermes, since he was the chief speaker. 13 Now, the temple of Zeus was located just outside the town. So, the priest of that temple brought bulls and wreaths of flowers to the town gates, and he prepared to lead the people in offering sacrifices to the apostles.

14 But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard what was happening, they tore their clothing in dismay and ran out among the people, shouting, 15 "Friends, why are you doing this? We are merely human beings—just like you! In fact, the very reason we have come is to tell you that you should stop worshipping false gods like these and believe in the living God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. 16 Until now, he has allowed people around the world to act in accordance with their own ideas about what God is like — 17 though He surrounded them with evidence of his existence and his goodness. For instance, he sends us rain and harvests, filling our hearts with food and gladness." 18 But despite

everything they said, Paul and Barnabas could scarcely restrain the people from sacrificing to them.

19 Some time later, some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and were so successful in persuading these very same crowds that Paul and Barnabas were false teachers, they ended up stoning Paul, and, thinking he was dead, dragged his battered body out of town. 20 But, amazingly, as the believers gathered around his body lying in the dirt, Paul got up! — and went right back into the town to spend the night! The following day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

21 After preaching the Good News in Derbe and winning many people to Christ, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, 22 where they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to maintain their faith in Jesus, reminding them that the normal Christian life [authentic Christianity] includes many hardships. 23 Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders in every church. With prayer and fasting, they turned the elders over to the care of the Lord, in whom they had come to put their trust. 24 Then they traveled back through Pisidia to Pamphylia. 25 After proclaiming the Good News in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From there, they sailed back to Antioch of Syria, where their journey had begun. It was there that the believers had first entrusted them to the grace of God to do the work they had now completed.

27 Upon arriving in Antioch, they called all the believers together and reported everything God had done through them and how he had opened the door of salvation by faith in Jesus to the Gentiles, too. 28 And they stayed there with the believers for a long time.

*[Note: Peter used the “keys” God had given him to “Open the Door of Salvation” to 1. the Jews, 2. John the Baptist’s followers, 3. the Gentiles.]*

## **ACTS 15**

While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers: “Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved.” 2 Paul and Barnabas strongly disagreed, and disputed the issue warmly with them. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to discuss this question with the apostles and elders. 3 The church sent the delegates to Jerusalem, and they stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria to visit the believers. They told them—much to everyone’s joy—that the Gentiles, too, were being converted.

4 When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had

done through them. 5 But some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, “The Gentile converts must worship God the way we do, as Jews: they must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses.”

6 So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. 7 At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: “Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. 8 God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that the Gentiles were accepted by Him by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he saved them simply by their faith in Jesus - just as we were saved. 10 So why are you now arguing against God by demanding that the Gentile believers do something neither we nor our ancestors were ever able to do? 11 We, Jews, now understand that we are saved only by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus. The Gentiles are saved the exact same way.”

12 That quieted everybody down, and they all listened intently as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

13 After they had finished speaking, James stood and said, “Gentlemen, brethren - here is what I have to say

about this matter. 14 We have heard the account from Peter about the first time the Gospel was brought to the Gentiles, and how God called some of them to become his children through faith in Jesus. 15 Backing this account, Gentile conversion is exactly what the prophets predicted. The Bible says:

16 ‘Afterward, I will return  
and restore the fallen kingdom of David.  
I will rebuild its ruins and restore it,  
17 so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord,  
including the Gentiles—  
all whom I have called to be mine.

The Lord has spoken—

18 and he will do everything he planned to do since the beginning of the world.’

19 “And so my judgment is that we should cause no trouble for the Gentiles who are turning to God for salvation. 20 But I believe, to promote peace in the Body between Jewish and Gentile believers, we should counsel the Gentiles not to eat food that has been offered to idols, to keep themselves from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood.\* 21 For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations.”

*[Note: We all need to lay aside our preferences to avoid becoming a stumbling block to other believers.]*

22 In full agreement, the apostles and elders together with the whole church in Jerusalem chose two delegates, and they sent them to Antioch of Syria with Paul and Barnabas to report on this decision. The men chosen were leaders among the believers—Judas (also called Barsabbas) and Silas.

23 This is the letter they took with them:

“This letter is from the apostles and elders, your Christian brothers in Jerusalem. It is written to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings!

24 “We understand that some men from here have been bothering you and upsetting you by teaching that you must be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law; but they are not preaching this with our authority; we did not send them! 25 Having come to complete agreement concerning your question, we decided to send official representatives to you, accompanied by our beloved Barnabas and Paul — 26 who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We are, therefore, sending Judas and Silas to you to confirm verbally what we have decided concerning your question.

28 “We felt impressed by the Holy Spirit to ask no more of you than these few requirements: 29 that you abstain from

eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. We think it best for you to avoid these things. God bless you.”

30 The messengers traveled at once to Antioch, where they called a general meeting of the believers and delivered the letter from the Jerusalem council to them. 31 As they read this encouraging message, it brought great joy to the church.

32 Then Judas and Silas, both being excellent Bible teachers, spoke at length to the believers, encouraging them and strengthening their faith. 33 They stayed for a while, and then the believers sent them back to the church in Jerusalem with their blessing. 34 However, Silas chose to remain there, 35 with Paul and Barnabas. Along with many others, they continued to teach and proclaim the Good News of the grace of God.

36 After some time Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s go back and visit every city where we have previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are doing.” 37 Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. 38 But Paul disapproved, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia, and had not continued with them in their missionary work. 39 Their disagreement was so strong that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus. 40 Paul chose Silas, and before they sailed, the believers entrusted them to the

Lord's gracious care. 41 Then he traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there.

## **ACTS 16**

Paul and Silas went first to Derbe and then on to Lystra where they met Timothy, a believer whose mother was a Christian Jewess, and his father a Greek. 2 The Christians in Lystra and Iconium thought highly of Timothy, 3 so Paul asked him to join them on their journey. In deference to the Jews of the area, he circumcised Timothy before they left, for everyone knew that his father was a Greek and hadn't permitted this before. 4 Then they went from city to city, making known the decision concerning the Gentiles, as decided by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. 5 So the church grew daily in faith and numbers.

6 Next they traveled through Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had told them not to go into the Turkish province of Asia Minor at that time. 7 Then, going along the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia, but again the Holy Spirit said no. 8 So instead they went on through Mysia province to the city of Troas.

9 That night, Paul had a vision. In his dream he saw a man over in Macedonia, Greece, pleading with him, "Come over *here* and help *us*." 10 At this point, I, Luke, joined Paul at Troas, and, because of Paul's vision, we determined to leave immediately for Macedonia, for we

concluded that God was sending us to proclaim the Good News there.

11 We boarded a ship at Troas, and sailed straight across to Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis, 12 and finally reached Philippi, a Roman colony just inside the Macedonian border, and we stayed there several days.

13 On the Sabbath, we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank where we understood some people met for prayer; and we preached the Gospel to some women who came. 14 One of them was Lydia, a saleswoman from Thyatira, a merchant of purple cloth. She was already a worshiper of God and as she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart and she accepted all that Paul was saying. 15 She was baptized along with all her household and asked us to be her guests. “If you are satisfied that I am a sincere Christian with no ulterior motive,” she said, “be my guests, and stay at my home.” And she continued to coax us until we agreed.

16 One day as we were going down to the place of prayer beside the river, we met a demon-possessed slave girl, who earned much money for her masters by telling people’s fortunes. 17 She followed along behind us crying out, “These men are servants of God, and they have come to tell us the true way of salvation.”

18 This went on for many days until Paul, greatly troubled, turned and spoke to the demon within her. “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” Instantly it left her.

19 When the slave-girl’s owners realized that their source of profit was now ended, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them to the marketplace before the authorities.

20-21 “These Jews are seriously disturbing the peace of our city,” they shouted. “They are teaching the people to do things that are against the Roman laws.”

22 A mob was quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the judges ordered that they be stripped and given a caning. 23 After they had been given a good beating, they were thrown into prison. The jailer was strictly warned to prevent their escaped, 24 so he took no chances, but put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet into the stocks.

25 Around midnight, as Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to the Lord — with all the other prisoners listening, 26 suddenly, there was a great earthquake, shaking the prison to its foundations, with the result that the doors of every cell flew open, and the chains of every prisoner were loosed! 27 The earthquake wakened the jailer. He ran from his house, next door, to the prison to

find all the doors wide open. Assuming the prisoners had escaped, he drew his sword to kill himself.

28 But Paul yelled to him, “Do not hurt yourself! We are all here!”

29 Trembling with fear, the jailer called for a torch, ran into the dungeon and prostrated himself in thanks before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he led them out of the prison and implored them, “Sirs, what must I do to have this salvation you possess and have been proclaiming?”

31 They replied, “Simply believe in Jesus as your Lord and as the Messiah and you will be saved; and this same thing applies to your entire household.”

32 Then they carefully explained to him and all his household the Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. 33 The jailer, a new believer, washed their bloody backs, and then he and all his family were baptized as believers in Jesus. 34 Next, he brought them to his house and set a meal before them. He and his family were filled with such joy in being new believers!

35 The next morning the judges sent police officers to tell the jailer to let Paul and Silas go. 36 So the jailer told Paul they were free to leave.

37 But Paul replied, “They have mistreated us by arresting us, shaming us, and beating us publicly — without any trial, and they have put us in irons and in jail—and we are Roman citizens! And now they add insult to injury by trying to get rid of us secretly? Never! Let them come themselves and release us publicly!”

38 When the police officers brought this reply back to the judges, the judges feared for their lives when they heard Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. 39 So they hurried to the jail, apologized profusely, ushered them out and implored them to leave their city. 40 So, Paul and Silas left the prison and returned to the home of Lydia. After meeting there with the local believers and reassuring them of God’s sovereignty over every situation, they left town.

## **ACTS 17**

Paul and Silas now traveled through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As was Paul’s custom, he went there to preach, and for three Sabbaths in a row he opened the Scriptures to the people, 3 explaining the prophecies about the death of the Messiah and his resurrection. His persistent theme was “Jesus is the Messiah”. 4 Some who listened were persuaded and became converts and continued to spend time with Paul and Silas—including a large number of sincere Gentiles and also many important women of the city.

5 But, once again, some of the staunch Jews were jealous of the attention being given to Paul and Silas relating to Jesus — whom they rejected as Messiah, so they conspired with some nefarious fellows from the streets to form a mob and start a riot. The mob assailed the home of Jason, expecting to find Paul and Silas there, and planning to bring them out to the crowd to do them violence.

6 Not finding them there, they dragged out Jason and some of the other believers, and hauled them, instead, before the city Council. They howled, “These men, Paul and Silas, who have caused nothing but trouble everywhere they’ve been, are now here disturbing *our* city!

7 And Jason has welcomed them into his home! They are all guilty of treason, for they claim Jesus to be their king — not Caesar!”

8-9 The people of the city, as well as the judges, were concerned at these reports and let Jason and the others go only after they had posted bail.

10 That night the Christians hurriedly sent Paul and Silas to Berea, where, as usual, they went to the synagogue to preach about Jesus. 11 But the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and gladly listened to the message. They searched the Scriptures day by day to check up on Paul and Silas’ statements to see if they were really so. 12 As a result, many of them

believed, including several prominent Gentile women, and many men, also.

13 But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching in Berea, they went over and stirred up trouble. 14 The believers acted at once, sending Paul on to the coast, while Silas and Timothy remained behind. 15 Those accompanying Paul went on with him to Athens and then returned to Berea with a message for Silas and Timothy to hurry and join him.

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere throughout the city. 17 He went to the synagogue for discussions with the Jews and the devout Gentiles, and spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there.

18 He also had an encounter with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Their reaction, when he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, was, “He’s imagining things,” or, “He’s pushing some foreign religion.”

19 But they brought him to the forum at Mars Hill. “Please tell us more about this new religion,” they said, 20 “for you are saying some things we’ve never heard before, and we want to understand them.” 21 (The Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time hearing and telling anything new.)

22 So Paul, standing before them at the Mars Hill forum, addressed them as follows:

“Men of Athens, it is obvious that you are deeply reverent toward all religions. 23 For as I was walking in your city I saw many shrines. I noticed that one of them had this inscription on it—‘To the Unknown God.’ This God you have been worshiping without knowing who he is, is the One I now wish to tell you about.

24 “His name is Jehovah. He made the world and everything in it. And, since he is Lord of the entire universe and of the whole earth, He doesn’t live in man-made temples; 25 and human hands can’t minister to his needs—for he has no needs! In fact, it is He, himself, who gives life and breath to everything, and satisfies every need there is. 26 He created all the nations of the world from one man, Adam, and scattered them across the face of the earth to the places He had prepared for them. He decided beforehand which nations should rise or fall, and when. He determined the specific geographical boundaries of each nation.

27 “His desire is that, because of all He has done for them, men would be aware of His existence, and would be intrigued to reach toward him and discover him personally—though he is not far from any one of us, since He fills the entire universe. 28 In fact it is true to say that we live and

move *in* Him and have come to existence *out* of Him! As one of your own poets puts it, 'We are the sons of God.'

29 This being the case, we shouldn't think of God as an idol made by men from gold or silver or chipped from stone. 30 God has tolerated man's past ignorance about these things, but from now on he commands everyone to turn away from idols and worship only him. 31 This is very important because he has set a day when the world is going to be judged righteously by a man he has appointed to this task. And He has endorsed this man to all by raising him from the dead."

32 When they heard Paul speak of the resurrection of a person who had been dead, some laughed out loud, though some others said, "We want to hear more about this later."

33 But that was all Paul had to say to the mockers. 34 However, his speech had a good effect on others. A few people embraced what he had said and became believers. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the City Council, and a woman named Damaris, and there were others.

## **ACTS 18**

Some time later, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2-3 There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila,

born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had been expelled from Italy as a result of Claudius Caesar's order to expel all Jews from Rome. Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was.

4 Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue, persuading both Jews and Gentiles that Jesus is the Messiah. 5 After the arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia, Paul, deeply concerned for his people, the Jews, turned his full attention to convincing them that Jesus is the Messiah. 6 But when the Jews shut their minds to his teaching and began blaspheming Jesus, Paul shook off the dust from his robe and said, "Your blood be upon your own heads—I have fulfilled my responsibility toward you. From now on I will take my message to the Gentiles."

7 From then on, he lodged with Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God and lived next door to the synagogue. 8 Before long, Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and all his household believed in the Lord and were baptized—as were many others in Corinth.

9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't quit! 10 I am with you, so no one can harm you. There are many people in this city who will trust in me as their Savior." 11 So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching them the Word of God.

12 But when Gallio became governor of Achaia, the Jews rose in concerted action against Paul and brought him before the new governor for judgment. 13 They accused Paul of “persuading men to worship only one God, contrary to Roman law.” 14 But when it was Paul’s turn to make his defense, Gallio turned to his accusers and said, “Listen, you Jews, if this were a case involving a misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be my duty to listen to you, 15 but since it is merely a matter of semantics and person preferences and your own Jewish laws, you take care of it. I’m not interested in dealing with it.” 16 And he drove them out of the courtroom.

17 Then the Gentile mob turned against Sosthenes, the new leader of the synagogue, and gave him a beating right outside the courtroom. But Gallio couldn’t have cared less.

18 Paul remained in the city several days after that and then said good-bye to the Christians there and sailed for the coast of Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him. At Cenchreae, Paul had his head shaved according to Jewish custom, for he had taken a vow. 19 Arriving at the port of Ephesus, he left us aboard ship while he went over to the synagogue for a discussion with the Jews. 20 They asked him to stay for a few days, but he felt that he had no time to lose.

21 “I must by all means be at Jerusalem for the holiday,” he said. But he promised to return to Ephesus later if God permitted; and so he set sail again.

22 The next stop was at the port of Caesarea. He went from there to Jerusalem to greet the church there, and then sailed on to Antioch. 23 After spending some time there, he left for Turkey again, going through Galatia and Phrygia, from place to place, encouraging the local groups of believers and helping them grow in the Lord.

24 As it happened, a Jew named Apollos, a wonderful Bible teacher and preacher, had just arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. 25 While he was in Egypt, someone had told him about John the Baptist and what John had said about Jesus, but that is all he knew. He had never heard the rest of the story! 26 So he was preaching boldly and enthusiastically in the synagogue, “The Messiah is coming! Get ready to receive him!” Priscilla and Aquila were there and heard him—and it was a powerful sermon. Afterwards they met with him and explained what had happened to Jesus since the time of John, and all that it meant!

27 Apollos had been thinking about going to Greece, and the believers encouraged him in this. They wrote to their fellow-believers there, directing them to welcome him. And upon his arrival in Greece, he was greatly used of God to strengthen the church, 28 for he powerfully refuted all the

Jewish arguments in public debate, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

## **ACTS 19**

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through Turkey and arrived in Ephesus, where he found several Gentile “believers”. 2 Sensing something wasn’t quite right with their “Christianity”, he asked them “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed in Jesus?”

“No,” they replied, “we don’t know what you mean. What is the Holy Spirit?”

3 “Then what beliefs were you acknowledging by your baptism?” he asked.

And they replied, “What John the Baptist taught.”

4 Then Paul pointed out to them that John’s baptism was to demonstrate a desire to turn from sin to God and that those receiving his baptism must then go on to believe in Jesus, the one John said would come later.

5 As soon as they heard this, they put their faith in Jesus and were baptized as true believers in the Lord Jesus. 6 Then, when Paul laid his hands upon their heads, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other languages

and gave testimonies of their new faith. 7 The men involved were about twelve in number.

8 Paul went to the synagogue and preached boldly each Sabbath day for three months, telling about The Church [authentic Christianity], and persuading many to believe in Jesus. 9 But some strongly rejected his message and publicly spoke against the new way of salvation by faith in Christ apart from works, so he left, refusing to preach to them again. Gathering the believers from among them, he began a separate meeting at the lecture hall of Tyrannus and preached there daily. 10 This went on for the next two years, so that everyone in the Turkish province of Asia Minor—both Jews and Gentiles —heard the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

11 Now, God had given Paul the power to do wonderful miracles, 12 so that even when his handkerchiefs or parts of his clothing were placed upon sick people, they were healed, and any demons within them came out.

13 A team of itinerant Jews who were traveling from town to town casting out demons planned to experiment by using the name of the Lord Jesus. The formula they decided on was this: “I adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!” 14 Seven sons of Sceva, a chief Jewish priest, were doing this. 15 But when they tried it on a man possessed by a demon, the demon replied, “I know Jesus and I know Paul, but who are you!” 16 And he

attacked two of them and beat them up, so that they fled out of his house naked and badly injured.

17 The account of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Gentiles alike; and a serious reverence for Paul and his message descended on the city, and everyone's respect for the name of the Lord Jesus increased. 18 Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. 19 A number of them who had been practicing black magic brought their spell books and charms and burned them at a public bonfire. (Someone estimated the value of the books at \$10,000.) 20 This indicates how deeply the whole area was stirred and permanently affected by God's message.

21 Afterwards Paul felt impelled by the Holy Spirit to go across to Greece before returning to Jerusalem. "And after that," he said, "I must go on to Rome!" 22 He sent his two assistants, Timothy and Erastus, on ahead to Greece while he stayed a while longer in Asia Minor.

23 But about that time, a big blowup developed in Ephesus concerning the Christians. 24 It began with Demetrius, a silversmith who employed many craftsmen to manufacture silver shrines of the Greek goddess Diana. 25 He called a meeting of his men, together with others employed in related trades, and addressed them as follows:

“Gentlemen, this business is our income. 26 As you know so well from what you’ve seen and heard, this man Paul has persuaded many, many people that handmade gods aren’t gods at all. As a result, our sales volume is going down! 27 Of course, I am not only talking about the business aspects of this situation and our loss of income, but also of the possibility that the temple of the great goddess Diana will lose its influence, and that Diana—this magnificent goddess worshiped not only throughout this part of Turkey but all around the world—will be forgotten!”

28 This speech made them all angry and they began shouting, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”

29 A crowd began to gather, and soon the city was in an uproar. Everyone rushed to the amphitheater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions, for trial. 30 Paul wanted to go in, but the believers wouldn’t let him. 31 Some of the Roman officers of the province, friends of Paul, also sent a message to him, begging him not to risk his life by entering.

32 Inside, the people were all shouting — some one thing and some another; everything was in confusion. In fact, most of them didn’t even know why they were there.

33 Alexander was spotted among the crowd by some of the Jews and dragged forward. He motioned for silence and tried to speak. 34 But when the crowd realized he was

a Jew, they started shouting again and kept it up for two hours: “Great is Diana of the Ephesians! Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”

35 At last the mayor was able to quiet them down enough to speak. “Men of Ephesus,” he said, “everyone knows that Ephesus is the center of the religion of the great Diana, whose image fell down to us from heaven. 36 Since this is an indisputable fact, you shouldn’t be disturbed no matter what is said, and should do nothing rash. 37 Yet you have brought these men here who have stolen nothing from her temple and have not defamed her. 38 If Demetrius and the craftsmen have a case against them, the courts are currently in session and the judges can take the case at once. Let them go through legal channels. 39 And if there are complaints about other matters, they can be settled at the regular City Council meetings; 40 for we are in danger of being called to account by the Roman government for today’s riot, since there is no cause for it. And if Rome demands an explanation, I won’t know what to say.”

41 Then he dismissed them, and they dispersed.

## **ACTS 20**

When it was all over, Paul sent for the believers, and after encouraging them, made his good-byes and left for Greece, 2 preaching to the believers along the way in all

the cities he passed through. 3 He was in Greece three months and was preparing to sail for Syria when he discovered a plot by the Jews against his life, so he decided to go north to Macedonia first.

4 Several men were traveling with him, going as far as Turkey; they were Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; Aristarchus and Secundus, from Thessalonica; Gaius, from Derbe; Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus, who were returning to their homes in Turkey, 5 and had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas. 6 As soon as the Passover ceremonies ended, we boarded ship at Philippi in northern Greece and five days later arrived in Troas, Turkey, where we stayed a week.

7 On Sunday, the weekly gathering of the believers for a meal and Christian fellowship, Paul addressed everybody. And since he was leaving the next day, he talked until midnight! 8 The upstairs room where we met had a number of windows. 9 As Paul spoke on and on, a young man named Eutychus, sitting on one of the windowsills, went fast asleep and fell three stories to his death below. 10 Paul went downstairs, bent over him, and took him into his arms. “Don’t worry,” he said, “he’s all right!” 11 And he was! They all went back upstairs and had some refreshments; then Paul preached another long sermon—so it was dawn when he finally left them! 12 The young man was taken home unhurt, and everyone was greatly relieved.

13 Paul was going by land to Assos, and we went on ahead by ship. 14 He joined us there and we sailed together to Mitylene; 15 the next day we passed Chios; and the next, we touched at Samos; a day later we arrived at Miletus.

16 Paul had decided against stopping at Ephesus this time, as he was hurrying to get to Jerusalem, if possible, for the celebration of Pentecost.

17 But when we landed at Miletus, he sent a message to the leaders of the house churches at Ephesus asking them to come down to the boat to meet him.

18 When they arrived he told them, “You men know that from the day I set foot in Turkey until now 19 I have done the Lord’s work humbly—yes, and with tears—and have faced grave danger from the plots of the Jews against my life. 20 Yet I never shrank from telling you the truth, either publicly or in your homes. 21 I have had one message for Jews and Gentiles alike—the necessity of turning from sin, to God, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

22 “And now I am going to Jerusalem, drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what awaits me, 23 except that the Holy Spirit has told me through believers in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. 24 But life is worth nothing unless I use it for completing

the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God’s grace.

25 “And now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about teaching the ways of God in The Church [authentic Christianity] will ever see me again. 26 I boldly declare that no man’s blood can be laid at my door, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you everything God wanted me to say.

28 “And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God’s flock—his church, purchased with his blood—for the Holy Spirit is holding you responsible as overseers. 29 I know full well that after I leave you, false teachers, like vicious wolves, will appear among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Some of you yourselves will distort the truth in order to draw a following. 31 Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you—my constant watchcare over you night and day and my many tears for you.

32 “And now I leave you in God’s hands and with the wonderful teaching of his grace that is able to build your faith and give you an inheritance among all those who are saved.

33 “I have never been hungry for money or fine clothing; 34 you know that these hands of mine worked to pay my own way and even to supply the needs of those who were with me. 35 And I was a constant example to you in

helping the poor; for I remembered the words of the Lord Jesus, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

36 When he had finished speaking, he knelt and prayed with them, 37 and they wept aloud as they gave him farewell hugs, 38 sorrowing most of all because he said that he would never see them again. Then they accompanied him down to the ship.

## **ACTS 21**

After parting from the Ephesian elders, we sailed straight to Cos. The next day we reached Rhodes and then went to Patara. 2 There we boarded a ship sailing for the Syrian province of Phoenicia. 3 We sighted the island of Cyprus, passed it on our left, and landed at the harbor of Tyre, in Syria, where the ship unloaded. 4 We went ashore, found the local believers, and stayed with them a week. These disciples warned Paul—the Holy Spirit prophesying through them—not to go on to Jerusalem. 5 At the end of the week when we returned to the ship, the entire congregation including wives and children walked down to the beach with us where we prayed and said our farewells. 6 Then we went aboard, and they returned home.

7 The next stop after leaving Tyre was Ptolemais, where we greeted the believers but stayed only one day. 8 Then we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the first seven deacons. 9 He had

four unmarried daughters who were gifted at speaking through the power of the Holy Spirit.

10 During our stay of several days, a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of speaking through the power of the Holy Spirit, arrived from Judea 11 and visited us. He took Paul's belt, bound it around his own feet and hands, and said, "The Holy Spirit declares, 'So shall the owner of this belt be bound by the Jews in Jerusalem and turned over to the Romans.'" 12 Hearing this, all of us—the local believers and his traveling companions—begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

13 But he said, "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." 14 When it was clear that he wouldn't be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The will of the Lord be done."

15 So, shortly afterwards, we packed our things and left for Jerusalem. 16 Some disciples from Caesarea accompanied us, and on arrival we were guests at the home of Mnason, originally from Cyprus, one of the early believers; 17 and all the believers at Jerusalem welcomed us gladly.

18 The next day Paul took us with him to meet with James and the elders of the Jerusalem church. 19 After greetings

were exchanged, Paul recounted the many things God had accomplished among the Gentiles through his work.

20 They praised God but then said, “You know, dear brother, how many thousands of Jews have also believed, and they are all very insistent that Jewish believers must continue to follow the Jewish traditions and customs. \* 21 Our Jewish Christians here at Jerusalem have been told that you are against the laws of Moses, against our Jewish customs, and that you forbid the circumcision of their children. 22 Now what can be done? For they will certainly hear that you have come.

\*Note: Descriptive; not prescriptive.

23 “We suggest this: We have four men here who are preparing to shave their heads and take some vows. 24 Go with them to the Temple and have your head shaved too—and pay for theirs to be shaved.

“Then everyone will know that you approve of this custom for the Hebrew Christians and that you yourself obey the Jewish laws and are in line with our thinking in these matters.

25 “As for the Gentile Christians, we aren’t asking them to follow these Jewish customs at all—except for the ones we wrote to them about: not to eat food offered to idols,

not to eat unbled meat from strangled animals, and not to commit fornication.”

26-27 So Paul agreed to their request and the next day went with the men to the Temple for the ceremony, thus publicizing his vow to offer a sacrifice seven days later with the others.

The seven days were almost ended when some Jews from Turkey saw him in the Temple and roused a mob against him. They grabbed him, 28 yelling, “Men of Israel! Help! Help! This is the man who preaches against our people and tells everybody to disobey the Jewish laws. He even talks against the Temple and defiles it by bringing Gentiles in!” 29 (For down in the city earlier that day, they had seen him with Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus in Turkey, and assumed that Paul had taken him into the Temple.)

30 The whole population of the city was electrified by these accusations and a great riot followed. Paul was dragged out of the Temple, and immediately the gates were closed behind him. 31 As they were attempting to kill him, word reached the commander of the Roman garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32 He quickly ordered out his soldiers and officers and ran down among the crowd. When the mob saw the troops coming, they stopped beating Paul. 33 The commander arrested Paul and ordered him bound with double chains. Then he asked

the crowd who he was and what he had done. 34 Some shouted one thing and some another. When he couldn't find out anything because of the uproar and confusion, he ordered Paul to be taken to their garrison. 35 As they reached the stairs, the mob grew so violent that the soldiers lifted Paul to their shoulders to protect him, 36 and the crowd surged behind shouting, "Away with him, away with him!"

37-38 As Paul was about to be taken inside, he said to the commander, "May I have a word with you?"

"Do you know Greek?" the commander asked, surprised. "Aren't you that Egyptian who led a rebellion a few years ago and took 4,000 members of the Assassins with him into the desert?"

39 "No," Paul replied, "I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia which is no small town. I request permission to talk to these people."

40 The commander agreed, so Paul stood on the stairs and motioned to the people to be quiet. When a majority of the crowd had quieted down, he addressed them in Hebrew as follows:

## **ACTS 22**

“Brothers and fathers, listen to me as I offer my defense.”  
2 (When they heard him speaking in Hebrew, the silence was even greater.) 3 “I am a Jew,” he said, “born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, but educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, at whose feet I learned to follow our Jewish laws and customs very carefully. I became very anxious to honor God in everything I did, just as you have tried to do today. 4 And I persecuted the Christians, hounding them to death, binding and delivering both men and women to prison. 5 The High Priest or any member of the Council can testify that this is so, for I asked them for letters to the Jewish leaders in Damascus, with instructions to let me bring any Christians I found to Jerusalem in chains to be punished.

6 “As I was on the road, nearing Damascus, suddenly about noon a very bright light from heaven shone around me. 7 I fell off my horse to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Paul, Paul, why are you persecuting me?’

8 “‘Who is it speaking to me, sir?’ I asked. And he replied, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are so intent on eliminating.’ 9 The men with me saw the light but didn’t understand what was said.

10 “And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’

“And the Lord told me, ‘Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that I have appointed for you to do.’

11 “I was blinded by the intense light and had to be led into Damascus by my companions. 12 There a man named Ananias, as godly a man as you could find for obeying the law and well thought of by all the Jews of Damascus, 13 came to me, and standing beside me said, ‘Brother Paul, receive your sight!’ And immediately I could see.

14 “Then he told me, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Messiah and hear him speak. 15 You are to take his message everywhere, telling what you have seen and heard. 16 And now, why delay? Go and be baptized and be cleansed from your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’

17 “One day, after my return to Jerusalem, while I was praying in the Temple, I fell into a trance 18 and saw a vision of God saying to me, ‘Hurry! Leave Jerusalem, for the people here won’t believe you when you give them my message.’

19 “‘But Lord,’ I argued, ‘they certainly know that I imprisoned and beat those in every synagogue who believed on you. 20 And when your witness, Stephen, was killed, I was standing there agreeing—keeping the coats they laid aside as they stoned him.’

21 “But God said to me, ‘Leave Jerusalem, for I will send you far away . . . to the Gentiles!’”

22 The crowd listened until Paul came to that word — “Gentiles”, then they all began yelling at once: “Away with such a fellow! Kill him! He isn’t fit to live!” 23 They yelled and threw their coats in the air and tossed up handfuls of dust.

24 So the commander brought him inside and ordered him lashed with whips to make him confess his crime. He wanted to find out why the crowd had become so furious!

25 As they tied Paul — spread-eagled in an upright position — to lash him, Paul said to an officer standing there, “Is it legal for you to whip a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been tried?”

26 The officer went to the commander and asked, “Be careful what you do; this man is a Roman citizen!”

27 So the commander went over and asked Paul, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?”

“I most certainly am.”

28 “I am too,” the commander muttered, “and it cost me plenty!”

And Paul said, “Well, I am a citizen by birth!”

29 The soldiers standing ready to lash him, quickly disappeared when they heard that Paul was a Roman citizen, and the commander was frightened because he had ordered him bound and whipped.

30 The next day the commander freed him from his chains and ordered the chief priests into session with the Jewish Council. He had Paul brought in before them to try to find out what the trouble was all about.

## **ACTS 23**

Looking the Council over carefully, Paul began:

“Brothers, I have kept a clear conscience before God all my life.”

2 At once, Ananias the High Priest ordered somebody close to Paul slap his mouth.

3 Paul said to him, “God shall slap you, you whitewashed pigpen. You pretend to judge me according to the law, while commanding me to be struck, contrary to the law!”

4 Those standing near Paul said to him, “Is that any way to talk to God’s High Priest?”

5 “I didn’t realize he was the High Priest, brothers,” Paul replied, “for I know that the Scriptures say, ‘Never speak evil of your ruler.’”

6 The council had fallen into disorder. Then Paul thought of something! Part of the Council were Sadducees, and part were Pharisees! So he called out, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee — as were all my ancestors! And I am being tried here today because I believe in the resurrection of the dead!”

7 This divided the Council right down the middle—the Pharisees against the Sadducees— 8 for the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, no angels, and no eternal spirit within us, but the Pharisees believe in all of these.

9 Now, an even greater clamor arose. Some of the Pharisees leapt to their feet to argue that Paul was all right. “We see nothing wrong with him,” they shouted. “Perhaps a spirit or angel spoke to him there on the Damascus road. Let us not argue against God.”

10 The shouting grew louder and louder, and the men were tugging at Paul from both sides, pulling him this way and that. Finally the commander, fearing they would tear him apart, ordered his soldiers to take him away from them by force and bring him back to the garrison.

11 That night the Lord stood beside Paul and said, “Don’t worry, Paul; just as you have told the people about me here in Jerusalem, so you must also in Rome.”

12-13 The next morning more than forty of the Jews got together and bound themselves under an oath neither to eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. 14 Then they went to the chief priests and elders and told them what they had done. 15 “Ask the commander to bring Paul back to the Council again,” they requested. “Pretend you want to ask a few more questions. We will kill him on the way.”

16 But Paul’s nephew, his sister’s son, got wind of their plan and came to the garrison and told Paul.

17 Paul called one of the officers and said, “Take this boy to the commander. He has something important to tell him.”

18 So the officer did so, explaining, “Paul, the prisoner, called me over and asked me to bring this young man to you to tell you something.”

19 The commander took the boy by the hand, and leading him aside asked him privately, “What is it you want to tell me, lad?”

20 “Tomorrow,” he told him, “the Jews are going to ask you to bring Paul before the Council again, pretending they

want to get some more information. 21 But don't do it! There are more than forty men hiding along the road ready to jump out and kill him. They have bound themselves under a curse to neither eat nor drink till he is dead. They are out there now, expecting you to agree to their request."

22 "Don't let a soul know you told me this," the commander warned the boy as he left. 23-24 Then the commander called two of his officers and ordered, "Get 200 soldiers ready to leave for Caesarea at nine o'clock tonight! Take 200 spearmen and 70 mounted cavalry. Give Paul a horse to ride and get him safely to Governor Felix."

25 Then he wrote this letter to the governor:

26 "From: Claudius Lysias

"To: His Excellency, Governor Felix.

"Greetings!

27 "This man was seized by the Jews, and they were beating him to death when I sent the soldiers to rescue him, for I learned that he was a Roman citizen. 28 Then I took him to their Council to try to find out what he had done to make them so angry. 29 I soon discovered it was something about their Jewish beliefs — definitely nothing worthy of imprisonment or death. 30 But when I was informed of a plot to kill him, I decided to send him on to

you and will tell his accusers to bring their charges before you.

Farewell.”

31 So that night, as ordered, the soldiers started on their march to take Paul to Antipatris. 32 They returned to the headquarters the next morning, leaving him with the cavalry to take him the rest of the way to Caesarea.

33 When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they presented Paul and the letter to the governor. 34 He read it and then asked Paul where he was from.

“Cilicia,” Paul answered.

35 “I will hear your case fully when your accusers arrive,” the governor told him, and ordered him kept in the prison at King Herod’s palace, in the meantime.

## **ACTS 24**

Five days later, Ananias the High Priest arrived with some of the Jewish leaders and the lawyer Tertullus, to make their accusations against Paul. 2 When Paul was called into the courtroom, Tertullus laid charges against Paul in the following address to the governor:

“Your Excellency, you have given quietness and peace to us Jews and have greatly reduced the discrimination against us. 3 And for this we are very, very grateful to you. 4 But lest I bore you, kindly give me your attention as I take a moment to briefly outline our case against this man. 5 For we have found him to be a troublemaker, a man who is constantly inciting the Jews throughout the entire world to riots and rebellions against the Roman government. He is a ringleader of the sect known as the Nazarenes. 6 Moreover, he was in the act of defiling the Temple when we arrested him.

“We would have given him what he justly deserves, 7 but Lysias, the commander of the garrison, came and took him violently away from us, 8 demanding that he be tried by Roman law. You can find out the truth of our accusations by examining him yourself.”

9 Then all the other Jews chimed in, declaring that everything Tertullus said was true.

10 Now it was Paul’s turn. The governor nodded for him to speak.

Paul began: “I know, sir, that you have been a judge of Jewish affairs for many years, and this gives me confidence as I make my defense.

11 You can quickly discover that no more than twelve days ago I arrived in Jerusalem to worship at the Temple,

12 and you will discover that my accusers did not find me in the temple stirring up trouble with anyone,

nor have I ever incited a riot in any synagogue or on the streets of any city.

13 The fact is that these men cannot prove any of the things they accuse me of doing.

14 “Their real problem with me is that, because I accept and believe *everything* written in the Hebrew scriptures, I worship the God of my fathers as a Christian, by following “The Way” [the belief that has recently arisen in Jesus as the Messiah]—a belief they consider a heresy, 15 and I believe, just as these men do, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and ungodly. 16 It is because of this belief that I try with all my strength to always maintain a clear conscience before God and man.

17 “After several years away, I returned to Jerusalem with money to aid needy Jews and to offer a sacrifice to God.

18 My accusers saw me in the Temple as I was presenting my thank offering. I had shaved my head as their laws required, and there was no crowd around me, and no rioting! But some Jews from Turkey were there 19 (who ought to be here if they have anything against me)— 20 but look! Ask these men right here what wrongdoing their

Council found in me, 21 except for one thing I said when I shouted out, ‘I am here before the Council to defend myself for believing that the dead will rise again!’”

22 Felix, who knew Christians [members of The Way] didn’t go around starting riots, told the Jews to wait for the arrival of Lysias, the garrison commander, and then he would decide the case. 23 He ordered Paul to prison but instructed the guards to treat him gently and not to forbid any of his friends from visiting him or bringing him gifts to make his stay more comfortable.

24 A few days later Felix came with Drusilla, his legal wife, a Jewess. Sending for Paul, they listened as he told them about The Way: about the faith centered in Jesus as Messiah. 25 And as he reasoned with them about the foolishness of trusting for salvation during the coming judgment in our own righteousness and self-control, his words affected Felix deeply.

“That’s enough for now. You may leave.” he replied, “When my schedule allows it, I’ll call for you again.”

26 Hoping that Paul would bribe him to be released from prison, he sent for him from time to time to talk with him. 27 Two years went by in this way; then Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And because Felix wanted to gain favor with the Jewish leaders, he left Paul in prison.

## ACTS 25

Three days after Festus arrived in Caesarea to take over his new responsibilities, he left for Jerusalem, 2 where the chief priests and other Jewish leaders made their accusations to him against Paul. 3 They asked that, as a favor to them, he bring Paul from Caesarea to Jerusalem. (Their plan was to waylay and kill him.)

4 But Festus replied that since Paul was in custody at Caesarea, and he himself was returning there soon, 5 those with any interest in this affair should return with him to make their accusations at the coming trial.

6 Eight or ten days later he returned to Caesarea and the following day opened Paul's trial.

7 On Paul's arrival in court, the Jews from Jerusalem gathered around, hurling many serious accusations, but with no proof. 8 Paul denied all the charges: "I am not guilty," he said. "I have not opposed the Jewish laws, nor desecrated the Temple, nor rebelled against the Roman government."

9 Then Festus, anxious to please the Jews — and knowing they would have much more power over Paul in their own city, asked Paul, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there?"

10 But Paul — knowing the motive behind Festus’s question, replied, “This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. I am guilty of no crime against the Jews — as you know very well. If I have done anything worthy of death, I don’t refuse to die! But as I am innocent, neither you nor anyone else has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I wish to make my appeal to Caesar.”

12 Festus conferred with his advisors and then replied, “Very well! You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you shall go!”

13 A few days later King Agrippa arrived with Bernice for a visit with Festus. 14 During their stay of several days Festus discussed Paul’s case with the king. “There is a prisoner here,” he told him, “whose case was left for me by Felix. 15 When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and other Jewish leaders gave me their side of the story and asked me to have him killed. 16 Of course I quickly pointed out to them that Roman law does not convict a man before he is tried. He is given an opportunity to defend himself face-to-face with his accusers.

17 “When they came here for the trial, I called the case the very next day and ordered Paul brought in. 18 But the accusations made against him weren’t at all what I supposed they would be. 19 It was something about their religion and about someone called Jesus who died, but

Paul insists is alive! 20 I was perplexed as to how to decide a case of this kind and asked him whether he would be willing to stand trial on these charges in Jerusalem. 21 But Paul appealed to have Caesar decide his case! So I ordered him back to jail until I could arrange to get him to the emperor.”

22 “I’d like to hear the man myself,” King Agrippa said.

And Festus replied, “You shall — tomorrow!”

23 So the next day, after the king and Bernice had arrived at the courtroom with great pomp, accompanied by military officers and prominent men of the city, Festus ordered Paul brought in.

24 Then Festus addressed the audience: “King Agrippa and all present,” he said, “this is the man whose death is demanded both by the local Jews and by those in Jerusalem. 25 But in my opinion he has done nothing worthy of death. However, he appealed his case to Caesar, and I have no alternative but to send him. 26 But what shall I write the emperor? For there is no real charge against him! So I have brought him before you all, and especially you, King Agrippa, to examine him and then tell me what to write. 27 For there is no way I’m going to send a prisoner to the emperor for trial without any charges against him!”

## **ACTS 26**

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Go ahead. Tell us your story.”

So Paul, with a respectful gesture of his hand, presented his defense:

2 “I am fortunate, King Agrippa,” he began, “to be able to present my answer before you, 3 for I know you are an expert on Jewish laws and customs. So, please be patient with me as I tell you the whole story!

4 “As the Jews are well aware, I was given a thorough Jewish training from my earliest childhood in Tarsus and later at Jerusalem, and I lived accordingly. 5 If they would admit it, they know that I have always been the strictest of Pharisees when it comes to obedience to Jewish laws and customs.

6 No; the real reason behind their accusations is something else—it is because I believe in the fulfillment of a promise God made to our ancestors, long ago - that He would raise them back to life, after their death, to spend eternity with Him. 7 The entire nation of Israel has respectfully worshipped God night and day hoping in this very promise! Yet, O King, these Jews are accusing me of a crime for believing that a resurrection has taken place!

8 Does it seem unbelievable to you that God is able to bring a dead person back to life again?

9 “I used to think I was doing the right thing by horribly persecuting those who believed in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 I imprisoned many of the saints in Jerusalem, as authorized by the High Priests; and when they were condemned to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 Many a time, I went from one synagogue to other to have them punished, and I used torture to try to make Christians everywhere curse Christ. I was so violently opposed to them that I even hounded them in distant cities in foreign lands.

12 “I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 when one day about noon, sir, a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions. 14 We all fell down, and I heard a voice speaking to me in Hebrew, ‘Paul, Paul, why are you persecuting me? I am not going to allow you to do this anymore.’

15 “‘Who are you, sir?’ I asked.

“And the reply came back, ‘I am Jesus - the one who was crucified, buried and resurrected. In persecuting those who believe in me, you have been persecuting *me*.

16 Now, mount up! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and my witness. You are to tell the world about this experience and about many other things I shall teach you. 17 And I will protect you from both your own people and the Gentiles. For, yes, I am going to send you to the Gentiles 18 to open their eyes to their true condition so that they may repent and live in the light of God instead of in Satan's darkness, so that they may receive forgiveness for their sins and God's inheritance along with all people everywhere who are saved from their sins by putting their faith in me.'

19 "And so, O King Agrippa, I did not ignore that visitation from heaven, 20 but shared it — first with the people in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout Judea, and also to the Gentiles — urging *everybody* to forsake their sins and turn to God by faith in Jesus, the Messiah — proving their repentance by a changed life.

21 *This* is the reason the Jews arrested me in the Temple and tried to kill me. 22 But God protected me so that I am still alive today to tell these facts to everyone, both great and small. I teach nothing except what the Prophets and Moses said— 23 that the Messiah, Jesus, would be crucified for our atonement and be the First to rise from the dead — providing salvation for Jews and Gentiles, alike."

24 Suddenly Festus spoke out, “Paul, you’re nuts! Too much studying has affected your mind!”

25 But Paul replied, “No, I have not lost my mind, Most Excellent Festus. Everything I am saying is both true and important. 26 And King Agrippa knows that my testimony is the truth. I speak with no fear of contradiction because I am sure these events are all familiar to him, for they were not done in secret, but openly, in his jurisdiction!

27 King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets were talking about Jesus? But I know you do—”

28 Jokingly, Agrippa interrupted him. “You have almost persuaded *me* to be a Christian!”

29 And Paul replied, “I wish that not only you but also everybody else here today were not just almost but absolutely as I am — except for these bonds.”

30 At this point, the king, the governor, Bernice, and all the others got up and left the courtroom. 31 Afterwards, as they talked it over among themselves, they agreed, “This man hasn’t done anything worthy of death or even of imprisonment.”

32 Agrippa said to Festus, “True. We could set him free, if he hadn’t appealed to Caesar!”

## ACTS 27

When arrangements were eventually made for a ship to leave for Rome, Paul and several other prisoners were placed in the custody of an officer named Julius, a member of the imperial guard. 2 We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the Turkish coast, and put out to sea. I should add that Aristarchus, a Greek from Thessalonica, was with us.

3 The next day when we docked at Sidon, Julius was very kind to Paul and let him go ashore to visit with friends and receive their hospitality. 4 Putting to sea from there, we encountered headwinds that made it difficult to keep the ship on course, so we sailed under the lee of Cyprus - between the island and the mainland, 5 and passed along the coast of the provinces of Cilicia and Pamphylia, landing at Myra, in the province of Lycia. 6 There, our officer found an Egyptian ship from Alexandria, bound for Italy, and put us aboard.

7 We had several days of rough sailing, and finally neared Cnidus; but the winds had become too strong, so we ran across to Crete, passing the port of Salome. 8 Beating into the wind with great difficulty and moving slowly along the southern coast, we arrived at Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea. 9 There we stayed for several days. By then, the weather was becoming dangerous for long voyages,

because it was so late in the year, and Paul spoke to the ship's officers about it.

10 "Sirs," he said, "I perceive that there will be much danger ahead if we go on— to the ship, its cargo, and to us." 11 But the officer in charge of the prisoners trusted the counsel of the Captain and the ship's owner more than Paul's. 12 And since Fair Havens was an exposed harbor—a poor place to spend the winter—most of the crew advised trying to go further up the coast to Phoenix, in Crete, in order to winter there; Phoenix was a good harbor with only a northwest and southwest exposure.

13 Just then a light wind began blowing from the south, and it looked like a perfect day for the trip; so they weighed anchor and sailed along, staying close to shore.

14 But not long afterwards, the weather changed abruptly, and a heavy wind of hurricane strength, a "northeaster," caught the ship and blew it out to sea. 15 They tried at first to bear up into the wind, but couldn't, so they gave up and let the ship run before the gale.

16 We finally sailed into the lee of a small island named Clauda, where with great difficulty we hoisted aboard the lifeboat that was being towed behind us, 17 and then banded the ship with ropes to strengthen the hull. The sailors were afraid of being driven across onto the sandbars off the African coast, so they lowered the sea

anchor to slow the ship and keep its stern to the waves, and let the ship be driven along by the wind.

18 The next day as the seas grew higher, the crew began throwing the cargo overboard. 19 The day after that, they threw all excess tackle overboard, and anything else they could lay their hands on.

20 The terrible storm blotted out the sun and stars for many days, until the sailors had no idea where they were on the sea, and lost all hope of avoiding shipwreck.

21 No one had eaten for a long time, but finally Paul called the crew together and said, “Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Fair Havens—you would have avoided all this damage and loss! 22 But cheer up! Not one of us will lose our lives, even though the ship will go down.

23 “For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, ‘Don’t be afraid, Paul—for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What’s more, God has granted your request and will save the lives of all those sailing with you.’ 25 So take courage! For I believe God! We will be safe, as he said! 26 But we will be shipwrecked on an island.”

27 About midnight on the fourteenth night of the storm, as we were being driven to and fro on the Adriatic Sea, the

sailors suspected land was near. 28 They sounded and found 120 feet of water below them. A little later they sounded again and found only 90 feet. 29 At this rate they knew they would soon be driven ashore; and fearing rocks along the coast, they threw out four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.

30 Some of the sailors planned to abandon the ship, and lowered the emergency boat as though they were going to put out anchors from the prow. 31 But Paul said to the soldiers and commanding officer, “You will all die unless everyone stays aboard.” 32 So the soldiers cut the ropes and let the boat fall off.

33 As the darkness gave way to the early morning light, Paul begged everyone to eat. “You haven’t touched food for two weeks,” he said. 34 “Please eat something now for your own good! For not a hair of your heads shall perish!”

35 Then he took some hardtack and gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it. 36 That encouraged everyone and they began eating — 37 all 276 of us, for that is the number we had aboard. 38 After eating, the crew lightened the ship further by throwing the cargo of wheat overboard.

39 When day dawned, they didn’t recognize the coastline, but noticed a creek running into a small bay with a sandy beach and wondered whether they could ground the ship

in the creek. 40 They finally decided to try. Cutting off the anchors and leaving them in the sea, they removed the ropes from the rudder, raised the foresail, and made a dash for the creek. 41 But failing to detect a hidden reef, they ran the ship onto it. The bow of the ship stuck fast, while the stern was exposed to the violence of the waves and began to break apart.

42 The soldiers advised their commanding officer to let them kill the prisoners lest any of them swim ashore and escape. 43 But Julius wanted to spare Paul, so he told them no. Then he ordered all who could swim to jump overboard and make for land, 44 and the rest to make for shore holding onto planks and debris from the broken ship. In this way, everyone made it safely ashore!

## **ACTS 28**

We soon learned that we had made landfall on the island of Malta. 2 The natives of the island were very kind to us, having built a bonfire on the beach to welcome and warm us in the rain and cold.

3 Paul picked up an armful of sticks to lay on the fire. As he placed them on the fire, a viper, driven out of the sticks by the heat, bit him on his hand and was unable to release its hold for a second or two as Paul quickly jerked his hand back, giving some onlookers the opportunity to see that Paul had been bitten. 4 The natives who saw this happen

said to each other, “This must be a very bad man: a murderer, no doubt! He managed to escape drowning, but justice will not permit him to live!”

5 But Paul calmly shook the snake off his hand into the fire, experiencing no pain or ill effects from the bite. 6 The people expected his hand to begin swelling, or for him to drop dead all of a sudden; but when they had waited a long time and saw absolutely no effect, they changed their minds about Paul, and decided he was a god.

7 Not far from where we had landed was an estate belonging to Publius, the Roman governor of the island. He welcomed us courteously and lodged us for three days. 8 As it happened, Publius’s father was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, healed him! 9 Because of this, all the other sick people in the island came and were cured. 10 As a result the islanders honored us in many ways, and when the time came to leave the island, they furnished us with all the food and supplies we might need for our trip.

11 It was three months after the shipwreck before we set sail again, in a ship named Castor & Pollux [the twin gods], out of Alexandria - a ship that had wintered at the island. 12 Our first stop was Syracuse, where we stayed three days. 13 From there we circled around to Rhegium; a day later a south wind began blowing, so the following day we arrived at Puteoli, 14 where we found some

believers! They entreated us to stay with them seven days. After that, we continued on to Rome.

15 The believers in Rome had heard we were coming and travelled out from Rome to meet us. We met some of them at the Forum on the Appian Way, about 43 miles from Rome! Others joined us at The Three Taverns, about 35 miles from Rome. It was a great encouragement to Paul to see them, and he thanked God for them.

16 When we arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to live wherever he wanted to, though guarded by a soldier.

17 Three days after his arrival, he called together the local Jewish leaders and spoke to them as follows:

“Gentlemen and brothers,  
Though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested by the Jews in Jerusalem and handed over to the Roman government for prosecution. 18 The Romans tried me and would have released me, for they found no cause for the death sentence demanded by the Jewish leaders. 19 But when the Jews protested the decision, I felt it necessary to appeal to Caesar — for a fair trial, though not to bring any charges against my people, the Jews. 20 I asked you to come here today so we could get acquainted and I could tell you that it is only because I believe the Messiah has already come that I am bound with this chain.”

21 They replied, “This is all news to us! We have heard nothing against you. We have had no letters from Judea nor reports from those arriving from Jerusalem. 22 But we are interested to hear more about your belief that the Christ - the Messiah - has come, because the only thing we know about these Christ-ones [Christians] is that they are spoken against everywhere!”

23 So a date was set and, when it arrived, a large number of Jewish leaders came to his house. Paul carefully explained authentic Christianity [God’s plan of salvation/ The Church/the way things work in the Kingdom of God] to them, showing them glimpses of Jesus throughout the entire Old Testament Scriptures. He began speaking to them in the morning and taught them all day long, on into the evening!

24 Some believed and some didn’t. 25 But after quite a lengthy discussion among themselves about the things they had heard, they left with this final word from Paul ringing in their ears: “The Holy Spirit was right when he said through Isaiah the prophet,

26 ‘Tell the Jews, “You will hear about me with your ears but not understand; you will see the miracles I do with your eyes but not perceive; 27 for your minds have become so set in your own traditions and beliefs that you are no longer interested in listening to anything other than what

you presently believe, and you are no longer interested in seeing anything that disagrees with what you think you already understand. If this were not the case, you would turn to me, and find salvation.””

28-29 So I want you to realize that this salvation from God is going to be taken to the Gentiles — and *they* will accept it!”

30 For the following two years, Paul lived in his rented house in Rome, and welcomed all who came to visit him.

31 Boldly, and without hindrance, he shared authentic Christianity [the Good News of salvation by grace through faith; The Church; the way things work in the Kingdom of God] with everybody, and disciplined new believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.