

DISCOVERY **TEACHER'S GUIDE**

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Discovery is a Bible study course for the high school and adult levels. Bible references are taken from the King James Version. The companion to these Sunday school lessons is Daybreak, a daily devotional and personal Bible study continuum. All of the material is available on our website, as well as in printed form. The print version is designed to be stored in a binder; subsequent modules can then be easily inserted. Discovery is an official publication of the Apostolic Faith Church. All rights are reserved.

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Preparations for Jesus' Ministry

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Luke 1:1 through 4:13

KEY VERSES FOR MEMORIZATION

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

(Luke 2:10-11)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Luke was written to Theophilus, a Gentile who is believed to have been interested in the teachings of the Christian faith; his name means “one who loves God.” Luke, the author of this Gospel, was a skilled writer and historian as well as an educated physician. He was also a Greek—the only Gentile among the writers of the Gospels—so he could identify with the perspectives of Gentile readers. His writings helped Christians in the Gentile churches to better understand Jesus, His life, and His mission on earth.

As a friend and traveling companion of Paul the Apostle, Luke had access to the Apostles and close friends of Jesus, and no doubt their firsthand reports and recollections were the basis for much of his writings. Luke gives more detail than any other Gospel writer concerning the birth and early life of Christ.

The universal scope of Christ's message is brought out in the Gospel of Luke in a variety of ways. For example, Luke's genealogy of Jesus in chapter 3 goes back to Adam (the father of all mankind), rather than only to Abraham (the father of the Jewish nation), as Matthew's did. Heli, mentioned at the beginning of the genealogical list, was likely Joseph's father-in-law, so this ancestral record traces the family line of Mary, and may have been received personally from her.

The Book of Luke highlights Jesus' compassion toward those considered unimportant in Jewish society, such as women, children, those in poverty, and social outcasts. In these first chapters, Luke detailed how Christ's birth took place in lowly circumstances—in an area housing animals. It was to humble shepherds that the angels proclaimed their joyous message, and those shepherds had the privilege of meeting in person the tiny Babe who came as the Savior of the whole world.

Another notable feature of Luke's Gospel is the emphasis on the humanity of Jesus. In chapters 1 and 2, Luke gave a detailed account of Jesus' birth by an earthly woman, and provided the only glimpse in

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Scripture of Jesus' boyhood. In chapter 4, Luke recounted how Jesus experienced hunger after fasting for forty days, and then was subjected to temptation from Satan. In addition, he gave details about how Jesus overcame temptation, providing an example for His followers throughout the ages since.

Luke alluded frequently to the Holy Spirit. For example, he explained Jesus' conception by relating the angel's assertion to Mary, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee" (Luke 1:35). At Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove while the Father spoke from Heaven, beautifully depicting the Holy Trinity.

The text of this lesson includes words that have been woven into some of the greatest songs of all Christendom: Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55, often called the *Magnificat* (the first word of the Latin translation of this passage); the *Benedictus* or *Song of Zacharias* in Luke 1:68-79, and *Gloria in Excelsis*, which begins with the words the angels sang when Jesus' birth was announced to shepherds in Luke 2:14.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. After four hundred years without a message from God's prophets, the Jewish people were expecting their Messiah to come, heralded by the forerunner prophesied in Malachi 4:5-6. In Luke 1:11-17 the angel Gabriel announced the advent of that forerunner, John the Baptist. What miraculous circumstance surrounded John's birth as noted in Luke 1:7,18?

According to Luke 1:7, Elisabeth was barren, and both Elisabeth and Zacharias were "well stricken in years," or very old. The fact that Elisabeth was beyond the natural age of childbearing is also made clear by Zacharias' disbelief, expressed in verse 18.

You could amplify the miraculous aspect by alluding to other miraculous events surrounding John's birth: the angelic declaration, Zacharias' loss of speech, and the restoration of his speech at the naming of the child. Class discussion should bring out that even devout individuals can sometimes rely on natural assumptions or their own reasoning rather than on the promises of God. Though Elisabeth and Zacharias had prayed for a child (see verse 13), he doubted when the angel appeared and made the amazing proclamation that his wife would have a son. The point should be made that when we are tempted to view a situation as impossible, we should focus on examples of God's miracle-working power throughout history. God is not constrained by human limitations. A good practice when facing seeming impossibilities is to focus on the One for whom nothing is impossible, rather than on the circumstances.

As we begin this study of the Gospel of Luke, it is heartening to realize that in spite of man's weakness

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Scripture. We should also be able to understand and use Scripture correctly. This points to the necessity of regular study of God's Word, and of nurturing and building up our faith in God's promises.

There are many aspects of withstanding temptation that could be helpful to develop with your class, depending upon their age and spiritual maturity. Some points that could be addressed are:

- Satan often attacks when we are at a low point physically, mentally, or spiritually.*
- We never advance to the point spiritually where we are beyond being tempted. If Satan attacked the Son of God, we can be sure he will attack us as well.*
- It was necessary for Jesus to experience and triumph over temptation because temptation is a part of the human experience. Knowing He went through it, we can have assurance that He fully understands us and what we face.*
- Satan does not hesitate to raise questions about what God has said. If we begin to question God's commands, we have moved into the danger zone where we are much more vulnerable to succumbing to Satan's tactics.*
- There may be times when we are tempted to do something that is not necessarily wrong in itself, but the timing is wrong; it is not God's will for us at that moment. Satan often tries to persuade us to take action at the wrong time or for the wrong reason.*

Wrap up the class discussion of this question by pointing out the danger of trusting in our own power or ability to withstand Satan's attacks. It is best to realize that God has provided us with the tools to withstand temptation, and be quick to use them when we feel the beginning of an assault by the enemy of our souls.

CONCLUSION

Luke's description of John's prophetic role, his baptism of Jesus, and Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, help us understand that these events were all part of the divine preparation for Jesus' ministry and His role as Savior of the world.

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spiritual hunger of penitent sinners. He set free the demon-possessed, and raised the dead. By word and deed, Jesus showed love and compassion, regardless of nationality, gender, age, wealth, or station in life.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. In our focus verses, Luke 4:18-19, Jesus explained the purpose of His ministry on earth. What did Jesus say He was sent to accomplish? Why were these things needful for the human family?

Jesus said He was anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor; heal the brokenhearted, preach deliverance to the captives, recover sight to the blind, set at liberty those who were bruised, and preach the acceptable year of the Lord. Point out to your class that He was reading from Isaiah 61:1-2, a passage of Scripture which would have been very familiar to those in the synagogue who were listening to Him.

As your group discusses the second question, they should conclude that Jesus' actions were needful because of sin. The world was in distress. Hatred and oppression ruled the lives of the people, who were spiritually blind and held captive by sin. There was a great need for a Deliverer. Point out to your class that the world situation has not changed. People still are held captive in spiritual blindness and sin. The need for the Savior and Deliverer is just as great today. Those of us who are saved are called to offer the hope of deliverance through Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world.

2. After describing the purpose of His ministry by reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4:16-21), what did Jesus mean when He said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears"? What was the response of the people to His statement?

Jesus was indicating that He was the Messiah; this was His first public declaration of that fact. Clearly, the people were astonished at His claim. While they admired his "gracious words"—likely referencing His speaking ability and His manner of reading the Scripture—they were amazed to hear one who had grown up in their midst make such an assertion. Their surprise quickly turned to indignation as they realized what He was claiming, and they tried to cast Jesus over the side of the mountain into the valley below. However, He "passing through the midst of them went his way" (verse 30).

3. We read in Luke 5:16 that Jesus withdrew into the wilderness to pray. A little later, before selecting His disciples, Jesus went to a mountainous region, and this time prayed all night (Luke 6:12). What was the value in removing Himself from others in order to spend time alone with God? Why do you think He did this?

Jesus was the Son of God, but He was also fully man, and still felt the need of communing with the Father. Jesus was drawn to prayer; it was not a duty. Class discussion should focus on the fact that personal

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pick corn to eat on the Sabbath (verses 1-5), and when He healed a man's hand on the Sabbath (verses 6-11). Jesus saw the hypocrisy of the Pharisees' hearts, and responded that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath (verse 5). What did He mean by that statement?

When Jesus said that He was "Lord of the Sabbath," He was stating that His authority as the Messiah and the Son of God overruled the traditions and practices established by religious leaders. Point out to your class that many restrictions had been put in place by the Jews' religious leaders themselves. For example, thirty-nine categories of activities were forbidden on the Sabbath. These included the prohibition against harvesting, which Jesus's disciples challenged by picking grain to eat. ("Corn" was wheat or barley; the chaff was removed by rubbing in their hands.) The forbidden activities also included practicing medicine on the Sabbath. Since the Pharisees equated healing with the practice of medicine, Jesus challenged that tradition when He healed the man with a withered hand. The religious leaders of the day were always on the lookout for what they considered infractions of the Law, so they quickly identified these two supposed violations in an attempt to condemn and discredit Jesus.

What irony that these so-called teachers of the Law were challenging the very One who created the Sabbath! Jesus had the authority to interpret what activities honored or violated the Sabbath; the Pharisees certainly did not.

6. In chapter 8, verses 4-18, Jesus gave the parable of the four soils to illustrate spiritual receptivity. While emphasis is often placed on the variety of soil in this parable, we should also consider the seed itself. What does the seed represent? What are some conclusions we can draw about sowing the seed that are applicable to our day?

According to verse 11, the seed represents the Word of God.

In response to the second question, several points could be mentioned.

- The sower "went out" to sow the seed. We know from Scripture that the Gospel message will "go out" to every man, enlightening every individual about his/her spiritual need. As Christ's followers we have a commission and a responsibility to go "into all the world" with the message of salvation.*
- The seed was living; it had the potential to bring forth new life. The Word of God continues to be alive thousands of years after it was written. It still has the potential to bring forth new life in a receptive heart.*
- The responsibility of the sower was to sow abundantly, even though he was no doubt aware that some would be snatched away and*

others would spring up at first but ultimately would be choked out. We recognize that some in our day will reject the truth, and others will respond initially but in time will fall away. The results depend upon the receptivity of the one who hears the Word; no fault can be found with the seed itself.

7. Luke 8:22-25 tells of a fierce storm which occurred on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples, who were traveling across that body of water at the time, were afraid. Fear is a normal human reaction when we face alarming circumstances. Yet after calming the storm, Jesus challenged the disciples by asking them, “Where is your faith?” What can we do to retain our faith when faced with fear-inducing circumstances?

Your group should conclude that while faith may not be the natural first reaction to fear-inducing circumstances, we should remind ourselves that God is in control of everything that comes our way. He does at times allow situations that will test and stretch us spiritually. Faith is not a failure to see the danger, nor is it simply an absence of fear, but rather a surrendering of our fear to God. It is trusting that God will take care of us, and will work out all situations for good (see Romans 8:28).

To get to that place of complete trust in every circumstance will take prayer and drawing close to God. Faith is built on the Word of God, so as we absorb Scriptures and embrace them, our faith is strengthened. Another faith builder is to recall past answers to prayer in our lives as well as the lives of others. We will find that keeping our eyes on Jesus rather than on circumstances gives a wonderful calm even in the midst of the storm.

8. On two occasions recounted in chapter 9, Jesus warned His disciples about His impending death (Luke 9:21-27,44-45). He also stated that following Him would not always be easy. It would necessitate a life of self-denial and there would be a cross to carry. How can Jesus’ admonition in Luke 9:23 be fulfilled in today’s world?

In verse 23, Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” To deny ourselves and carry our cross is simply to surrender our will to the Lord and to obey Him instantly and completely. Doing so requires trust. It may mean to go, as Jesus commissioned the disciples, or it may mean to stay, as Jesus commanded the demoniac who had been healed. The bottom line is that we follow our Lord by imitating His life and obeying His commands. We are not to expend our lives on earth for our own pleasure, but in serving God and others. We all must make sacrifices. At times, commitment may be costly in a number of ways, but in the end, it will be immeasurably worth all pain and effort!

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and build greater ones to store his crops. What precipitated this discourse by Jesus, and what point was He making in this parable?

Jesus' discourse was triggered by a man who asked Him to resolve an inheritance problem so the man could get what he felt should be his. The point of the parable is found in Christ's words, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (verse 15). Point out to your group that this warning is no less critical in our day than it was in the time of Christ. Though many in our society seek after material gain, riches will never satisfy, and there are countless snares and temptations that can come upon those who focus on having or seeking prosperity. Perhaps that is why Jesus gave more parables about money than any other topic.

2. After giving the parable of the rich farmer, Jesus went on to tell His followers that “life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment,” and to explain that there was no need to worry about the provision of their needs (verses 23-34). How can we reconcile this injunction with other Scriptural admonitions to labor industriously to provide for our own necessities and those of our families?

Christ's followers are not to be anxious about what to eat, drink, or wear. The phrase "life is more than meat [food]" (verse 23) highlights that man has a spiritual as well as a physical existence. While it is necessary to work and plan responsibly for ourselves and those in our families, we must guard against allowing prudent forethought to become obsessive concern. The main focus of disciples of the Lord should be the salvation of souls and the building up of Christ's Kingdom. If these are the first priority, God has promised to meet material needs.

To broaden your discussion of this passage, you may wish to focus your group's attention on the phrase "neither be ye of doubtful mind" (verse 29). This is a caution not to fluctuate between faith and anxiety. God's providential care is unfailing and we should never doubt it. Rather, we should focus on seeking the Kingdom of God (see verse 31). When we release total control of our lives to God, He will help us to be satisfied and joyful whether we have a lot or a little in this world.

3. In Luke 13:24, Jesus told the people to “strive to enter in at the strait gate,” the “gate” representing access into the Kingdom of God. What does it mean to “strive” to enter in, and why is this necessary?

Jesus was saying that if we want to enter His Kingdom, we have to exert extreme effort. The Greek word translated strive is agonizomai, meaning “an agonizing, intense, and purposeful struggle.” It is the word used to describe athletes in the ancient games as they gave everything they had in order to win the prize

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aspects of this life with a loose hand and avoid entanglements that could hinder us from being ready for the Rapture. When Christ comes, there will be no second chances, just as there was no opportunity for Lot's wife to reverse her decision to disobey.

7. After relating the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow, Jesus said, "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily" (Luke 18:7-8). To "bear long" and to "avenge them speedily" could appear to be contradictory concepts. What was Jesus teaching by this parable?

Jesus was making the point that if a woman could obtain justice from an unjust judge simply by continually coming, a follower of Christ should have no trouble believing that God will answer his prayers, even though it may appear at times that the answer is delayed. God is never late. He looks at time differently than we do. We may feel we have sought long and hard for something, but the Lord knows the right time to answer. It is up to us to trust in God's timing. You may wish to ask your class to share examples from their own experiences when God stepped on the scene at just the perfect time.

8. Jesus loved the little children. We read in Luke 18:15-17 that after the disciples tried to stop those in the crowd from bringing infants to Him, Jesus welcomed them to come to Him. He then told those present that one must "receive the kingdom of God as a little child." How do children typically receive teaching about God?

As you begin discussion of this question, be aware that this passage frequently is used to describe general qualities of little children that adults should emulate. However, in this passage Jesus was specifically addressing how little ones "receive the kingdom of God."

In response to the question, your class should conclude that children are typically trustful, receptive, and simple in faith when presented with the teachings of God. They are not hindered by doubt or suspicion when they are told of Jesus and His love. They do not question or challenge what they hear—their natural response is to simply believe. Jesus declared that adults must receive Christ in that same manner if they are to be saved.

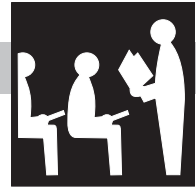
9. The account of Zacchaeus' conversion is given in Luke 19:1-10. What evidence did Zacchaeus give of the transformation that had taken place in his life?

Zacchaeus announced that he would give half of his goods to the poor and would restore fourfold anything he had taken by false accusation. As a chief publican (or tax collector) and a rich man (see verse 2), Zacchaeus would have been part of the culture of

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The Passion of Christ

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Luke 19:28 through 24:53

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”
(Luke 22:42)

BACKGROUND

This final portion of the Gospel of Luke covers Jesus' last days on earth. Our text begins with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and His second cleansing of the Temple. Luke goes on to describe several instances in which the religious leaders challenged Jesus' authority (chapter 20), and then records Jesus' closing teachings regarding future events (chapter 21). Chapter 22 gives a description of Christ's last supper with His disciples, His agony in the Garden, His betrayal by Judas Iscariot, and Peter's denial. In chapter 23, Luke tells of Jesus' trial before Herod, His sentencing by Pilate, and His crucifixion and burial. Chapter 24 concludes the Gospel, recounting Jesus' resurrection, His post-resurrection appearances to His followers, and finally, His ascension into Heaven.

Luke's main purpose in writing his Gospel—to present Jesus as the Savior for all people everywhere—is clearly revealed in this text. By chronicling the details of the price paid for man's salvation, Luke highlighted the importance and relevance of the Good News for all mankind. Jesus' life on earth gave the perfect pattern for a life lived in obedience and accordance with the will of God. Through His death, He paid the price for salvation for all people everywhere. Through His resurrection, He provided overcoming power over sin, death, and Hell. And at His ascension into Heaven, He gave His followers not only a great commission but also a glorious commitment—the promise of the fulfillment of all things that had been written by Moses and the prophets, and the enduement of power from on high.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. In Luke 19:29-38, we read that as Jesus approached Jerusalem, crowds began to acclaim Him as King and to give Him glory and praise. The account of His triumphal entry into the city is one of the few incidents in the life of Jesus which appears in all four Gospels. Clearly, this was a significant event, not only to the people of Jesus' day, but also to Christians throughout history who celebrate Palm Sunday to commemorate

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that occasion. Why do you think the Triumphal Entry was so significant?

Your group should conclude that this event was significant because Jesus was making public His claim to be the Messiah and King of Israel in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The way He came into the city was important: the King coming on the foal of a donkey was an exact fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9 (see also Matthew 21:5). The time and place were also significant: since the Passover was less than a week away, there were large numbers of travelers coming into the city to join the residents of Jerusalem.

Based on this fulfillment of a prophecy made hundreds of years earlier, the point could be made that God is a God of details. What people may overlook or regard as inconsequential happenings are fore-ordained by God. This could be a time to ask your group to share examples from their own knowledge or experience of times when God worked in the details of a situation.

2. Bible historians note that the view of Jerusalem from the point near the Mount of Olives where Jesus rode into the city would have been one of beauty and splendor, with glimpses of the magnificent Temple, the gardens and elaborate dwellings of wealthy Jews, and the great wall encircling the city. According to Luke 19:41-44, what did Jesus do as He looked out over Jerusalem, and why?

Jesus wept because He knew the terrible judgment that would befall the city in a very short time. He also wept because the people of Jerusalem were oblivious to the conditions by which peace could be obtained—conditions that were hid from their eyes because of the condition of their hearts.

Remind your group that in Leviticus 26:31, God had warned Israel what would happen if they failed to obey Him: “And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation.” Though this prophecy already had been fulfilled when the Northern and Southern Kingdoms went into captivity, it began to be fulfilled again in A.D. 66 when the Jews revolted against the Roman yoke. The Romans responded by plundering Jerusalem and executing six thousand Jews, prompting a full-scale rebellion. After a lull in military operations because of turmoil in Rome, in A.D. 70 the Roman general, Titus, moved against the rebels in Jerusalem. After a seven-month siege, the armies of Rome prevailed, Jerusalem fell, and the Temple was destroyed. Once again, Israel’s cities were laid waste and her sanctuaries brought into desolation, fulfilling Christ’s sorrowful prediction in our text.

You may wish to discuss with your class Jesus' assertion that Israel "knewest not the time of thy visitation" (verse 44). The Jewish people for the most part had rejected God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ and as a result, they would endure the

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point out that when the New Testament commands us to “watch,” it is usually the translation of one of two Greek words (*gregoreuo* and *agrupneo*), which have similar meanings—to “stay awake” and to “be sleepless.” They are typically used in a metaphorical sense. The exhortation to spiritual watching is often coupled with the command to pray, for it is prayer that gives one the strength to survive temptations and triumph in difficult situations.

The point should be made that watching is not a passive state. Jesus was emphatic that His followers should hope for His return, expect His return, and pray for His return! Our joyful anticipation and excitement regarding that great event should intensify as we see world events fulfilling Bible prophecies—especially those that point to the increasing nearness of Christ’s return.

Conclude your discussion by pointing to Jesus’ promise in verse 36 that if we keep alert to our personal spiritual condition and world events, and keep praying, we will be accounted worthy to escape the end-time tribulation and to be with Christ in His Kingdom. That is a powerful incentive to vigilance!

5. On the night before Jesus’ crucifixion, He expressed His desire to celebrate a final Passover meal with His disciples, who were His closest earthly companions. In addition to sharing a precious time of communion with them, Jesus knew the religious significance that evening would have for His followers in the coming centuries. What ordinance did Jesus institute that night at this final meal with His disciples, and how?
Luke 22:17-20

Jesus instituted the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper at the Passover meal with His disciples. At the conclusion of supper, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to the disciples. This deliberate, ceremonial distribution (referred to in some religious circles as “Communion”) has become one of the greatest expressions of faith and adherence to the doctrines of Christianity.

Explain that the word ordinance means “A direction or command of an authoritative nature; something ordained or decreed by God; an established religious rite.” This was not just a suggestion or an optional activity; it was a direct command. We want to be careful to obey God’s directive, and never neglect our privilege to participate in these ordinances.

You may wish to mention briefly that Jesus also instituted the ordinance of foot washing after the conclusion of the Passover meal, since the two ordinances are typically observed together in our organization. That ordinance is described in the Gospel of John, chapter 13.

6. In a grove of olive trees near the Mount of Olives, Jesus spent His final hours before His arrest in prayer

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legal proceeding in history, described in our text, occurred so that God's plan for the salvation of mankind could be fulfilled. The Innocent One was declared guilty not just in one court, but in three. Before whom did those three trials take place? Luke 22:66-71; 23:1-25

The first of Jesus' three trials took place when He was charged with blasphemy before the Sanhedrin, or leaders of Jewish religious law (Luke 22:66-71). The second trial occurred in the court of Jewish secular law represented by Herod (Luke 23:6-12), where He was charged with insurrection or sedition. Finally, He was tried in two appearances before the Roman ruler Pilate (Luke 23:1-5 and 13-25). In each case, the charges brought against Jesus were false and in each case, He was condemned in spite of His innocence.

You may wish to expand the answer to this question by pointing out that Pilate wanted to release Jesus; he felt the accusations against Him were false. However, the crowd clamored for Jesus' death and threatened to report Pilate to Caesar (see John 19:12). History tells us that tensions in the region already had been reported to Rome, and Pilate had been warned that he must keep the situation under control. So to save his own reputation and position, and to appease the mob crying for Jesus to be crucified, he conceded and turned Jesus over to the people. Discuss with your class how often people today will resort to doing something they know is not right based upon self-preservation or the pressure of those around them. Ask, How can we best prepare ourselves to stand for what is right, even when we face rejection, ridicule, or societal pressure to conform?

9. Luke's account of the life of Jesus Christ on earth does not end with the grief and darkness of Calvary. In chapter 24, we find the thrilling account of Jesus' resurrection from the dead and His post-resurrection appearances. The Resurrection is the cornerstone of the Gospel and the central fact of Christian history. What are some of the ways the Resurrection is fundamental to our Christian faith?

Your class will identify a variety of ways that the Resurrection is fundamental to Christianity. Following are some thoughts that could be brought out.

- Because of the Resurrection we have proof that God is personally involved in human history.*
- Because of the Resurrection we know that we serve a God who is alive—One who has power over death and the grave.*
- Because of the Resurrection we know that we too will one day be raised from the dead to live forever with Christ.*
- Because of the Resurrection we have power and authority to preach Christ. Like the*

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- *Because of the Resurrection we have the assurance that there is a purpose and a provision for ultimate good behind even the most heartbreaking tragedy.*
- *Because of the Resurrection we have hope. Not only has death been conquered, but Satan and all his evil power will one day be eternally vanquished. We know that ultimate victory will be the Lord's and that His Kingdom will be triumphant and eternal.*

Jesus paid a high price for our redemption, and was victorious over sin, death, and Hell. As Christians, we have every reason to glorify the King of kings and the Lord of Lords for He is worthy!

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Establishing the Church

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Acts 1:1 through 7:60

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

BACKGROUND

The Acts of the Apostles is the Biblical account of the establishment of the Early Church, and the primary source of information about the expansion of Christ's message in the first century. Traditionally ascribed to Luke, it continues the narrative of the Gospel of Jesus Christ recorded in the Book of Luke and the other Gospels. Chapters 1-7 describe the ascension of Christ into Heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter's sermon following the outpouring, and the subsequent actions of the Apostles through the power of the Holy Spirit that established the church in Jerusalem.

At His ascension, described in chapter 1, Jesus commanded His disciples to return to Jerusalem and wait for the promised Holy Spirit. They were to begin their ministry as Christ's witnesses only after they had received this power from on high, for the Holy Spirit would equip them to spread the Gospel, beginning at Jerusalem and then expanding out to all points of the earth.

Chapter 2 records the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost upon the disciples who had tarried together in the Upper Room with hearts in perfect unity. Shortly after being filled with the Holy Ghost, Peter boldly faced the crowds, who were amazed at what was happening, and preached a Spirit-anointed sermon. About three thousand people were converted and baptized in water the same day.

A miracle of healing at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple is the key event of chapter 3. A lame man asked Peter and John for money, but through Jesus' Name, they gave him a much greater gift—the ability to walk, though he had been lame from birth. Following this miraculous healing, Peter preached another sermon, recounting how Moses and Samuel had prophesied the coming of the Messiah who would fulfill the covenant of blessing to Israel, and asserting that Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise. More souls received salvation after that sermon, and the congregation grew to about five thousand.

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What were they instructed to do, and what was promised to them before fulfilling the Great Commission?

Acts 1:4 tells us that Jesus instructed His disciples not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Refer your class to Acts 1:8, which describes the natural outcome of receiving the promised infilling—they would become witnesses for Jesus Christ all over the earth. Jesus' words were not a command but a simple statement of fact; His promise that "ye shall be witnesses" is in the indicative rather than imperative mood. Jesus was not recommending that they become witnesses, He was saying they would be witnesses.

2. The disciples obeyed Jesus' instructions to tarry in Jerusalem, and Acts 2:1 tells us that when the Day of Pentecost came, they were "all with one accord in one place." What does this statement tell us about the disciples' spiritual condition when the Holy Ghost descended?

Your group may offer several responses to this question including that the disciples were obedient, persevering, committed, etc. Lead the discussion to an understanding that the disciples were in perfect unity. Jesus had prayed for His followers to experience this oneness, which comes about through the experience of sanctification (see John 17). This was the evidence that Christ's prayer had been answered and His followers had been sanctified.

Use this question to review the prerequisites for receiving the Holy Ghost. Salvation accomplishes the forgiveness of sins, and sanctification results in the removal of the sin nature, thus making a suitable dwelling place for the Holy Ghost. The God who wants to live within us is a holy God, so the place where He dwells must be a holy place. When the habitation is cleansed and made pure and holy through sanctification, we are ready to receive the infilling of the Spirit.

3. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Ghost descended upon those who had tarried in prayer. According to Acts 2:4, what was the external evidence that the Spirit had descended?

Speaking with other tongues was the evidence that signified the Spirit had descended. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is about receiving power rather than tongues, but the Scriptural evidence of receiving the baptism is that the recipient speaks in an unlearned language that can be understood by others. That evidence is consistent among Spirit-filled Christians in all eras and cultures.

It may be helpful to explain to your group that the expression “speaking in tongues” comes from a Greek word that combines glossa (tongue) and lalia (speaking). It refers to a language uttered through the power of the Holy Spirit. This will not be gibberish,

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deception to portray full submission and participation. Divine judgment was immediate, and caused a healthy fear of God among the people. Why do you think God punished this couple so quickly and with such finality? What can we learn from this?

Lead your group to consider that God was establishing the Early Church and its call to be pure and holy. This couple's duplicity showed utter disregard for the corruption they were bringing into the body of believers. Ananias and Sapphira not only lied to Peter, they lied to the Holy Ghost. Their deceit and hypocrisy were a direct threat to the church's spiritual success, and thus resulted in swift punishment from God. Those who witnessed this event—individuals who had been brought up revering the Law as the ultimate authority—undoubtedly had a deepened respect for the divine authority of God manifested through the Apostles, based on this evident act of judgment.

Class discussion of the second question may bring out several lessons we can learn from this incident. These could include such thoughts as:

- *One cannot serve both God and mammon (money).*
- *Sin and holiness do not mix.*
- *Dishonesty and covetousness are destructive in people as well as the church.*
- *God's judgment of sin, whether immediate or postponed, is sure.*
- *Ananias and Sapphira may have been attempting to "look good" in the eyes of the other church members. It is dangerous to base our behavior on trying to make a good impression before others.*
- *Even believers are not immune to Satan's temptations.*
- *God sees the heart. He knows if our spiritual stand is true or false.*

7. Multiple references in chapters 1-7 indicate that the early disciples were people of prayer even after the amazing prayer meeting where they received the infilling of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 3:1; 4:24-31; 6:4-6). What conclusion can we draw from this?

Class discussion of this question should bring out that one good prayer meeting does not replace consistent, daily seeking of God. Temptations and trials continue to come. We need to maintain a constant connection with God in order to meet the challenges of daily life, withstand the opposition of the enemy, discern the guidance of the Spirit, and effectively witness for Christ. Communion with God in prayer is a sure way to help us maintain victory in our Christian lives.

8. Acts 6:1-7 describes the appointment of seven individuals to attend to the physical needs of the growing group of believers. According to verse 3, what

qualifications were necessary in those who would fill the position? Why are these qualities important for the service of the Lord?

Qualifications needed for the recruits for this position were: being of “honest report” (having a good reputation), being full of wisdom, and having the infilling of the Holy Spirit in their lives. These qualifications were to define the character and spiritual attributes of the men to be chosen. Clearly, the Apostles were more concerned with the internal quality of the recruits than their outward appearance or the skills they possessed.

As your class discusses the second question, following are some points that could be brought out.

A Christian needs a good reputation. One must be looked upon by one's associates as being a person of integrity, and one who can be trusted, in order to be a light in a lost world. If one's reputation is tainted, it will negatively impact those who might be interested in learning more about Christianity.

The qualification of wisdom refers to being of a practical mind. The Bible scholar Matthew Henry says of this passage, "It was not enough that they were honest, good men, but they must be discreet, judicious men, that could not be imposed upon, and would order things for the best." Wisdom is more than accumulated knowledge but implies the ability to apply knowledge and discern what is true, right, or lasting.

The Holy Spirit is vital in the lives of those who desire to serve God most effectively, for He will guide, teach, and empower. God's Spirit will also convict sinners when a believer is witnessing to a lost world. One does receive a measure of the Holy Spirit at salvation and has a testimony to share, but after being filled with the Holy Ghost, God's Spirit multiplies the effect of that witness.

9. Stephen was charged with speaking blasphemous words against God and the Temple, and attempting to change Jewish customs. Chapter 7 records his defense before the Sanhedrin. Why do you think Stephen could so fearlessly address the council, even though he must have known his life was in danger for doing so?

As your class discusses this question, they should conclude that the Holy Spirit gave Stephen a spirit of boldness. It was the Holy Spirit who used his words to convict—to “cut to the heart” of his accusers (verse 54). Although the Sanhedrin reacted with rage instead of submission to the Spirit, Stephen did not back down or soften his words. When his accusers rushed forward to kill him by stoning, the Holy Spirit helped Stephen finish his earthly life by committing his soul to the Lord and devoutly praying for his persecutors.

Use this question to wrap up your lesson, pointing out that having the power of the Holy Spirit will influence every part of our lives, even its end. When

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Prior to Jesus' ascension to Heaven, He promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would empower them to be witnesses for Him, "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." After receiving the promised power, the disciples began to witness and evangelize, and as a result, the Early Church was established in Jerusalem and grew rapidly.

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Peter was offended by the request and rebuked Simon, saying, “Thy money perish with thee . . .” He challenged Simon to repent, as the sorcerer’s request clearly had been based on a desire for monetary gain or favor with the people.

2. According to Acts 8:5-8, Philip’s ministry to the people of Samaria had been blessed by God. Many afflicted individuals had been healed, and there was great joy in the city. Yet, God instructed this successful evangelist to go to a lonely road in the middle of a desert to witness to one man (verse 26). What spiritual lessons can we learn from this incident?

Several answers could be suggested to this question. Some may include the following.

- It is vital to obey God, even when we do not understand. He has a purpose in everything He directs us to do.*
- One soul is of great value to God.*
- We may come across seekers for God in unlikely places. God sometimes opens doors for witnessing that we never imagined.*
- The spiritual flame kindled in one soul has great potential. The testimony of the eunuch carried the Gospel into a new region.*
- Explaining who Jesus is and what He has done for us is the essence of the Gospel.*

3. From the perspective of the early disciples, Saul of Tarsus was an unlikely candidate for the Gospel. Based on Acts 9:1-2, 13-14, how would you describe Saul prior to the events that occurred as he traveled to Damascus? What happened that changed him?

In response to the first question, your students will likely describe Saul as a fiercely zealous and religiously committed persecutor of the followers of Jesus. His whole being was “breathing out threatenings and slaughter,” and he was consumed with his purpose to stamp out the new sect. (Be aware that some of your group’s summary of Paul’s pre-conversion nature may be drawn from his testimonies that appear in Acts 22:3-5 and Acts 26:9-12).

Discussion of the second question will give you an opportunity to review Saul’s amazing conversion. Ask your class to point out some things we can learn about the experience of salvation that are made evident by Saul’s conversion experience. Thoughts brought out may include the following.

- Only God can see the heart. We have no idea how He is dealing with the sinners around us, or those for whom we have been praying. We cannot evaluate how near someone is to salvation by outward actions or appearance.*
- Sinners must become aware of their sin and rebellion against God, even the sins which were done in ignorance.*

- *Conversion requires that we submit fully to God and are willing to obey Him.*
- *Salvation is something God does. Our part is only a response to His drawing us to Himself.*
- *God seeks for sinners, even when they are not looking for Him.*

Your group might be interested to learn that before the conversion of the noted evangelist Charles Finney, his friends had about as much hope for his conversion as the Early Church saints had for Saul's. Prayer was requested for Finney's salvation at a prayer meeting. The leader responded that there was no use praying for him because he had gone too far away from God and would never be interested. Yet, only a few days later, Charles Finney was wonderfully converted! Make the point that we should never be discouraged when those we pray for do not seem to be affected. There is also no one who is too sinful to receive God's mercy.

4. In chapter 10, verses 1-8 describe a vision of the devout centurion, Cornelius, in which he was instructed by God to send to Joppa for Peter—a man he had never met. He obeyed, sending two of his household servants and a devout soldier to the location God designated. Shortly before their arrival, Peter was praying on the rooftop, and God sent him a vision as well. What did Peter see in his vision, and what was the lesson he was to learn? Acts 10:11-16

Peter saw a sheet full of animals both clean and unclean. The Law prohibited Jewish people from eating unclean animals (see Leviticus 11), but Peter was commanded to kill and eat. The lesson he was to learn was that God made no difference between Jew and Gentile, and that he was not to regard the Gentiles as inferior people whom God would not redeem. In addition, the distinction between clean and unclean meats was a major emphasis of the Mosaic Law; by its abolishment, one of the great barriers of separation between Jews and Gentiles was done away with.

5. The Apostles and believers in Jerusalem heard that Peter had visited Cornelius' house. Acts 11:2-3 describes their reaction—they “contended” with him and condemned his actions, saying in effect, “You are supposed to be a faithful Jew, so why did you associate with and even eat with Gentiles?” How did Peter respond to their criticism? Why was the eventual understanding they reached so critical to the spreading of the Gospel? Acts 11:4,18

Peter responded by relating what had happened at Cornelius' house, and the events were conclusive proof that God had poured out His Spirit upon Gentiles. The leaders in Jerusalem at first reacted with stunned silence, but then glorified God because they realized He was working among the Gentiles also.

In response to the second question, your group should conclude that this understanding was critical

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Paul's Missionary Journeys

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Acts 13:1 through 21:17

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And so were the churches established in the faith,
and increased in number daily.” (Acts 16:5)

BACKGROUND

Jesus had said His followers would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). Persecution had caused the believers to be scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, and even into neighboring territories (Acts 11:19). By A.D. 44, the Roman Empire provided conditions conducive to expanded preaching of the Gospel around the eastern end of the Mediterranean world and westward to Rome, the capital. Paul was to lead this movement. Throughout his three missionary journeys, described in chapters 13 through 21 of Acts, the Holy Spirit guided by selecting the Apostle's fellow workers, signifying Paul's destinations, and directing decisions regarding the new churches.

Chapters 13 and 14 describe Paul's first and shortest missionary journey, circa A.D. 46-47, which began in Antioch, Syria. With the clear direction of the Holy Ghost, Paul and his co-worker, Barnabas, traveled initially to the island of Cyprus, and from there into the regions of Pamphylia, Pisidia, Lycaonia, and Galatia. Their method of evangelism was to preach first in the town synagogues, but when many of the Jews rejected Christ, the missionaries recognized the Holy Spirit's leading to witness to the Gentiles. It was on this first journey that Saul began to be referred to as Paul, his Grecian name, possibly in order to identify more closely with the Gentiles he was attempting to reach.

Chapter 15 describes the first session of the Early Church leaders held in Jerusalem (often called the Jerusalem Council), which probably occurred about A.D. 50. In the mixed Jew-Gentile church of Antioch, dissent and confusion had arisen regarding compliance with Jewish Law. In Jerusalem, converted Pharisees insisted that Gentile converts observe the Law. However, when Peter, Paul, and Barnabas related their experiences, including the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit on Gentile believers, the council concluded that Gentile converts should not be compelled to adhere to Jewish rites. This significant decision removed a potential barrier to the expansion of the Gospel into the Gentile world. Paul and Barnabas, along with others, took a letter summarizing this conclusion to Antioch.

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Paul's second missionary journey, described in Acts 15:36 to 18:22, began approximately three years after the conclusion of his first trip. Paul was accompanied by Silas on this second trip, and this time they set out by land rather than sea. Their purpose was to revisit the churches in Galatia, encouraging them in the Lord. Paul also added Timothy, a convert from Lystra, to the team.

Chapter 16 records that in Troas, the Holy Spirit changed Paul's plan of continuing on to Asia. The vision of a man saying, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us," was an indicator of the Spirit's leading. In Philippi, a Roman colony and the largest city in Macedonia, the missionaries were arrested, beaten, and put into stocks in an inner prison. However, as they sang praises to God at midnight, an earthquake shook the prison, the doors opened, and the shackles came off all the prisoners. This led to the salvation of the jailor and his whole household.

Chapter 17 states that Paul and Silas went next to Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia, and from there to Berea and Athens.

In chapter 18, Paul continued on to Corinth, which was a city of great immorality. There the Apostle met Aquila and Priscilla, fellow tentmakers who became Paul's helpers in the Gospel. Paul stayed in Corinth for over eighteen months, during which time he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Then he returned to Ephesus, finally traveling back to his starting point in Antioch.

The record of Paul's third missionary journey is found in Acts 18:23 to 21:17. After a time in Antioch, Paul traveled back to the regions of Galatia and Phrygia to strengthen the saints. In Ephesus, Paul met with some believers who had not heard of the Holy Ghost, knowing only the water baptism of John. After Paul's instruction, they were water baptized according to Jesus' baptism and shortly thereafter, received the infilling of the Holy Ghost.

Chapter 19 relates that Paul remained in the area of Ephesus for two years, edifying the saints, preaching, and performing miracles in the name of the Lord.

Chapter 20 continues the record of Paul's travels. During this period, he wrote his second epistle to the saints at Corinth, and his epistle to the Romans. As his trip drew to a close, the Apostle traveled on to Miletus where the elders from Ephesus bid him a tearful goodbye, knowing they would not see Paul again on earth. Though warned by disciples in Tyre and Agabus in Caesarea that trouble awaited him in Jerusalem, Paul was led by the Spirit to continue on to that city, thus concluding his third missionary journey.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Acts 13 marks a milestone in Christian history, as Saul (later called Paul) and Barnabas were commissioned by the Holy Spirit to set forth on the first missionary venture into Gentile territory. What were the

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two men doing when they were chosen? Why do you think this is significant? Acts 13:1-3

According to verse 2, Saul and Barnabas were ministering to the Lord and fasting when they were chosen. The word translated “ministered” here is often used in the Old Testament to describe the services of the priests and Levites. It can also be translated “worship,” so the two men clearly were engaged in holy tasks. They were also fasting, which is of spiritual value only in relation to prayer, so no doubt they were praying as well.

The activities of the two men are significant because they show that God and His service was their primary focus. Scripture does not reveal what they were fasting about, but they seemingly felt a need to seek God in a special way. Judging from the response of the Holy Spirit, their prayers probably focused on the need to spread the Gospel to all the earth. Point out that very often God prepares our hearts for His call to a special endeavor in His service by giving us a burden for that particular field or ministry.

2. The Early Church did not start or grow by its own efforts or enthusiasm. The early believers were empowered and directed by God's Holy Spirit. What role did the Holy Spirit have in the appointment of Barnabas and Saul? Acts 13:1-4

The Holy Spirit was the One who inaugurated this forward step in the expansion of Christianity by choosing Barnabas and Saul. Verse 4 indicates that it was the Holy Spirit who sent them forth. And we know it was the Holy Spirit who led in subsequent decisions regarding travel routes, church establishment, and doctrine. The point should be made that God has a perfect plan for the furtherance of His kingdom, and as we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, we will be in step with the plan and will of God.

You may wish to conclude the discussion of this question by asking your group: What are some ways the Holy Spirit gives direction in our day? Perhaps a few of your student would be willing to share accounts of divine guidance in their personal lives.

3. Paul and Barnabas traveled for about two years on this first missionary outreach to the Gentiles, and covered many miles. After evangelizing in Galatia, the two could have finished their trip by returning through Paul's hometown of Tarsus. It would have been simpler and safer to do so. Instead, however, they retraced their steps and revisited the churches where they had been, going back into the very areas where they had been violently opposed and persecuted. According to Acts 14:21-23, what was their purpose in doing this?

According to verse 22, the missionaries chose that return route with the purpose of encouraging and strengthening the new converts. Though they recently had been threatened and even physically attacked in

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In Paul and Silas' situation, their songs of praise undoubtedly were a powerful witness to the other prisoners, and ultimately resulted in the conversion of the jailer and his household. While we may not see such dramatic results, we can be sure God notices every effort to honor Him by our praises, and that is especially true when our earthly circumstances are difficult.

6. In view of the shameful treatment Paul and Silas had endured in Philippi, preaching the same message at their next stop in Thessalonica took God-given courage! Still, they went ahead and taught boldly in the synagogue of that city, making it clear that the Jewish ceremonial way of being reconciled to God was obsolete and that Jesus was the promised Messiah. While some believed, others of the Jews stirred up a mob. What accusation was leveled against the missionary team? Acts 17:6

The accusation was that they had "turned the world upside down." This is reflective of the impact the Early Church was already having on the culture.

While Paul and Silas had not incited any violence, there is a sense in which the charge ought to be true of any follower of Christ. Ask your group: In what ways should we, as Christians, be turning our world upside down? Lead them to the conclusion that Christians do so by confronting the world with the truth of the Gospel and by living holy lives. The fact is, ever since the fall of man, people have been acting in rebellion against their Creator. All are born in sin and continue in sin unless confronted by the Gospel message that reveals sin and makes possible a change in direction.

This question could provide an opportunity to encourage your group to be unafraid in their witness for Christ, even when they face opposition.

7. In chapter 17, we read that Paul visited Athens, the intellectual and cultural center of the ancient world, where he began his sermon on Mars Hill by referencing an altar with the inscription "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." Based on Acts 17:16-21, how would you describe the men of Athens? In what ways do you think they were similar to people in the "Christian" society of our day?

Your group should identify the following characteristics of the men of Athens.

- *They were steeped in idolatry (verse 16).*
- *The philosophers (the Epicureans, who focused on the sensual pleasures of life, and the Stoicks, who emphasized moral strictness and a life free of passion and feeling) were derisive and mocking of Paul's message (verse 18).*
- *They were curious and drawn by the novelty of anything new (verse 21).*
- *They were religious but not serving the true God. (The word "superstitious" in verse 22 could also be translated "religious.")*

Discussion of the second question should bring out that, although we live in a “Christian” society, many people have no real knowledge of God. An interest in spirituality does not necessarily equate with an understanding of who God is and what He did for humanity by His Son. Even those who claim Christianity may not have a real experience of salvation.

Point out that Paul’s address to the men of Athens gives us a good example of how to communicate the Gospel effectively. He began by establishing common ground with his listeners by alluding to objects or situations they could identify with (verses 22-23). Then he declared the truth about how God interacts with man (verses 24-29), and concluded by urging his hearers toward a decision (verses 30-31).

8. In his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, recorded in Acts 20:18-35, Paul warned of grievous wolves and false prophets who would attempt to destroy the church. The admonition Paul gave is good today. What two key words in verse 31 give us a vital clue regarding how to avoid being led astray by any “grievous wolf”?

The key words are “watch” and “remember.” These two actions are still very necessary in our day. We still must vigilantly guard against being swayed by false teachings from any source, and we must remember the teachings of those who have been faithful.

Ask your group: What are some of the sources of false teaching in contemporary society that could impact us if we are not careful? Responses may include such things as blogs and other online sources that are just a click away, religious books and magazines that typically present an eternal security perspective, so-called “Christian” music, religious programming on television or the internet, and friends or associates with doctrinal beliefs that do not align with the Bible.

Lead your group to the understanding that the first and most important step we can take to guard against being influenced by false teaching is to study the Word of God regularly. The Bible was given to instruct and guide us, so the most critical question we can ask when evaluating any teaching is, “What does Scripture say?” With the help of the Holy Spirit, we must take great care to hold spiritual input from any source against the light of God’s Word.

CONCLUSION

Paul’s missionary journeys took the Gospel to regions along the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. New churches were started, and new believers began to mature and grow in their Christian lives. Paul was able to conclude his third missionary journey with joy, and with a testimony proclaiming the grace of God. In spite of intense opposition, he had been faithful to the souls of both Jews and Gentiles. Now his heart’s desire was to spread the Gospel in Rome.



Destination: Rome

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Acts 21:18 through 28:31

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.” (Acts 23:11)

BACKGROUND

This final portion of the Book of Acts centers on Paul's long-desired visit to Rome. At the conclusion of his third missionary journey, Paul went to Jerusalem to deliver relief money gathered by the Gentile churches. Once his mission there was complete, he intended to visit Rome, capital of the Roman Empire and the natural base for his next missionary endeavor because of its strategic location and political importance. This would take his missionary effort further west.

The Holy Spirit was the source of Paul's desire to evangelize, and the Holy Spirit divinely orchestrated the means by which the Apostle reached Rome. Within days of his report to the church elders at Jerusalem regarding what God was doing among the Gentiles, opposition arose. Paul was falsely accused and arrested at the Temple, setting the stage for a series of trials before various religious and government officials. These trials gave Paul the opportunity to give his testimony and proclaim the Gospel of salvation for both Jew and Gentile in a variety of locations, including Rome.

First, Paul was given an opportunity to speak to the mob of angry Jews in Jerusalem who were determined to kill him. The next day, he was brought before the Sanhedrin, where he gave his second defense. After a plot to kill him was foiled, the Apostle was taken to Caesarea, where he witnessed initially before Felix (the procurator of Judea), then before Festus (the governor who succeeded Felix), and finally before Agrippa (King of Judea). In each case, Paul skillfully wove together a tapestry of his own experiences, doctrinal elements, and in some cases, even a call to decision.

After his hearing before Agrippa, the king and those with him concluded that Paul was not guilty and could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar. However, Paul's steps had been ordained by God, and He had promised Paul that he would testify in Rome (see Acts 23:11). Paul being sent to Rome for trial was simply the next step in God's plan.

Luke concluded his account of the Acts of the Apostles by detailing Paul's journey to and arrival in

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Rome. Chapter 27 through 28:15 relate Paul’s experiences aboard ship on the voyage to Rome as a prisoner, including a stay on the island of Malta after a storm caused their ship to be wrecked. After a description of the last leg of their journey to Rome, the final verses of chapter 28 tell of Paul living under house arrest in Rome, where he remained for two years preaching, teaching, encouraging, and visiting with those who came to him while he awaited trial.

The Book of Acts ends with Paul’s first Roman imprisonment; Luke states that Paul lived two years under house arrest. According to tradition, Paul was set free for a time after this. Historians indicate that charges had to be brought within two years, so he possibly was released when that time ran out. His letter to the church at Philippi, which was written during this first imprisonment, records Paul’s expectation of being released shortly (see Philippians 2:24). Later, Paul was imprisoned again, most likely in Rome, and under much more strict conditions. It was then that he wrote his final epistle, 2 Timothy. The New Testament does not say when or how Paul died, but historians believe he was martyred sometime after the Great Fire of Rome in A.D. 64 and before the last year of Nero’s reign in A.D. 68.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. At the conclusion of his third missionary journey, Paul returned to Jerusalem, where he met with the leaders of the church. Soon after, opposition arose when a group of Judaizers accused him of encouraging the Jews to “forsake Moses”—to put aside the traditions of the Law. In response, what did the elders of the church ask Paul to do, and why? Acts 21:23-24

The elders asked Paul to join four men in completing a vow—likely a Nazirite vow—which was a form of dedication. By definition, the Hebrew word nazir simply means “to be separated or consecrated.” This type of vow typically involved ritual purification for thirty days and concluded with shaving of the head.

The elders asked this of Paul in order to prove he was not guilty of teaching the Jews to forsake the Law. They stated that taking this step would prove “that thou thyself also walkest orderly [a military term that meant keeping in step] and keepest the law” (verse 24). Explain to your group that although the Early Church was growing, for Jews there had not yet been a clear break with the traditions of their religious heritage. Most Jewish converts still observed the Law of Moses, not seeing any conflict between it and faith in Christ for salvation.

Point out that Paul assented to the elders’ request—a step that prompted unity. He knew a right standing with God came by faith alone, but he was willing to concede on non-essential matters. Follow up by asking your group to suggest ways we can help

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preserve unity in the church in our day. Their suggestions may include such thoughts as:

- *Understand the importance of unity.*
- *Practice qualities such as patience, long-suffering, forbearance, etc.*
- *Put others before yourself.*
- *Talk to people, not about people.*
- *Be willing to relinquish your own ideas.*
- *If differences arise, be the first to seek peace and reconciliation.*
- *Look to God rather than at people.*

2. In spite of Paul’s action in taking the vow, a riot was started by some “Jews which were of Asia”—the area where Paul had been so violently opposed. Paul was arrested, but the chief captain allowed him to speak to the people, and Paul used this opportunity to share his testimony. Based on the Apostle’s words in Acts 22:13-21, give a brief description of this former persecutor after his conversion.

Your students' descriptions should bring out that after Paul's encounter with Christ, he became a commissioned witness for Christ (verse 15), a baptized believer (verse 16), a man of prayer (verse 17), and an appointed missionary (verse 21).

Your group's summary of the change in Paul could be a springboard for a discussion of the transformation that takes place when a person is converted. That change may not always be as dramatic or apparent as it was in the life of Paul, but it will be very real. Paul's own words written to the saints in Corinth affirm this: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

3. Acts 23 describes Paul's appearance before the Sanhedrin. His defense resulted in a furious dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees—a conflict so uproarious that the chief captain ordered Paul to be removed from the scene, “fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them” (verse 10). With his future in jeopardy and his life hanging in the balance, Paul no doubt needed some extra support. How did the Lord comfort and encourage the Apostle? Acts 23:11

The Lord whom Paul loved, and for whom he was suffering, stood by him in the night and spoke words of consolation and encouragement. Paul had long hoped to go to Rome and had made plans to travel there, but at this point, he was not even certain he would survive. However, the divine message assured Paul that not only would he live, but just as he had testified for God in Jerusalem, he would also have the privilege of bearing witness for God in Rome. What an encouragement that must have been to the imprisoned Apostle!

Follow up by asking your class to share times and ways they have been encouraged by the Lord.

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“complete in every part; perfectly sound and whole.” James was pointing these individuals toward the highest goal of Christian character—a fully matured life of holy living—and indicated the way to attain that goal was through unswerving constancy in spite of persecution and problems.

To expand your discussion, you could ask your group to identify outward evidences that a person is bearing his or her trials with what James described as “patient endurance.” Responses might include indicators such as a spirit of acceptance rather than discouraged resignation, absence of complaining or grumbling about one’s circumstances, a thankful heart in spite of the trials, a focus on the eternal goal, and an ever-closer relationship with God.

2. Early Christian churches followed the pattern of synagogue worship in which religious instruction was delivered orally, so throughout his epistle James frequently challenged believers to put into practice what they heard from God’s Word. One such instruction is found in James 1:22, where he admonished, “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.” How would you describe a person who is a doer of the word?

The comments your group comes up with to describe a doer of the Word could include: one who is obedient, who pays close attention and absorbs the truth and then follows through, who responds by taking action, or whose heart is tender to correction and slow to be offended. The point should be reinforced that mere mental or even verbal assent to the truth is not sufficient. We must embrace the opportunity to act upon what we hear (or read) from the Word of God and respond with obedience.

Amplify by focusing on the second part of verse 22, which indicates those who are “hearers only” are deceiving (or deluding) themselves. In verses 23-25, James illustrated this by the example of a man who looks in a mirror but goes away without dealing with the problems the mirror revealed. Point out that God’s Word not only reveals spiritual aspects of our lives that need attention, but unlike a mirror, also reveals what God wants us to become.

Ask your group: How is one who ignores his spiritual needs deceiving himself? Discussion should bring out that the individual may deceive himself by assuming correction is not important, or that he is better than others who have worse problems. He may deceive himself into thinking he will take care of the matter later, or that the issue really is not his fault. The excuses for neglecting or refusing to address spiritual problems are myriad, and they will have eternal consequences.

3. In James 2:14-26, James described the interaction of “faith” and “works” in the Christian life. How does his assertion that “faith without works is dead” (verse

20) fit with the Apostle Paul's teaching that salvation is obtained through faith alone, and not by works?

While some might think that James' epistle contradicts Paul's writings, the two perspectives are actually in perfect harmony.

Your group should understand that James' use of the word "faith" was a reference to the faith, and centered on how the Christian life was to be lived out after salvation. By "works," he meant the righteous deeds that would be the natural outcome when the heart was truly filled with love for God. He was not suggesting that good works could earn salvation, but simply that they were evidence of a right standing before God.

Paul's use of the word "faith" referred to saving faith; his point was that one attains salvation through Christ's atonement alone. He was not teaching that it was unnecessary to live in a godly manner after experiencing salvation. When Paul spoke of works, he was alluding to meticulous adherence to the requirements of the Jewish Law.

Both men believed and taught that true faith results in a changed life that is proved by good works. The differing emphasis is because they had different purposes in writing their epistles. Paul wrote to explain that salvation comes through faith, while James wrote to show how salvation by faith would impact daily living. Their teachings were in no way contradictory, but complementary to each other.

4. In chapter 3, James moved from generalities about good deeds to specifics about godly speech. In verse 5, he compared the damage the tongue can do to a fire, saying, "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" What are some ways uncontrolled speech and fire are alike?

Discussion of this question will likely bring out some of the following points.

- *Both can spread destruction quickly.*
- *Both can be hard to contain.*
- *Both can be caused by carelessness as well as specific intent.*
- *Both can cause irreparable damage (a fire—heirlooms, photographs, etc.; words—self-esteem of a child, etc.)*
- *Both can cause scars that remain.*

Point out to your group that we do not refuse to use fire because we fear the damage it might cause. Similarly, we do not stop talking out of concern that we might say something harmful. The key is control. If we control fire, we can use it to cook our food, warm our bodies, and light a dark night. If we control our tongue, we can use its power to honor God and to benefit others.

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The “elders of the church” (recognized or appointed leaders of the local congregation) were to anoint the sick one with oil in the name of the Lord, and pray the prayer of faith. We do not know how God will answer in each case—“if it be Thy will” is tacitly implied in every prayer of faith. However, Scripture indicates that we can expect extraordinary cures to occur in response to the prayer of faith. James concluded his instructions by saying, “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” If the sick person’s heart is reaching God’s way and he confesses his sins, God promises to forgive.

Though written nearly two thousand years ago, the epistle of James gives practical advice for believers of every era regarding living out what one believes.

1. After his opening salutation, Paul asserted that the Galatian believers had removed themselves from what they had been taught to “another gospel.” The Greek word translated “removed” in Galatians 1:6 implies changing sides or turning away. The verb tense used shows that this was taking place as Paul wrote, so this was an attempt at halting these believers’ movement away from the true Gospel. In verses 6-9, how did he make clear the seriousness of what they were doing?

Amplify your discussion by explaining that the Galatian churches apparently had been influenced by teachers who claimed that Gentile believers needed to fulfill the ceremonial requirements of the Law in order to be considered true believers and a part of the covenant people of God. Later in this epistle, Paul categorized those who embraced such false teaching as “foolish” and “bewitched” (Galatians 3:1). These sharp words revealed his indignation over the Galatians’ defection, as he likely was recalling the openness and enthusiasm with which they had initially received his message of justification through faith.

Class discussion should bring out that when a believer yields himself to Christ and allows his sin nature to be put to death, he is “crucified with Christ”—he enters into Christ’s death. Dying to self, the believer becomes relationally one with Christ and dead to sin.

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spiritually. Romans 6:2-6 is a good supporting Scripture to use in this discussion.

3. In the first two chapters of this epistle, Paul defended the authority of his message. In chapter 3, he addressed the spiritual error that was overtaking the Galatians: the false belief that obedience to the Mosaic Law was necessary for justification. Based on Galatians 3:19-25, how would you summarize the purpose for which the Law was given? What role did Paul point to in verse 24 to illustrate this purpose?

Your group should conclude that the Law was “added because of transgressions”—its purpose was to reveal sin and show man the impossibility of pleasing God through obedience to its requirements alone. In response to the second question, Paul stated in verse 24 that the Law was a “schoolmaster” (tutor or custodian) to bring the Jewish people to Christ, who fulfilled the Law. The Apostle noted that once individuals came to Christ in faith, they no longer had to live under the requirements of the Law, just as the child who reached adulthood no longer had to follow the directives of the tutor.

You may wish to point out to your group that the word translated “schoolmaster” is the Greek word paidagogos, which literally means “child leader.” In Paul’s day, this was a servant entrusted with the supervision of a child of the family. It was the servant’s duty to accompany his charge everywhere, make sure the child was kept safe, prevent the child’s association with unsuitable companions, and teach manners and moral lessons. When a child came of age, he was no longer under the control of the paidagogos.

4. In chapter 4, Paul continued his explanation of spiritual liberty by describing the difference between slaves and sons. He reminded the Galatians that they had been promoted from servitude to sonship, and expressed his deep concern about their choice to return to enslavement. Near the end of chapter 4, Paul used the Old Testament account of Abraham's two sons as an allegory or teaching tool. What basic contrast was Paul pointing out by his series of comparisons in verses 21-31?

Paul's allegory showed the contrast between the bondage of strict adherence to the Law (the legalistic teaching that was affecting the Galatians) and the freedom of faith (the Gospel that he had preached to them.)

Class discussion should bring out that the two mothers of Abraham's sons represented two covenants (contracts that established the rules for the relationship between God and man). The old covenant, which originated at Mt. Sinai, was characterized by slavery (illustrated by Hagar); the new covenant, coming from the "Jerusalem which is above" (verse 26), was characterized by liberty (illustrated by Sarah).

Ishmael was born “after the flesh” according to the normal means of human conception; Isaac’s miraculous birth established him as the child of promise. The bondwoman and her son (representing those depending on the works of the Law) would inherit nothing; the heir of the free woman (representing those delivered from the requirements of the Law through faith in Christ) would inherit all things.

Point out that Paul’s conclusion is summarized in verse 30: the Galatians were admonished to “cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman.” In essence, he was saying that the practice of the Law and the justification that comes through faith in Jesus Christ cannot coexist together as guiding principles for the Christian life. Under the new dispensation, adherence to the Law must be set aside. Paul ended his illustration in verse 31 by stating that “we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”

5. Toward the end of his letter, Paul took the concept of justification by faith and applied it to everyday life. He stated that the real test of a relationship with Christ was not the old covenant sign of circumcision, nor did uncircumcision have any merit. What had true value in God’s sight was faith that was worked out in the life by love (see Galatians 5:6). List some ways that faith in Christ can be evidenced (or worked out) through love for others.

Your group will come up with a variety of suggestions, which could be compiled into a list. Some thoughts that could be brought out are mentioned in other writings of Paul: we are called to serve one another, edify one another, submit to one another, be kindly affectioned to one another, forgive one another, etc. Conclude by reinforcing the point that while these “works” will be the natural result when the heart is truly filled with love for God, Paul was not suggesting that doing this would earn salvation.

6. In verses 19-21 of chapter 5, Paul presented a list of behaviors that he identified as “works of the flesh.” Which activities on this list pertain to relationships between individuals?

The first four works of the flesh—adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness—refer to sensual practices and thus pertain to relationships between individuals. The next two—idolatry and witchcraft—relate to religious practices. The next eight works of the flesh also clearly deal with relationships between individuals—hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, and envyings.

Some definitions may help your group to better understand this passage. Point out to your students that the word “hatred” could be translated enmity and denotes hostility. “Variance” means strife or contention. “Emulations” refers to jealousy and a desire to

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Paul also addressed several other foundational doctrines of the Gospel in this first portion of the epistle, including the nature of sin and its penalty, the fact that all have sinned, the question of whether believers sin, and the necessity of sanctification. In chapter 7, the Apostle described himself when he was a religious sinner, explaining the conflict that raged within while he was in that condition, and the inability of the law to suppress indwelling sin.

When outlining this epistle, many Bible scholars include chapter 8 in this first section. In that chapter the Apostle goes on to describe the victory that is possible for those “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. The word translated *gospel* means “good news” or “a good message.” In Romans 1:1-5 and 16-17, Paul spoke of the “gospel” for which he had been set apart. What can we learn about the Gospel from these verses?

Class discussion should bring out a number of points, including the following:

- *The source of the Gospel is God.*
- *Christ’s coming to earth for the salvation of mankind was foretold by Old Testament prophets.*
- *The good news of the Gospel concerns God’s Son Jesus Christ, who was born into this world in the lineage of David.*
- *Though the Son of God lived and died on earth as a man, He was resurrected from the dead through the power of God.*
- *Through obedience and faith in Jesus Christ, people of all nations can receive justification from sin.*

You may wish to follow up by asking your class what Paul meant when he said in verse 16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.” Discussion should bring out that the Apostle was not ashamed of his message because he knew the Gospel was of God’s own Son, and that it offered a life-changing transformation for everyone who would believe. Paul was well aware that the religious traditions of his nation, the philosophies of a powerful and materialistic society, and the bitter hatred of his peers were arrayed against him. Still, he refused to be deferential or apologetic in the face of these opposing forces.

2. Paul put in place the first foundational element of his message to the Romans by describing God’s wrath toward the ungodly, and asserting that all humanity is unrighteous and thus is condemned before God. Why did the Apostle say that people are without excuse for their ungodliness? (Romans 1:18-22)

Humanity is without excuse because God’s existence is made manifest in creation, and thereby is

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apparent to all people everywhere. Therefore, every person either accepts or rejects God.

Amplify this point by asking your group how they would explain what is meant by God's "wrath" in verse 18. Discussion should bring out that the word describes God's righteous reaction to evil, His implacable hostility toward it, His refusal to condone it, and His judgment upon it. God does not view sin with tolerance. While people may classify sins as big or little, no "levels" of sin exist in God's sight. Any sin is the complete antithesis of God's pure, moral righteousness. If He did not respond to unrighteousness with wrath, His perfect purity would be contaminated by complicity with man's guilt.

3. In Romans 2:4, Paul referenced those who despised the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and longsuffering. That same description could apply in many cultures today. Even in places where godly values and Biblical principles were once respected by most people, that is becoming less and less the case. What are some ways that, like Paul, we can show fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our unashamed commitment to it in an increasingly hostile environment?

Your class may offer a variety of answers to this question. Suggestions might include the following:

- Being faithful in church attendance*
- Being active in the work of the Lord whenever possible*
- Supporting initiatives and individuals who most closely align with Christian values*
- Unobtrusively removing ourselves from situations where God or the principles of His Word are derided*
- Researching the values of any organizations we support with time or resources (beyond our tithing to our place of worship)*
- Taking care that our posts on social media reflect Christian values*
- Expressing our beliefs in a manner that promotes compassion but does not compromise with sin*

Of course, the value of just living a holy Christian life among our peers can never be overestimated.

4. In Romans 2:11, Paul stated, "There is no respect of persons with God." What did he mean by this statement, and why did the Jewish teachers of the Law assume God would be partial to them?

The statement was an assertion that God condemns all sin; He is without favoritism and does not excuse wrongdoing in any group of people.

Some Jews assumed that because they had been chosen by God to be the recipients of His Law, they had a special access to God which was not available

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can we reconcile that statement with the fact that pain and adversity clearly occur in the lives of believers?

To correctly understand this statement, we must consider it in relation to God's eternal purpose. Paul's assertion does not mean that every incident which happens in this world is good, but that when a person's trust is in God, every incident fits into His eternal purpose for ultimate good. God can use even painful circumstances in a beneficial way, though we may not understand how until eternity.

Joni Eareckson Tada, an inspirational speaker and author, is a quadriplegic who has been confined to a wheelchair since a diving accident in 1967. When people ask her why God allows suffering, she often quotes her friend, Steve Estes, who wrote, "God permits what He hates to achieve what He loves."¹ God longs above all for people to enter into a relationship with Him and to become more like Him, and at times, this can only be accomplished through the endurance of hard trials.

This would be a good opportunity for your group to share personal experiences of times when great trials have resulted in great blessings or the gaining of spiritual ground.

3. *Foreknowledge* and *predestination* are concepts Paul alluded to in Romans 8:29-30. God chose all humanity to be made righteous through His grace, but His *foreknowledge* identifies individuals who He knew would respond to His call with repentance and faith. The word *predestinate* in verse 30 means “to predetermine.” According to verse 29, what is God’s predetermined purpose for all individuals?

Verse 29 indicates that God's predetermined purpose is that every individual "be conformed to the image of his Son." However, each person must choose whether or not he wants to be a participant in God's perfect plan. Peter's words in 2 Peter 3:9 reiterate the fact that God wants all to come to repentance.

If the supplemental chart at the back of this book listing the main differences between Calvinistic and Arminian teaching was not used in your class last week, it could be a good resource for this question as well.

Alternatively, you could discuss with your group what it means to be “conformed” to the image of Jesus. The dictionary definition of conform is “to act in accordance or harmony with.” Ask your class: What are some attributes or actions in our lives that would attest to our conformity with Jesus Christ? Responses should include such attributes as love for others, purity of motive, unselfishness, a forgiving spirit, etc.

4. In chapter 9, Paul continued his instruction on the sovereignty of God. In verse 19, he imagined someone asking, “If it is all a matter of God’s choice, then how can God find fault with me?” He responded in the next

verse by showing how disrespectful such a question is. His point was, who are we to question God? What illustration did Paul use in verse 21 to support his point?

Paul used a potter and his clay as an illustration. Your class should understand that Paul was not inferring by this illustration that some people are worth more than others, but simply that the Creator has the right to shape the object He creates as He wishes. Ask your group how the visual image of a potter and clay can help us keep a right perspective regarding our relationship with and to God. Thoughts brought out could include: it helps us understand that we are being shaped and our responsibility is to submit to Him; it removes any temptation to harbor pride in personal achievements; it helps us withstand times of trial with grace and trust in Him, etc.

5. Many of the Jews wanted to be righteous, but they tried to achieve that state in the wrong way. According to Romans 9:32, what was the great error of the Jews regarding how they sought to be righteous? What are some ways people try to be righteous in our day?

Verse 32 relates that the Jews failed to find a right standing before God because they “sought it not by faith.” They assumed that painstaking adherence to the precepts of the Law and laws of their own making would result in righteousness. However, righteousness cannot be obtained in that way because God bestows it only in response to faith.

Class discussion of the second question will likely bring out that people in our day may try to be righteous through performing good deeds, giving to others, strictly following a set of religious rules or traditions, comparing themselves to others whom they deem less good, or simply living moral lives. However, salvation still can only be obtained through faith in the atoning Blood of Jesus Christ.

6. What was the “stumblingstone” to which the Apostle referred in Romans 9:32-33?

The “stumblingstone” the Apostle referred to was Jesus Christ—the One whom the Jews had rejected as their Messiah. Israel balked at the thought that they could only be righteous through faith in Him. Rejection was a choice made by the Jews; they recoiled from the idea of honoring Jesus because He did not align with their idea of the Messiah. In addition, they perceived Him to be a threat to the Law and their long-held religious traditions.

You could broaden your class discussion by asking your group to identify some of the aspects of believing in Jesus Christ that people “stumble” over in our day. They may mention such things as a reluctance to submit control to Him, disbelief in Him as Creator of the universe, rejection of Him as One to whom honor and obedience is due, resistance to what they see as the “rules” of Christianity, a focus on themselves, etc.

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All things are “to God” because God is deserving of all the glory, praise, and honor for the great plan He has had in place from the foundation of the world for the redemption of humanity. That clearly was Paul’s perspective as he finished this portion of his epistle.

English evangelist and author F. B. Meyer (1847 –1929) commented on this passage, “All these words [of, through, and to] are monosyllables. A child just learning to read could easily spell them out. But who shall exhaust their meaning?”² Conclude your class time by pointing out that like Paul and F. B. Meyer, when we ponder the greatness of God and His plan, we should worship Him all the more fervently.

CONCLUSION

God’s remedy for man’s sinfulness is available to both Jew and Gentile, and is accessed only through faith in the shed Blood of Jesus Christ, His Son.

1. Joni E. Tada and Steve Estes, *When God Weeps*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997, page 84.
2. F. B. Meyer, *Our Daily Homily, Romans*, quoted in Bruce H. Wilkinson, *Closer Walk*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992, pg. 203.

Paul stated that spiritually mature individuals should be willing to forego personal liberties in consideration of the potential impact on their weaker brethren. The liberty that Paul enjoined was not a disregard for distinctions between right and wrong, but referred solely to matters such as ceremonial observances and differences of opinion.

Near the end of chapter 15, Paul began to draw his epistle to a close. The remainder of the letter contains an outline of his plans, along with a series of personal greetings and final words of encouragement. The Apostle related his intention to stop in Rome on his way to Spain, after first taking a contribution from the brethren in Macedonia and Achaia to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Realizing that such a trip would entail danger, he asked to be remembered in prayer. The quantity and variety of individuals named in his salutations illustrate the unifying bond of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul's companions at Corinth added their greetings, and then the Apostle concluded his epistle with a brief but characteristic benediction invoking the peace of God toward all the saints in Rome.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Paul's words in Romans 12:1, "I beseech you . . ." indicate a fervent appeal. In essence, he was saying, "I strongly appeal to you; I implore you." He went on to urge the believers to present (or consecrate) themselves completely to God. What three words did the Apostle use to describe the sacrifice he was encouraging them to make? What was the significance of each word?

The three words Paul used are "living," "holy," and "acceptable."

In response to the second question, consider first that our sacrifice must be "living." Point out that in the Old Testament, sacrifices were slain. In the New Testament, believers are called to be sacrifices. We are to live for God, being dead to self. God wants us to offer ourselves by daily laying aside our own desires, putting our energies and resources at His disposal, and looking to Him to guide us regarding how offering ourselves as living sacrifices is to be worked out. This will be personal for each individual.

Next, our sacrifice must be "holy." Your group should understand that we cannot offer God something tainted by self or the world. We are to wholly set ourselves apart for God by a personal act of will, and dedicate ourselves to Him for His use.

Finally, our sacrifice is to be "acceptable." Class discussion should bring out that this term builds on the Old and New Testament concept of a sacrifice that is pleasing to God because it meets the conditions He has established. When we willingly present ourselves as offerings that are both "living" and "holy," thus meeting God's conditions, that type of sacrifice is acceptable to Him.

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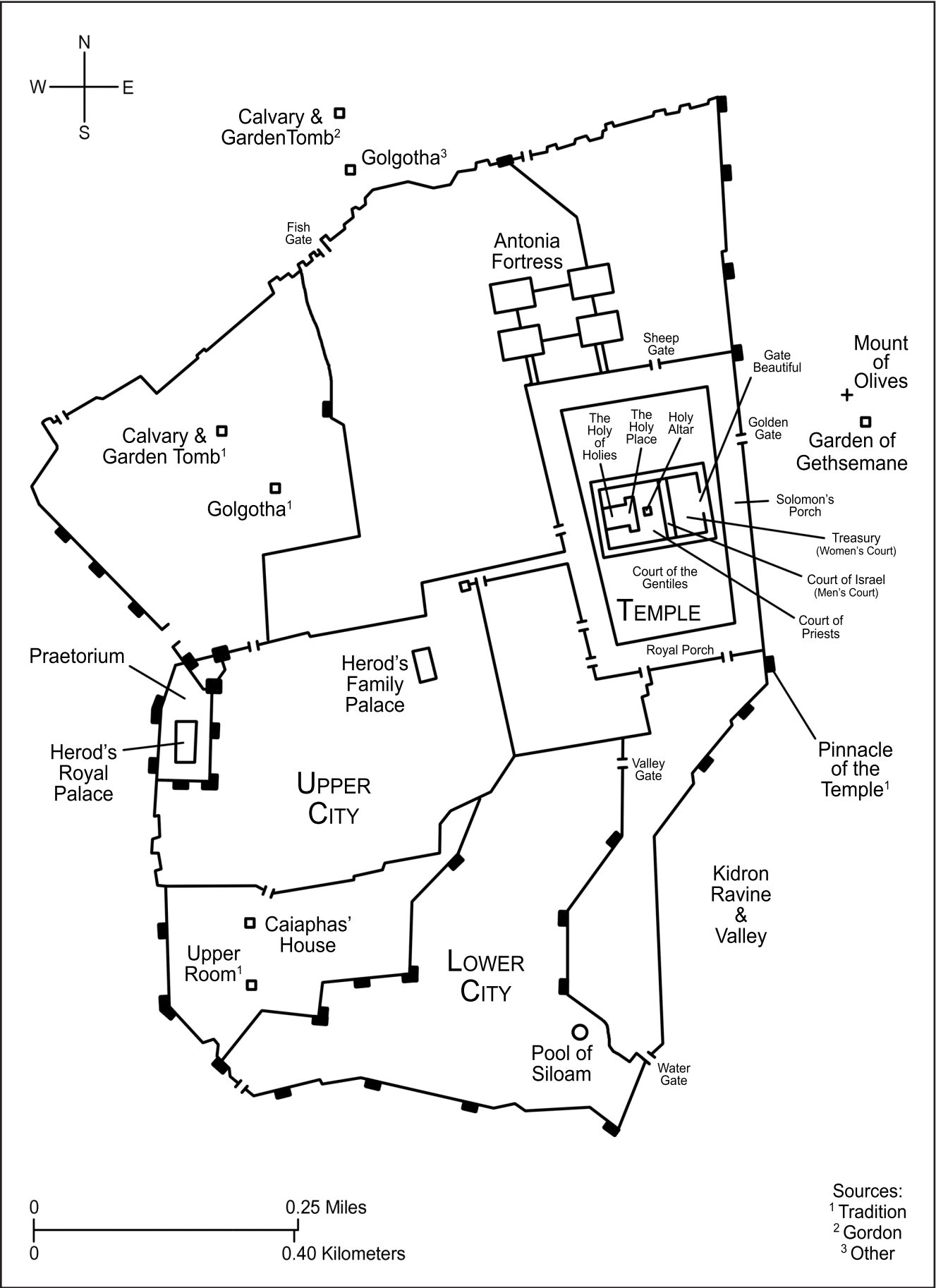
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New Testament Jerusalem



A Traditional View of Passion Week

PALM SUNDAY



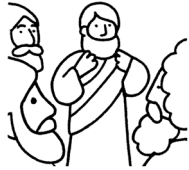
- Jesus makes His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowd waves branches, shouts “Hosanna,” and puts garments and branches in the road.

(Matthew 21:1-11)

MONDAY

- Jesus cleanses the Temple, overturning the money changers’ tables and declaring, “My house shall be called the house of prayer.”

(Matthew 21:13)



TUESDAY

- Jesus teaches the disciples and Jewish leaders with parables.

(Matthew 21:23)

WEDNESDAY

- Judas plots to betray Jesus to the priests for 30 pieces of silver.

(Matthew 26:14-16)



THURSDAY

- Jesus celebrates the Passover Feast and institutes the Lord’s Supper and Foot Washing ordinances.

(Matthew 26:26-28 • John 13:1-17)



- Jesus prays in Gethsemane.
- Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss.
- Jesus is arrested and taken to Caiaphas.

(Matthew 26:36-46)

(Matthew 26:47)

(Matthew 26:57)

FRIDAY

- Early in the morning, Jesus endures a Jewish trial.
- Before daybreak, Peter denies Jesus three times.
- Jesus stands before Pontius Pilate, is sent to Herod, and is sent back to Pilate.

(Matthew 26:59-68)

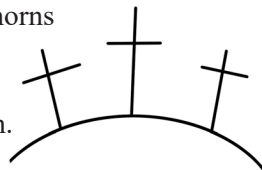
(Matthew 26:58, 69-75)

(Matthew 27:1-2 • Luke 23:6-11)

- Soldiers crown Jesus with thorns and mock Him.

- Jesus is crucified at 9:00 a.m.

(Mark 15:25)



- There is darkness from noon to 3:00 p.m.
- The veil in the Temple is torn from top to bottom.
- Jesus’ body is buried in a borrowed tomb.

(Matthew 27:45)

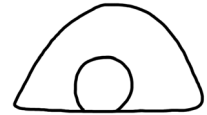
(Matthew 27:51)

(Matthew 27:57-60)

SATURDAY

- Jesus’ body remains in the tomb.

(Matthew 27:62-66)



EASTER SUNDAY¹

- Soldiers guarding the tomb become as dead men because of an earthquake and an angel who rolls away the tombstone.

(Matthew 28:2-4)

- The women in a group (Mary Magdalene in advance of the others) approach the sepulcher.
- Mary Magdalene, seeing the stone removed and hastily concluding that the body has been removed, runs for Peter and John, thus separating herself from the rest of the women.

(John 20:2)

- The other women arrive at the sepulcher and see two angels. They depart to tell the disciples.

(Matthew 28:5, 8 • Mark 16:5 • Luke 24:4, 9)

- While the women are gone, Peter and John run to the sepulcher, find it empty, and leave.

(Luke 24:12 • John 20:2-10)

- Mary Magdalene, having followed Peter and John to the sepulcher, stands outside weeping. After they depart, she sees two angels and then Jesus. According to His command, she departs to carry His message to the disciples.

(Mark 16:9-10 • John 20:11-18)

- The women on their way—before their arrival at the abode of the disciples, but after the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene—see Jesus.

(Matthew 28:9)

- All the women, including Mary Magdalene, unite in relating their story to the incredulous disciples.

(Matthew 28:9 • Luke 24:10)

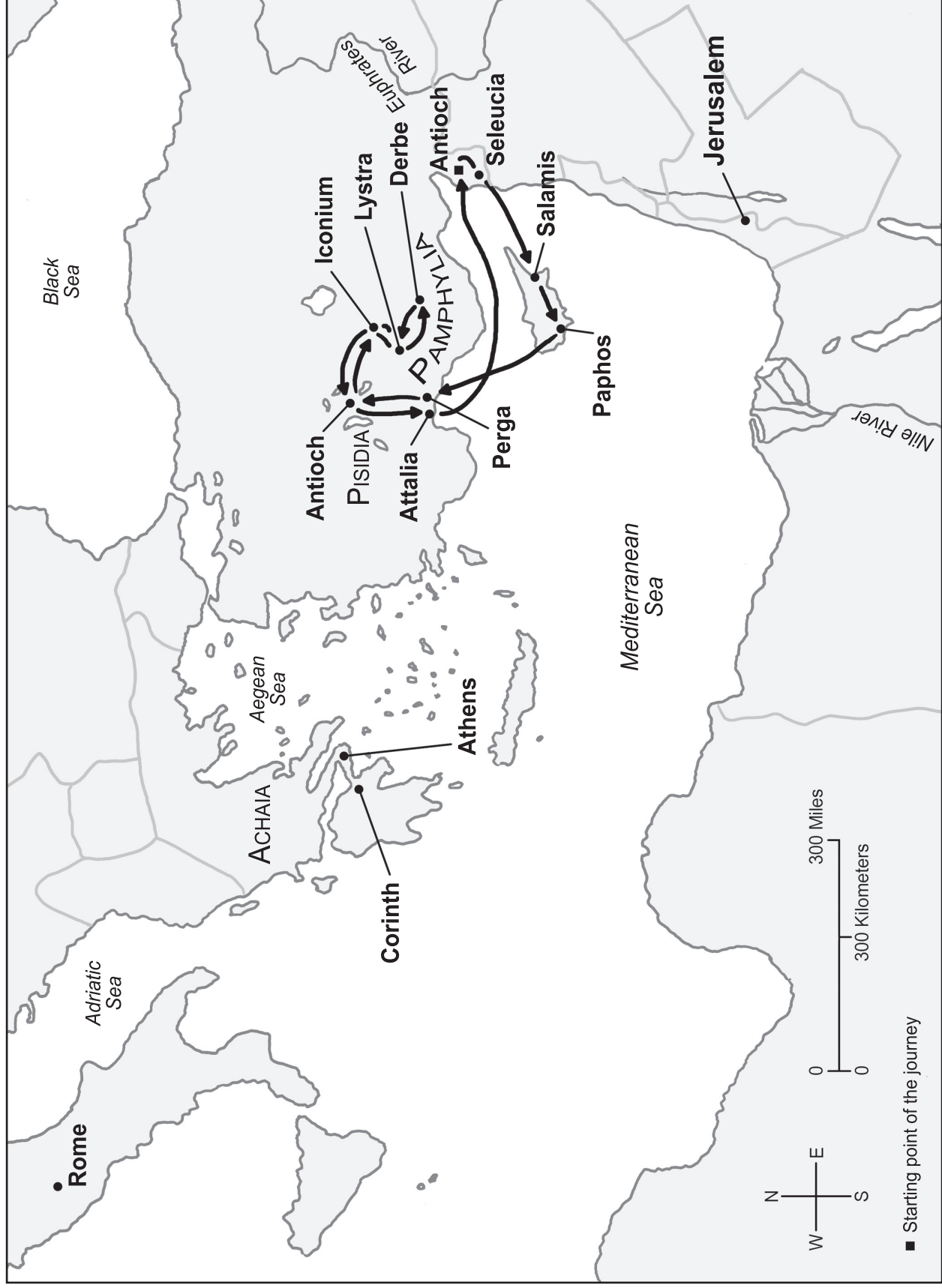
- Jesus appears to the disciples: to Peter, to Cleopas and another follower on the road to Emmaus, and then to a group of disciples in Jerusalem.

(Luke 24:13-36)

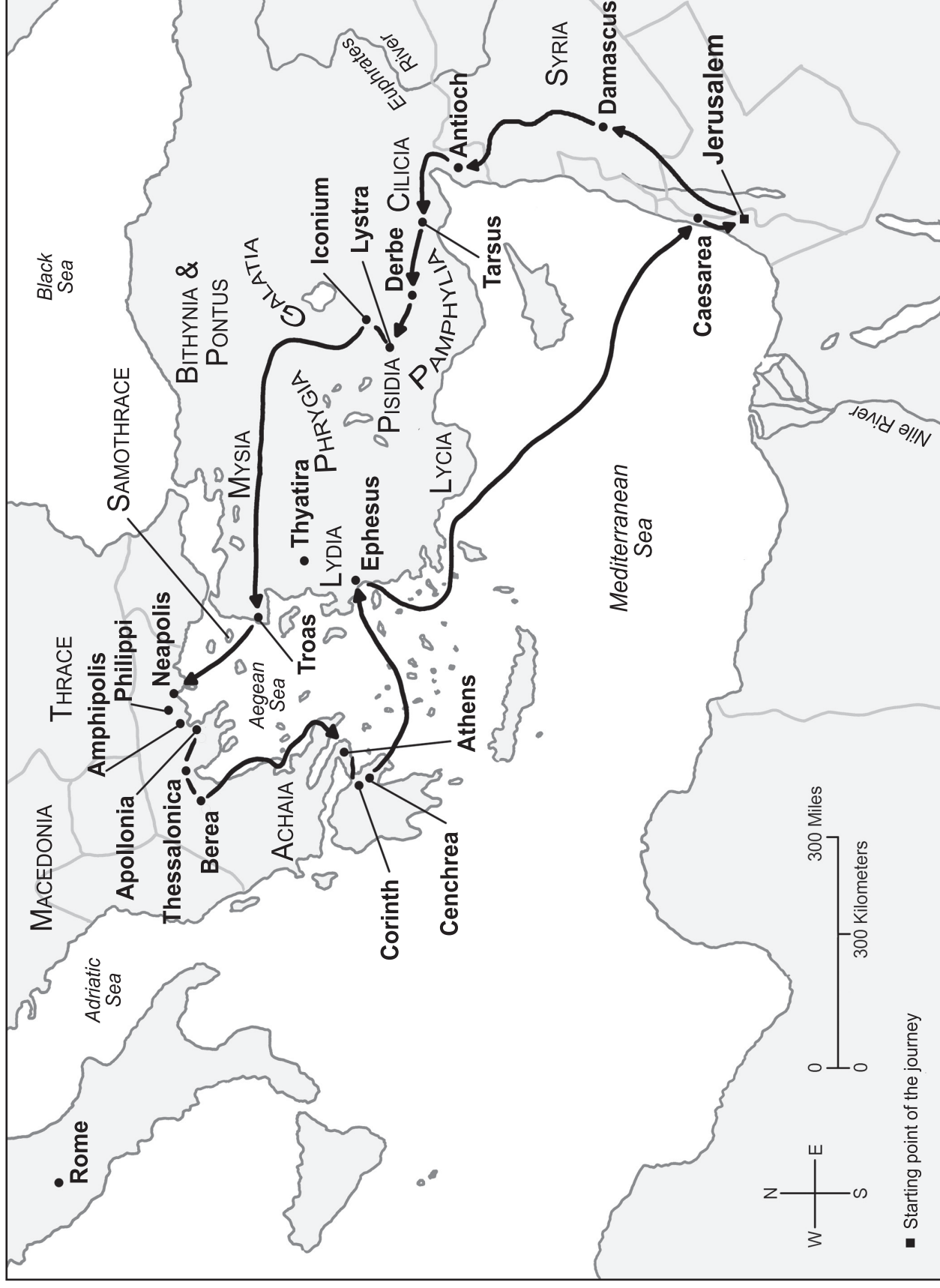


1. D.D.. Whedon, *Commentary on The Gospels: Luke-John*, p. 408

Paul's First Missionary Journey



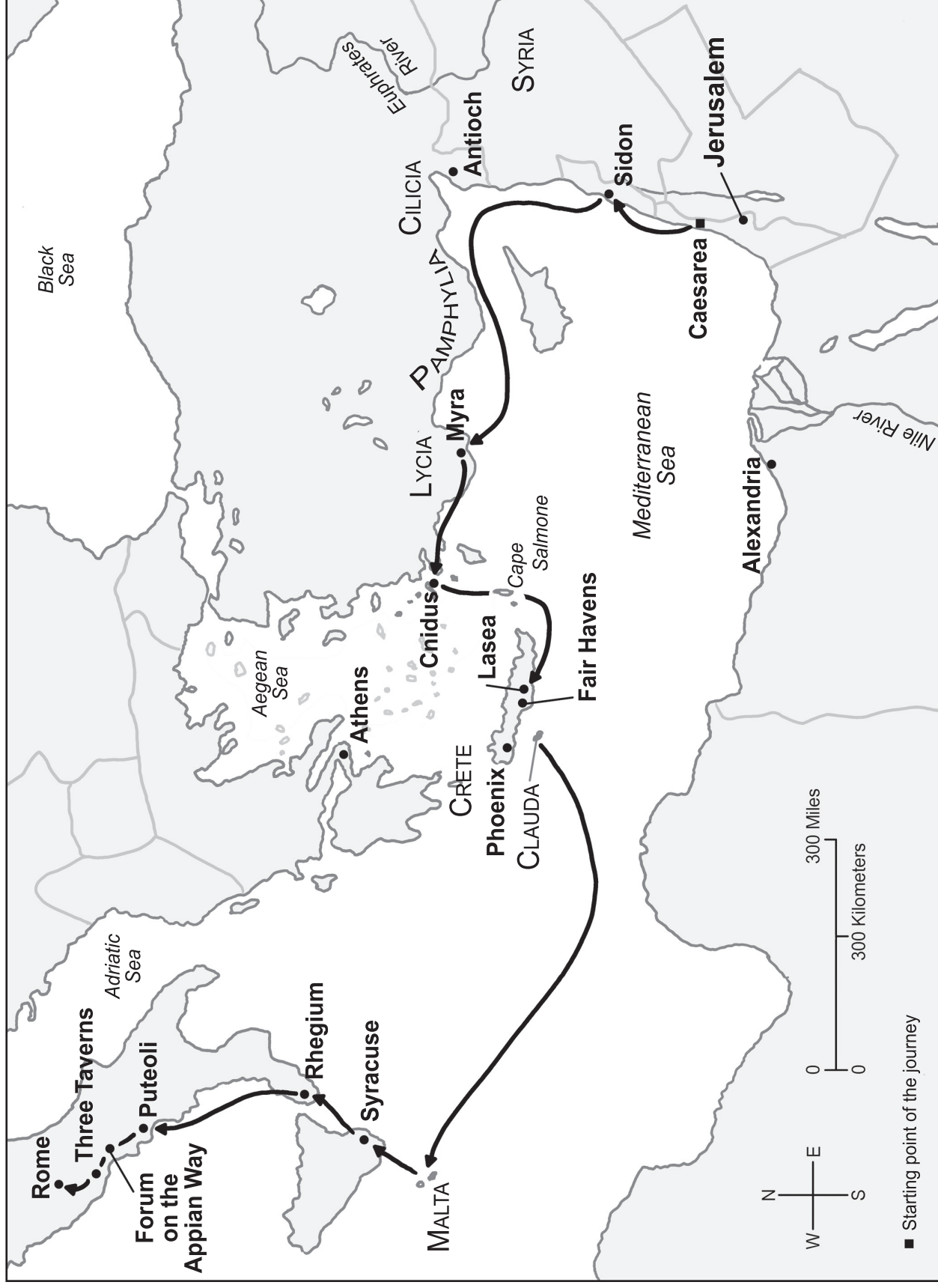
Paul's Second Missionary Journey



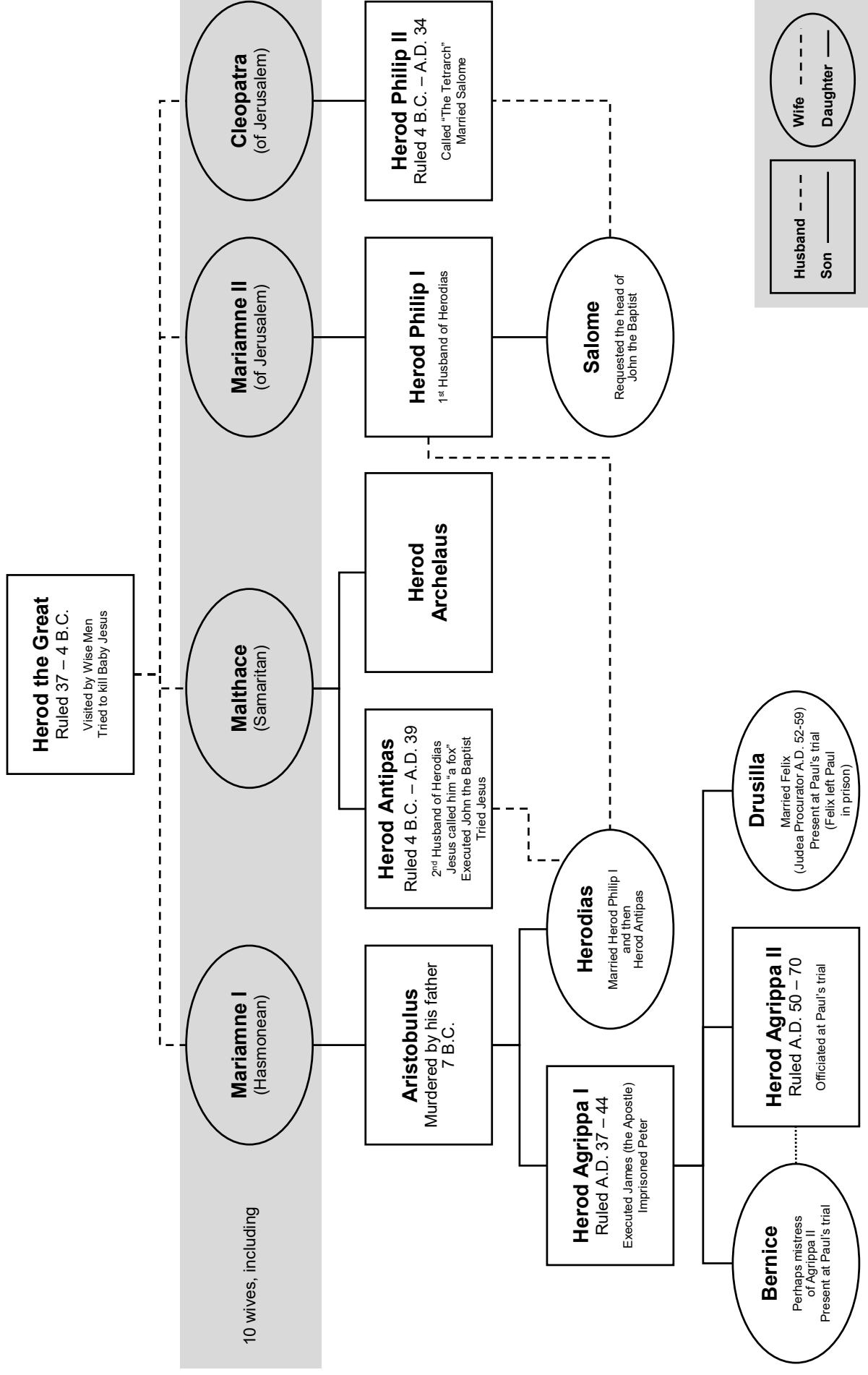
Paul's Third Missionary Journey



Paul's Journey to Rome



The Family of Herod the Great



Contrasting Calvinism and Arminianism

Within the broad scope of Christian theology, Arminianism and Calvinism share both history and many Biblical doctrines. However, they offer radically different interpretations of Scriptures related to salvation through Jesus Christ. In addition, there are a variety of approaches under the general headings of Calvinism and Arminianism; proponents on both sides are not in universal agreement regarding how they apply these doctrines.

Calvinism, which is built upon the religious teachings of John Calvin (1509-1564), emphasizes the sovereignty of God and the salvation of the elect (those He has predetermined will be saved) by God's grace alone.

Arminianism is based upon the original beliefs of the theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), but can also include teachings of John Wesley and others. The Apostolic Faith subscribes most closely to the Wesleyan view of Arminianism.

In his written works, Arminius quotes from Christian theologians dating back to the first century who taught that grace is extended to all, but that man, by his own free will, may turn toward or away from the faith. He also demonstrated that there were Christian leaders in every age since the time of Christ who taught that man can and should live holy in this life.

Following is a chart that briefly states the five main points of difference between Calvinistic teaching and Arminian teaching.

CALVINISM	ARMINIANISM
Total Depravity: Man is born with a depraved nature and lacks a free will. God draws to repentance only those He has predetermined for salvation.	Free Will: Man is born with a depraved nature but has a free will. God draws all to repentance, but man can choose to repent and be regenerated, or resist and perish.
Unconditional Election: God has chosen only certain individuals for salvation. The elect are those God has predetermined will be saved.	Conditional Election: God has chosen all humanity for salvation. The elect are those who respond to His offer of salvation with repentance and faith.
Limited Atonement: When Christ gave His life upon the Cross, atonement was made available but only for the elect.	Unlimited Atonement: When Christ gave His life upon the Cross, atonement was made available for everyone. However, atonement avails only for those who choose to accept Christ's provision.
Irresistible Grace: Grace is extended only to the elect. God's call cannot be resisted and always results in conversion.	Resistible Grace: Grace is extended to all. Man is free to accept or reject God's call. Conversion results when man believes and receives God's offered grace.
Perseverance of the Saints: Saved individuals retain their salvation to the end because they are preserved by God. No saved person will ever be lost; once an individual is saved, he is always saved.	Assurance and Security: Saved individuals can retain their salvation to the end through continued obedience and faithfulness to God. However, saved individuals can forfeit their salvation by turning away from God.