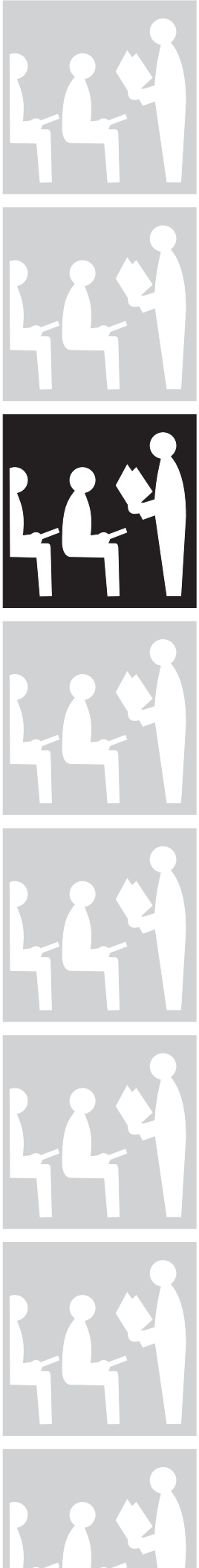

DISCOVERY UNIT 9 TEACHER'S GUIDE

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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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DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

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

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in 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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and frailties, God's plan will transpire according to His divine dictates. Though Zacharias wavered in his faith, the infant John was born and assumed his role as the forerunner to the Savior of the world.

2. In Luke 1:30-33, Mary was told by the Angel Gabriel that she would conceive and bear the Son of the Highest—an event that would bring difficult and life-altering circumstances into her life. What might some of those circumstances have been? Why do you think Mary surrendered to God's plan for her life with so little hesitation?

Class response to the first question should bring out that Mary could have suffered shame, disgrace, and rejection by her peers and society as a whole. A woman being found pregnant before marriage could be stoned or forced into a life of begging or worse. It could have meant rejection by Mary's fiancé and the loss of any possibility of marriage. Carrying the child and giving birth would bring its own hardship and pain. And although Mary did not know it, she would later have to endure the agony of seeing Jesus suffer and die for the sins of mankind.

In response to the second question, the fact that Mary was "highly favored" of God indicates that she was a godly and consecrated young woman. No doubt Mary was walking close to God on a daily basis. It would also be good to bring out that the felt presence of God brings wonderful assurance. Mary's words demonstrate this: in that sacred moment when the angel appeared and made such a startling announcement, she acquiesced to God's plan immediately, even though she did not comprehend the magnitude of it or the pain it would bring.

This might be an opportunity to point out to your group that when we have surrendered fully to the Lord, God always will provide direction for our lives. That direction may not come in the manner or time we expect it, and we will not always know where the road will take us, but that is not important. What is *important is that we are willing to follow. The more willing one is, the less he or she needs to know the details.*

3. In Luke 2:1, Caesar Augustus ordered his subjects to return to their home cities to be taxed. That decree meant Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem, even though the birth of her Child was imminent. Old Testament prophets had foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea (see Micah 5:2), and God's perfect plan was fulfilled when Jesus was born. What conclusion can we draw from the fact that this prophecy (and many others) was fulfilled in minute detail?

Your class should conclude that we can trust God's Word to be absolutely true. When He says something is going to happen, it will indeed take place. Your group may also note that God uses the actions

of men—in this case the ruler of the whole known world—to accomplish His purposes.

To further substantiate the veracity of Scripture, it might be interesting to compile a list of other Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus, and their fulfillment. Examples could include:

- *The Messiah would be born of a virgin. This was prophesied in Isaiah 7:14 and fulfilled in Luke 1:26-31.*
- *The Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah. This was foretold in Genesis 49:10 and fulfilled in Luke 3:33.*
- *A messenger would prepare the way for the Messiah. This was prophesied in Isaiah 40:3-5, and fulfilled in Luke 3:3-6.*

These three examples relate to circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus, and their fulfillment is recorded in Luke chapters 1-3. Many other Old Testament prophecies relate to Christ's life on earth, and His death, burial, and resurrection. They were written by different men, in different eras, and in different cultures, but each one came to pass. Some Bible scholars suggest there are more than three hundred prophetic references that were fulfilled in Jesus.

4. The message of the angel to the shepherds was one of great joy, for a Savior had been born to Israel. Many of the Jews expected that when their Messiah came, He would deliver them from Roman tyranny—their focus was on their temporal needs. However, the angels proclaimed a deliverance that was much greater than freedom from political oppression. What was the deliverance Jesus came to bring? (Luke 2:10-11)

Jesus came to deliver all people from the captivity and power of sin. This was His sole purpose in coming to earth. Through His sacrificial death, men and women who surrender their hearts to Him receive deliverance! Though outward circumstances may not change, inwardly there is a transformation so great that it is described elsewhere in Scripture as being "born again." This is the very foundation of the Gospel message.

If there are those in your class who might not fully understand God's plan of salvation, this would be a good opportunity to review it. The Bible clearly teaches that every individual is born with a sinful nature and at some point chooses to commit sin. Thus, each person is condemned before God. God's perfect righteousness and absolute justice demand that a penalty be paid for sin, and according to Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death"—physical death, spiritual death (separation from God), and eternal death (eternal separation from God with no hope of ever experiencing His saving grace).

God's plan from the beginning was to send His sinless Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for sin.

Jesus willingly gave His life on the Cross so that we could be saved from sin and its consequences. The angels on the hillside of Judea proclaimed the coming of a Savior, and that Baby grew to manhood and eventually died in our place that we might obtain forgiveness through His shed Blood. When a repentant sinner confesses his sins, believing that Jesus is the Son of God who died for all mankind, and surrenders his life to God, he will experience salvation.

5. When Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus into the Temple to be presented to the Lord, an elderly man named Simeon was greatly blessed to hold the Baby in his arms (see Luke 2:25-32). This just and devout man had waited patiently for many years to see the "consolation" of Israel. What do we, as the people of God, wait for today?

Class discussion should bring out that the people of God may need to wait at times for answers to prayer, for divine guidance, or for the supply of material needs or spiritual blessings. However, the primary event we are waiting for is the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. As we see violence, heartache, bloodshed, and rejection of Jesus and His teachings escalating around the world, we long more and more for our Messiah to come and set up His Kingdom. It is that hope which gives us comfort and strength through difficult times.

It might be interesting to point out that the Greek word translated waiting *in this verse means more than just enduring. It portrays waiting with an attitude of confidence and assurance. In context, Simeon was waiting with this attitude regarding the coming of the Messiah and the complete fulfillment of the Messianic promises of the Old Testament.*

6. John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, had been told by the angel Gabriel that John would prepare the way for the Messiah (Luke 1:17). When John began preaching throughout the region near the Jordan River, he declared that he was only a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way for the Lord by making His paths straight. In what way did John prepare the Messiah's path? Luke 3:7-18.

John preached repentance. For hundreds of years prior to John coming on the scene, God's prophets had pled with the people of Israel to turn from their wicked ways, but generation after generation had continued in idolatry. John pointed out the sins of various classes of people and proclaimed the need for all to repent and turn away from their sins.

Make sure your class understands that true repentance goes far beyond regret or even sincere remorse. It is a godly sorrow for sin accompanied by a renunciation of all wrongdoing. The Greek word translated repentance *in the New Testament means "compunction for guilt," and by implication, "reversal." It indicates*

a change of mind that results in a change of actions or direction. Repentance prepares the heart for God's forgiveness, so John's message was readying hearts to receive what Jesus Christ came to offer: deliverance from sin.

Verses 4-5 compare the work that needed to be done in hearts to the preparations done before a king traveled to a distant location. Messengers went before the king, proclaiming that royalty would visit and the roads must be made ready. The people leveled and smoothed the way so the king could come without hindrance. Hills or mountains literally would be brought down to grade level, and ditches or canyons would be filled up. When preparations were complete, the king could come. Using this analogy, John let the people know that they had to prepare their hearts for the coming of the Messiah.

As a follow-up to the question, discuss with your class some ways that we can prepare the way of the Lord in contemporary society. Answers should include ideas such as living a godly life before others, speaking a word for the Lord when we have opportunity, inviting acquaintances to church services, etc.

7. The Holy Trinity (also referred to as the Divine Trinity, Godhead, or Triune God) consists of three Persons in one who are equally and eternally the one true God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These are separate and distinct persons, possessing recognizable personalities and qualities, perfectly united in one. How does Luke's account of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River reveal the distinction of Persons in the Godhead? Luke 3:21-22

Jesus (God the Son) was baptized in the river by John; God the Father spoke saying, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased," and the Holy Ghost descended in the bodily shape of a dove. This question provides an opportunity to reinforce a cardinal doctrine of Scripture, the Trinity. Make sure your group understands that despite the individual roles of the members of the Godhead, they are in perfect and complete unity as to nature, relationship, cooperation, and authority; there is only one God. No Person in the Godhead exists or operates independently of the others.

8. In Luke 4 we read that as part of Jesus' spiritual preparation for ministry, He was "led by the Spirit" to a wilderness region where He fasted and prayed for a forty-day period. During that time, Jesus was "tempted of the devil," yet He refused to yield. Based on Luke 4:3-13, how can we withstand temptation using Jesus as our example?

Jesus used Scripture to counter Satan's attempts, and that is an effective weapon for us as well. It should be brought out that being able to use *Scripture presupposes that we both* know *Scripture and* believe

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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DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Jesus' Public Ministry

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Luke 4:14 through 11:54

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19)

BACKGROUND

This portion of the Gospel of Luke covers Jesus' ministry in Galilee and the beginning of His ministry in Perea, the territory east of the Jordan River. Jesus used Capernaum as His home base, but He travelled into many of the cities and villages in the region, teaching, preaching, and healing as He went. During this period Jesus called the twelve disciples who would be instrumental in helping to establish His church, and commissioned seventy followers to proclaim the Kingdom of God throughout Israel. In addition to His public ministry, Jesus spent time alone with His disciples, revealing to them His mission as the Savior of the world, His coming death, and the cost of true discipleship.

At times, Jesus' teaching took place in Jewish synagogues. During the years of Israel's exile when there was no Temple, synagogues were established as places of worship and as schools for young boys; a synagogue could be built in any town where ten or more Jewish families lived. It was customary for Jewish people to gather there on the Sabbath to hear the Scriptures expounded, and that practice continued even after the Temple was rebuilt. A visiting rabbi sometimes was invited to read from the Scriptures and teach, and Jesus availed Himself of that opportunity on a number of occasions.

As Jesus' fame spread throughout the area, He began to preach and teach in locations other than the synagogues. Luke states that He ministered in homes, by the seashore, as He traveled between various places, on the plains, at city gates, and in desert areas. Luke also mentions occasions when Jesus withdrew from the crowds for time alone in prayer, and spent time privately with His closest followers.

In these chapters, Luke's description of Jesus' ministry emphasizes the complete well-being or wholeness that Christ came to bring. He healed sick bodies but also delivered from sin. He had compassion for the hungry people in the wilderness, as well as for the

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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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communion with God is a vital component of succeeding spiritually. While there is blessing and power in united or corporate prayer, spending time alone with God should not be neglected. One way we can assess the value of such a practice is by observing how many obstacles the enemy tries to put in place to prevent it from happening!

Class discussion may also bring out that Jesus was our perfect example. He came to earth as a man so He could empathize with our humanity and show us how to have victory. Jesus knew we would need strength and grace from God to triumph over temptation, and He set a wonderful example before us by withdrawing from those around Him and spending time alone in prayer to His Father.

You may wish to point out that Luke describes Jesus in prayer before every major undertaking during His earthly life. Not only should we pray about needs and challenges that face us, but we should never make an important life decision without bringing it before God in a season of earnest prayer.

4. In chapter 5 we read that Jesus taught the people from Simon Peter's boat which had been rowed a distance away from the shore. Afterward, He instructed Simon to launch out into deeper water and lower his nets. Simon Peter had fished all night and caught nothing, yet he did as he was told. What qualities did Simon exhibit by his response, and what were the results? What would be a formula for victory using this account? Luke 5:1-11

Simon Peter exhibited faith and obedience. He did not understand why Jesus told him to lower the nets, and he even remonstrated briefly by pointing out to Jesus that no fish had been caught though they had spent the night trying. However, though it seemed pointless to lower the nets again, Simon obeyed. The result was that the net enclosed "a great multitude of fishes"—a quantity so immense that the net broke.

As your class discusses what formula can be derived from this example, they will likely conclude that obedience mixed with faith will result in victory. There may be times in our lives when we feel God leading us in a way which does not seem to make sense. It may be a call on our lives that we feel incapable of fulfilling adequately. We may feel led to speak to someone about the Lord, but are unsure because we do not know how our words will be received. However, if we truly feel God has called us to do something, we should trust Him and obey. Whether or not we always see "a great multitude of fishes"—an awesome, direct result because of our obedience—we will have spiritual victory and the approval of God.

5. Luke records frequent occasions when the Pharisees or teachers of the Law exhibited condemning attitudes toward Jesus. Chapter 6 provides two examples of them finding fault: when Jesus allowed His disciples to

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!

9. In chapter 10, a lawyer attempted to involve Jesus in a typical Jewish dispute over fine points of the Law by asking what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responded by validating the concept of loving God and loving our neighbors (verse 27). When the lawyer pressed further, asking, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan. We can all relate to this story as we all encounter people to whom we should reach out in compassion. What are some ways we can minister to the needs of others?

Your group should conclude that ministering to the needs of others may be more than sharing our resources. The Good Samaritan not only paid for the man's lodging, but he took time from his own affairs to offer compassion and personal care. The heart of love, expressed to another, likely will be the most valuable ministry of all.

Every person we come in contact with can be considered our "neighbor." We should never be so busy that we fail to respond when God shows us a person in need. There are endless ways we can help, depending upon the particular circumstances. Take time to offer a smile or a question of concern to a depressed or troubled co-worker. Send a note or take a meal to someone who is grieving or going through a hard place. If our hearts are open to the leading of the Spirit, we will find many opportunities to minister out of hearts of love.

10. When Jesus was a guest in Martha's home, her sister Mary sat at Jesus' feet in worship and communion with Him. Martha was attempting to minister to Jesus through acts of hospitality, and she complained that Mary did not help her (Luke 10:38-42). However, Jesus told Martha that Mary had chosen the better part. What does this account teach us about priorities?

Your class should conclude that communion and time spent with God must be a first priority in our lives. God is more concerned about our relationship with *Him than what we do* for *Him. Martha was so busy in serving God that she failed to take time to just be with Him. It is vital that we never let serving God become a substitute for spending time with Him.*

Ask your class to discuss some ways we can make our relationship with God a high priority, even though we live busy lives and have ongoing responsibilities in the Lord's work and to our spouses, families, employers, and so on.

CONCLUSION

Jesus taught His followers that love was the rule by which men are to live, and He lived what He taught when He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and delivered those in bondage. He commissioned His followers to follow His example by proclaiming the Kingdom of God in word and deed.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Instructions of Jesus

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Luke 12:1 through 19:27

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10)

BACKGROUND

Today's lesson describes Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem before His crucifixion. After leaving Galilee, Jesus passed through Samaria where He healed ten lepers. He spent some time east of the Jordan River and then went on to Jericho where He healed the blind man. Our text concludes with the conversion of Zacchaeus and Jesus' visit to his home.

In this portion of text, Luke's focus is on Jesus' compassion and the teaching of His principles. Many of Jesus' most well-known parables are in this segment; in fact, Jesus taught almost half of His parables while traveling through the countryside on His way to Jerusalem. Included are the accounts of the rich but foolish farmer, the chief rooms, a great feast, the lost sheep, a lost coin, a prodigal son, an unjust judge, and an unjust steward.

Jesus also spoke of His imminent death and gave numerous warnings regarding being alert for His return to earth—an event that will take many by surprise. He emphasized the necessity of striving to enter into the Kingdom of God and the high cost of discipleship, but also promised that those who sacrifice in this life will be greatly rewarded both here and in eternity.

Luke records several instances in these chapters when Jesus was criticized by the religious leaders of the day who were more concerned with their traditions than with the law of love. They condemned Jesus for healing on the Sabbath and eating with sinners, but Jesus knew their hearts and in each case responded with teachings that revealed their hypocrisy.

During this final journey, Luke highlighted the compassion of Jesus, noting how He gave special attention to the lowest in society: the women, the helpless, the poor, and the outcasts. He took time for little children and indicated by His teachings that He would go out of His way to find the lost. However, even though Luke portrayed Jesus as the Son of man—One who empathizes with humans—he also made it clear that Jesus was the divine Son of God.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. In Luke 12:13-21, Jesus gave the parable of the rich but foolish farmer who decided to tear down his barns

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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 (see 1 Corinthians 9:25). It is the same word Paul used when he told Timothy to "*fight *the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12, emphasis added).*

Make sure your class understands that this striving is not payment for admittance into the Kingdom; salvation is the free gift of God. Only Jesus' Blood can pay the price of forgiveness for sin. And yet, there is a price that must be paid to receive that free gift—not a monetary price but a complete surrender of self. One must be willing to yield everything into God's control in order to receive salvation and continue walking with the Lord.

As your group addresses the second question, they should note that Jesus' teaching in this passage gives three reasons why we must strive to enter the Kingdom: because the gate is narrow, because one day entrance will no longer be possible, and because the way in will never be re-opened once it is closed. Discussion should bring out that while the Christian life is one of joy, it also necessitates diligent seeking of God, a turning away from temptation, resistance to conforming to the world, putting others first, endeavoring to maintain unity, granting forgiveness, and a wide range of other requirements, all of which necessitate determined effort.

4. In the parable of the great supper (Luke 14:16-24), what did the invitation represent? What were some of the excuses given for not accepting the invitation?

The invitation represented the call of God to salvation. The excuses given were the purchase of a piece of ground, the purchase of five yoke of oxen, and a marriage. These excuses portray the tendency of people to become so preoccupied with the details of life that they fail to respond to God's invitation to salvation. The lord's response to the excuses, "I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper" (verse 24) illustrates that God's call will end if it is put off too long.

While this parable concerns God's invitation to sinners, ask your class how this parable could apply also to those who are saved. Class discussion should bring out that we all have a call to work for God. Not only are we called to day-to-day service, but we may have a more specific call that will take consecration and sacrifice. Have we spent time in prayer and the study of God's Word to prepare spiritually? Have we made business or other temporal decisions that would make us available for that call? Have we taken time to prepare ourselves with the proper education to qualify ourselves to respond effectively? Or are we just too busy with life to put God and His call first in our lives? We want to place a top priority on the most important aspect of our lives—the call of God.

5. Verses 1-2 of chapter 15 set the scene for the three parables given in this chapter, all of which relate to

seeking lost things. The Pharisees and scribes were upset about Jesus' actions and communicated their displeasure by "murmuring." What had Jesus done to cause their displeasure, and how did Jesus' response in the parables relate to their attitude?

The Pharisees and publicans were displeased because Jesus associated with sinners. The animosity of these religious leaders toward those who did not measure up to their strict religious requirements was well-known, and they presumed that anyone who associated with unrighteous individuals was of similar character. You may wish to point out to your class that the verb tense of the Greek phrase translated "drew near" (verse 1) indicates a tendency of publicans and sinners to approach Jesus, rather than an isolated incident. Apparently many of the outcasts of society recognized their lost condition through Jesus' teachings and eagerly sought salvation. In addition, since Jesus was traveling at this point, the Pharisees' charge that He "receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" had to refer to events in the past or to His general habit of such associations.

Jesus used the religious leaders' criticism as an opportunity to teach the value of sinners (lost souls). All of the lost articles described in the parables were precious to the owners, so no effort was spared in a diligent search until the lost was found. This point confronted the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees, who regarded "sinners" as being contemptible.

Point out to your group that Christ's valuation of and seeking for lost souls should be a great encouragement to us as we pray for those who need salvation. Christ's own words in our key verse point out that seeking the lost was the reason He came to earth.

If class time allows, you may wish to lead your group in a discussion of similarities and differences between the three parables.

6. When speaking of His future Kingdom on earth, Jesus said the coming of the Son of man will occur quickly and gave several warnings about being ready for that day. One of them was, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). What do you think Jesus meant by that warning?

Jesus was warning against getting so wrapped up in the temporal things of life that our affections become divided and we lose our focus on the Lord's return. Lot and his family had to be urged to leave behind the life they had built for themselves in Sodom (see Genesis 19:15-26). Though warned by God's messengers not to look back, Lot's wife disobeyed and did so. There must have been reluctance to part with what she was leaving behind.

You may wish to ask your students to name things in our lives today that could consume our attention and distract us from a proper spiritual focus. The

point should be made that we are to hold the material 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 extortion that was commonplace under the Roman government. His decision to make restitution by righting the wrongs of his past revealed his inward change by outward action.

This may be a good opportunity to review with your class that restitution is the act of making reparation or repayment for loss, damage, or injury that has been done to another. It is a voluntary act, not an imposed punishment or repayment demanded by the one who experienced the loss. The Bible is clear that Christians are to have a conscience "void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16), and that the desire to straighten out one's past is an evidence of true conversion. Thus, restitution may not be a requirement for salvation, but it certainly is a result of salvation.

10. In the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:12-27), a nobleman "went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return." In his absence, he gave his servants a certain number of pounds and instructed them, "Occupy till I come." What did the word "occupy" infer, and what is the application of this parable to our day?

The word "occupy" inferred that the servants were to do something with what had been given them. The nobleman's distribution of pounds was made so that the servants could multiply the master's wealth.

Jesus was communicating that in the interim between His time on earth and His return to earth, there was work to be done—His followers should busy themselves with expanding His Kingdom. Because we live in the era immediately prior to Christ's return, this parable is especially applicable. There may not be much time left to work for our Savior. Each of us has been given opportunities and resources that potentially could be used for God. The question is, what are we doing with them? Someday each of us will be accountable for what we have done with what He entrusted to us.

CONCLUSION

As Jesus neared the end of His time on earth, He taught His followers many vital principles. We would do well to pay close attention to His words and apply them to our own lives.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

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 foreordained 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 penalty. What was true of the Jewish nation also applies to every individual who rejects Christ. Ultimately, the penalty for rejection will be poured out. What a warning to individuals who are neglecting their own salvation!

3. In Luke 20:9-19, Jesus gave the parable of the vineyard, in which the husbandmen who had the responsibility of caring for the vineyard failed to provide the owner with a return on his investment. The husbandmen had rejected the owner's authority and viewed the vineyard as their own. Why were the chief priests and scribes so furious when they heard this parable?

The priests and scribes were angry because they understood that they were the husbandmen in Jesus' parable. They knew Jesus was pointing to their failure to care properly for the spiritual welfare of Israel, and to their rejection of His authority as the long-awaited Messiah.

In verses 17-19, Jesus was quoting from Psalm 118:22-23, pointing out to the chief priests and scribes that their rejection of the Messiah had been prophesied in the Scriptures. In a veiled manner, He was warning them that destruction would come upon those who rejected Christ the cornerstone.

As a follow-up to this question, point out to your class that the chief priests and scribes of Jesus' day are not the only ones to whom this parable relates. In society today, many challenge the deity of Christ and the authority of His teachings. However, widespread opposition does not change the facts. Ask your group to summarize why the deity of Christ is so foundational to our faith. They should conclude that rejection of the deity and authority of Jesus Christ also means a rejection of the reality that all mankind is born into sin, that sin causes a separation from God that cannot be bridged by man's own efforts, that there is an eternal penalty for sin, and that we have a moral responsibility toward God. In fact, every Biblical foundation crumbles if Jesus is not God's Son, come to earth to give His life for the salvation of mankind.

4. In chapter 21, Jesus told His followers of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, of His return, and of several distinct signs that would precede these events. In verse 36, He instructed His disciples to watch for these signs and to pray continually; otherwise, they could be caught off guard and suffer destruction. We are in the closing days before the return of Christ to this earth, so the warning to "watch . . . and pray" has special significance for our generation. What does the word "watch" mean in this context, and what are some ways we can watch for our Lord's return?

Class discussion will bring out that to "watch" means to be vigilant and on guard, fully awake, aware, alert, and intently focused. You may wish to

*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

to the Father. His petition culminated in these words, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). What did the "cup" Jesus referred to represent?

The "cup" referred to Christ's coming death and the terrible anguish that He would soon go through. While the physical suffering He was facing would be excruciating and no doubt His human nature recoiled, the deepest agony was the total separation from His Father which He would have to endure in order to make atonement for the sins of the world. The One who knew no sin would be "made sin" or a sin offering, for us (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). Pondering the depth and breadth of the perfect oneness between God the Father and God the Son helps us get a glimpse of just how dreadful that separation was.

7. Peter denied Jesus (Luke 22:56-62), and yet later became a leader in the Early Church. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss (Luke 22:47) and later suffered a tragic end. Why do you think these two men, both of whom had been among the closest associates of Christ, had such different endings?

Though Peter denied Christ three times, he repented quickly and wholeheartedly; he went out and wept bitterly in true godly sorrow for failing his Lord. There is no indication that Judas ever repented of his treachery. Matthew's Gospel does state that Judas "repented himself" and attempted to return the payment of thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders (see Matthew 27:4). However, the word translated "repented" in that instance is not the Greek word that indicates a change of heart, but rather a word which simply alludes to regret over the consequences.

Some Bible scholars suggest that Judas was trying to force the issue of Jesus taking the throne and throwing off the yoke of Roman bondage. Whether or not that was the case, when Judas realized that the events he had set in motion by his betrayal were irreversible, he went out and took his own life. This would be a good time to emphasize to your group that Jesus gladly will forgive the worst of sinners, but unless a sinner repents, he will die in his sins and be judged. God will restore those who own up to their sin and turn from it.

You may wish to bring out that even for those who are saved, there may be times when we see the error of a particular action. In such cases, it is important to admit our fault and come to God quickly to express regret and ask for His forgiveness. We should search our hearts often and right any offenses as soon as possible. God honors the efforts of one who will be honest and will judge himself. In the end he will not be judged.

8. God permitted false accusations and injustice to prevail in the trial of Jesus Christ. The most infamous 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 Apostles in the Book of Acts, our most important message and proof of the veracity of our beliefs is the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.*
- *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.*

CONCLUSION

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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DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

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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While numbers were increasing, the fledgling church faced great adversity. Chapter 4 records that in reaction to the healing of the lame man, Peter and John were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. This governing body of elders, rulers, scribes, and priests demanded to know "by what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" Peter fearlessly responded that it was "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified." He and John were released after being commanded to never preach again in the Name of Jesus, but in spite of that warning, the Apostles continued to proclaim Christ in synagogues without fear. The believers gathered in homes for fellowship, prayer, and communion. They were unified spiritually and demonstrated Christian love, with many selling their possessions and sharing with those in need in the church.

In addition to facing adversity from without, the body of believers faced challenges from within. Chapter 5 records what happened when Ananias and Sapphira lied to Peter about their offering, and in doing so, lied to God. Judgment was swift and sure; both husband and wife died when they were confronted, and were buried within a few hours. As a result, great respect and reverence for God came upon the new church.

The influence of the Gospel spread, and multitudes began coming from cities around Jerusalem, bringing their sick to the Apostles to be healed. Once more the Apostles were imprisoned but were miraculously delivered by an angel. Again they were commanded to cease from preaching in the Name of Jesus, and once more they refused, saying, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

In chapter 6, a dispute arose concerning the daily ministration to needy members of their group. Stephen was one of seven chosen to remedy this situation. His messages, which were "full of faith and power," stirred up more opposition, and Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin and accused of blasphemy.

Stephen's powerful sermon as he faced his accusers is recorded in chapter 7. It was not a defensive message, but rather a bold proclamation of truth going back to God's covenant with Abraham, and recounting God's blessing through the eras of Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. He asserted that the people had continued to reject God and ultimately had even put to death the promised Messiah, the Son of God. Stephen's accusation enraged the people, and he was condemned to death by stoning, becoming the first Christian martyr of the Early Church.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Just before His ascension, Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus' final words to His followers are recorded in Acts 1:4-8.

NOTES

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 once 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, but a definite language. That is evidenced by the fact that when the power fell at Pentecost, bystanders from surrounding nations who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost were amazed to hear words clearly spoken in their own languages (see Acts 2:7-12).

4. Following the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, Peter stood and preached with courage and boldness to the crowd that had gathered. According to Acts 2:37, what was the response to his message? What does this reveal about the effect the Holy Spirit has on the unsaved?

The response was that the people were "pricked in their heart" and asked, "What shall we do?" Point out that Peter offered no invitation, but merely declared the truth. His listeners themselves inquired what they should do! The description that they were "pricked" is a good way of describing the conviction of the Holy Spirit. In the original Greek, the word katanusso*, translated "pricked," means "to pierce thoroughly; to agitate violently." Through the words of Peter, the Spirit impressed upon these listeners' hearts that they were responsible for the death of Jesus and that they had to do something about it.*

In response to the second question, the point should be made that one of the works of the Holy Spirit is to bring conviction to the sinner. God's desire is for confession and repentance to follow such conviction. That was the case in this instance, as verse 41 relates that the same day about three thousand souls were added to the church.

5. The lame beggar by the Beautiful Gate of the Temple asked Peter and John for alms. The disciples had no money to give, but the lame man received far more than the monetary donation he had hoped for. What did he receive, and how? Acts 3:6-8

The lame man received healing of his lameness when Peter took him by the hand and raised him up; he was immediately able to walk and leap. The point should be made that this healing wasn't something Peter did on a whim or as a promotional event; he did it in the Name of Jesus, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Peter pointed to Christ as the Source of miraculous power—he was just the channel. His words, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" showed a total confidence in the power of Jesus' name, and implied that all the honor and glory for what was to be accomplished belonged to Him.

6. In Acts 5:1-2, Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession but conspired together to hold back part of the proceeds, while giving the impression that they were offering the full amount for God's use. The Greek word translated *kept back* in verse 2 means "to set apart or appropriate for one's own use," indicating

that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was deliberate 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 we think of needing God's power, we might focus on one or two areas of our lives where we suppose God will help us. Perhaps we think He will make us able to testify better, speak to others about God more easily, or perform some challenging task for Him. However, it is not any one *task for which the Holy Spirit empowers us. He will impact our whole inner man. That includes our intellect, our affections, our desires, our focus, our purpose, and our will. Every part of us will come under the influence of His power. God helped the Apostles, Stephen, and the other believers establish the church in Jerusalem, and He will help us as we face the challenges of our day.*

CONCLUSION

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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DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Persecution Spreads the Gospel

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Acts 8:1 through 12:25

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." (Acts 8:3-4)

BACKGROUND

Jesus' final words to His followers declared that after the Holy Ghost came upon them, they would be His witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth (see Acts 1:8). In today's text, that promise began to be fulfilled beyond Jerusalem. Chapters 8-12 of Acts relate that as the persecution in Jerusalem grew, believers dispersed throughout Judaea and Samaria, and everywhere they went they preached the Word.

Chapter 8 describes the ministry of Philip, a Greek-speaking Jew and one of those who had been chosen to serve with Stephen (see Acts 6:5). He went to Samaria and preached Christ there. The people gladly received his message. Later, the Apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to observe this new ministry to the Samaritans, people who were part Jew and part Gentile. They found a solid body of believers, and the Samaritans subsequently received the Holy Ghost.

Though his ministry in Samaria had been fruitful, Philip was directed by God to leave that location and go to a lonely desert road in Gaza. There he saw a chamberlain to the Queen of Ethiopia riding along in his chariot. The Ethiopian was thirsting for understanding of the Scriptures, and when Philip joined him in his chariot and told him of Jesus, the man believed and subsequently was baptized in water.

The story of Saul's conversion takes up most of chapter 9. Saul was well-known for his extreme hatred and persecution of the followers of Jesus, and his dramatic conversion on the road between Jerusalem and Damascus stirred the Jewish community. The radical change in this former persecutor demonstrated the transforming power of the Gospel, which Saul immediately began to witness to and would later preach. However, there was a waiting and growing time for Saul before he began his ministry. He spent about three years in the desert of Arabia (see Galatians 1:17-18), and then resided for a time in Tarsus, his home city.

At the end of chapter 9, the focus of the narrative in Acts shifts back to Peter. Two incidents in his

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ministry are described: the healing of Aeneas the paralytic, and the raising back to life of the deceased Dorcas (Tabitha).

Chapter 10 records how the divinely arranged meeting between Peter and Cornelius began to open the door for Gentiles to be a part of the community of believers. The Law was ingrained in the Jewish people. Strong feelings prevailed about things considered unclean, which included people who were Gentiles. That concept needed to be changed in order to reach the Gentiles for Christ. Peter's vision on the rooftop in Joppa helped him understand that Christ's death had abolished the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. Then, with perfect timing, Peter received the God-directed summons to Cornelius' house. Cornelius was a Roman centurion who was a devout man, though not a member of the Jewish community. Peter journeyed to Caesarea where Cornelius lived, and while he was delivering his message of salvation through Jesus, Cornelius and the others in his household embraced it, and the Holy Ghost was poured out upon them.

Chapter 11 describes the opposition to Peter's actions by the church leaders in Jerusalem. They were offended that Peter had visited Gentiles and had eaten with them, but Peter recounted his vision and the events that followed. Clearly, the Gospel was for all and after their initial astonishment, the Jerusalem saints began to rejoice in the salvation of these new converts.

The conclusion of chapter 11 describes the formation of the church in Antioch. Some of the Jews who had been scattered by persecution had settled in this city of Syria, located about three hundred miles from Jerusalem. As a vital commercial hub, Antioch became a major center for Christian missionary outreach. Barnabas was sent by the Jerusalem church to oversee the church there. The rapid growth of the congregation spurred him to travel to Tarsus to bring back Saul, who had been saved about ten years earlier, to help with the work. It was at Antioch that the name "Christians" was first applied to the followers of Christ.

The persecution in Jerusalem continued, as evidenced by the events described in chapter 12. Herod Agrippa beheaded James, making him the first Apostle to be martyred. (For information on the various Herods, see the chart at the end of the book.) Because this action pleased the Jews, Herod arrested Peter as well. However, the night before the Apostle's trial, the chains that shackled him between two guards fell off and an angel led him out of prison. Peter made his way to the home of John Mark's mother, where the saints had gathered to pray for him.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. After Simon saw the Holy Ghost being poured out through the laying on of hands by Peter and John, he attempted to pay money to obtain the same power. According to Acts 8:20-23, how did Peter respond?

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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

because a great impediment to evangelization in the Gentile world of that day was the assumption that salvation was for Jews alone. The fact that God would also call Gentiles into His Church was a new realization to the Jewish believers, although this was in accord with the Scriptures. They had both the words of the Lord himself (see Acts 1:8) and the Old Testament promise that Gentiles would come to the Lord through the Messiah (in passages such as Isaiah 49:6). Point out that Acts 11 demonstrates that the hearts of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were receptive and willing to be guided by God, which is a critical factor in successful evangelism.

Ask your class: What are the implications of this great truth in our day? Your group should conclude that the good news of Christ is for everyone. We must never permit differences of race, culture, economic class, religious background, education, or any other factor to be an impediment to unity within the church, or to hinder us from reaching out to non-believers. The world will be blessed as we accept God's divine plan and look beyond any diversities, working together to proclaim the Gospel to all.

6. Barnabas first appears in Scripture in Acts 4:36, where we learn that his name (perhaps a nickname) meant "Son of consolation." His first recorded action was when he sold land that belonged to him and "brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:37). He is also mentioned in Acts 9:26-31 and Acts 11:22-26, 30. After reviewing these texts, how would you describe this Christian worker?

Your students' comments about Barnabas should bring out some of the following thoughts.

Acts 4:36-37 – He was generous and concerned about the needs of others.

Acts 9:26-31 – He was courageous in vouching for Paul before the church elders.

Acts 11:22 – He evidently was well thought of by the Jerusalem church, since they chose him to go and help in Antioch.

Acts 11:23 – He was an able preacher who ministered joyfully and with encouragement, and one who was faithful to fulfill his spiritual duties.

Acts 11:24 – He was a good man who was full of the Holy Ghost and faith.

Acts 11:25 – He must have been a humble man, since he sought out Saul and asked for assistance, even though he had been converted and was a respected worker in the church before Saul was converted.

Acts 11:30 – He was trustworthy; the church could depend on him to deliver collected funds to Jerusalem.

Conclude your discussion of this question by establishing that Barnabas clearly was a good pattern for what a Christian worker should be.

7. According to Acts 12:1-2, the Apostle James was beheaded by King Herod, making him the first of the twelve Apostles to be martyred. Subsequent verses in the same chapter relate how the Apostle Peter was spared—in fact, he experienced a dramatic deliverance from prison through the intervention of an angel! (See Acts 12:5-10.) Why do you think God delivered in one instance but not the other?

No doubt the Early Church members had the same question. Class discussion should lead to the understanding that God has a perfect, unique purpose for each life. He sees the big picture, operates in accordance with His divine plan, and knows precisely the timing for each piece of His plan to fit together. We will not always understand why God allows what He allows. We may not always understand why we have to suffer when others seem to have easier lives. However, we can and must trust that every circumstance works together for eternal good.

8. Peter's imprisonment inspired the believers to pray "without ceasing" on his behalf. However, when Peter miraculously appeared at their door, the saints found it hard to believe (see Acts 12:13-16). Why do you think they were so disbelieving of Rhoda's report? What conclusion can we reach from this event about how God answers prayer?

We do not have a direct answer in Scripture regarding precisely why those who were praying for Peter's deliverance were so astonished when that happened. However, it is important to understand that these early believers had just learned about the death of James by the hand of Herod. They likely were dismayed and even fearful that they would be next. As they prayed for him, they may have thought the most favorable outcome would be Peter's release after his trial before Herod the next day; perhaps some of their prayers were specifically toward that end. Most likely they never even considered that angelic intervention would bring about the Apostle's release.

In response to the second question, your students should conclude that God's ways are not our ways. We may formulate in our minds what we think are the best resolutions to our problems, but God's solution may well be something we never imagined. Let us learn not to limit God! We may not always understand why He does not answer a prayer in the way we expect, but we can be absolutely confident that He always does answer in the most perfect way for His glory.

CONCLUSION

The New Testament church had a call to evangelize the world for Christ. Starting in Judea, then into Samaria, and then to regions beyond, the saints began to move into new areas, sowing the seed as they went. Our commission is the same today, as we carry on the work of the early disciples until Jesus comes.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

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

these locations, they clearly felt a deep responsibility to make sure the converts they had won were firmly established in the truth. Verse 23 relates another reason Paul and Barnabas felt a need to return to these cities: they wanted to appoint spiritual leaders. Even this soon in the establishment of the Early Church, a certain amount of organization was necessary to ensure the smooth working of the body of believers in each location after the missionaries returned to their home base.

An appropriate follow-up to this question would be to discuss the importance of nurturing and encouraging new believers, and ways this can be done.

4. The meeting of the Council of Jerusalem, described in chapter 15, is one of the great turning points in the Book of Acts. What issue was brought before the Council, and why was the decision they made so significant?

The issue was whether Gentile believers had to follow the requirements of the Mosaic Law—specifically the rite of circumcision—in order to be saved. Paul and his followers insisted that a person was justified by faith alone, while many of the converted Pharisees asserted God would not set aside the Law in receiving a Gentile believer. Although it was evident that Gentiles had been genuinely converted, the Jewish religious leaders found it difficult to relinquish their long-held belief that a right standing with God came through the keeping of the Law.

In response to the second part of the question, your class should understand that this was a critical decision because if Gentile converts had been required to keep the traditional rites of the Jewish Law, the expansion of the Gospel would have been greatly impeded.

5. Chapter 16 records that while the missionaries were in Philippi, opposition arose when a demon-possessed slave girl was delivered. Paul and Silas were taken before the magistrates, and then beaten and placed in stocks in the inner prison. At midnight, however, the two men prayed and sang praises to God. While we may never be beaten and imprisoned for our faith, we will experience trials of some nature. What are the benefits of keeping a spirit of praise, even in hard circumstances?

Responses from your group should bring out that keeping a spirit of praise in our hearts will remind us to view our circumstances through an eternal perspective, remembering that God promises all things will work together for good to those that love Him (see Romans 8:28). We can have the assurance that God is with us and is mindful of our situation. Additionally, when we retain our joy and spirit of praise in the midst of adversity, it will be a testimony that likely will speak louder than words to those around us.

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.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

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.

4. After his appearance before the Sanhedrin, the Apostle was transferred in the darkness of night to Caesarea where he was to appear before Felix, the procurator (or governor) of Judea. Chapter 24 records the accusations made against Paul before Felix, and the Apostle's response. What are some words you would use to describe how he made his defense, given in verses 10-15?

Your group will likely respond with a variety of descriptive words. Ultimately, they should conclude that Paul's defense was cheerful and pleasant in tone (verse 10), addressed each accusation with facts (verse 11), was firm (verse 12), forceful (verse 13), and affirmative (verses 14-15). Amplify this summary by pointing out that Paul was accused of being a renegade who incited trouble, of being the ringleader of an unauthorized religious sect that rebelled against Roman law, and of profaning the Temple. Though these accusations were false, he responded in a manner that could be a model for Christians of every era to follow when they are unjustly criticized or condemned.

5. Felix had been governor of Judea for six years, so he undoubtedly already knew about the Christian faith. Building upon that, Paul presented to him the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and when Paul finished his defense, Felix had a "more perfect knowledge of that way" (Acts 24:22). Subsequently, Felix met with Paul again, and listened to the Apostle concerning faith in Christ. When Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," how did Felix respond? What parallel can you see between his response and the way many respond to the Gospel invitation in our day? Acts 24:24-25

Felix trembled, but he avoided making a spiritual decision by putting it off. He knew Paul was innocent, yet he did not want to identify himself with Paul's Gospel and the Christians, so he delayed, saying that when he had a "convenient season" he would call for Paul again. Though Felix was undoubtedly under conviction, the Bible does not record that he ever surrendered his heart to the Lord.

In response to the second question, your group should see that many respond to the Gospel in the same way Felix did; they simply put off yielding. However, procrastination is *in fact rejection.*

6. Paul was imprisoned for two years in Caesarea. When Festus replaced Felix, Paul's accusers again brought charges against the Apostle and pressed for a trial to be held in Jerusalem. At that point, Paul requested a hearing before Caesar, which was the right of every Roman citizen. In Acts 25:14-21, Festus explained Paul's case to the visiting King Agrippa. What great doctrinal truth did Festus point to in his summary of the accusations against Paul? (Acts 25:18-19). Why did the Jewish religious leaders so vehemently resist this truth?

According to verse 19, Festus told Agrippa that the real contention surrounding Paul's teaching related to the doctrine of the Resurrection—a doctrine that was (and is) vital to the Christian belief. The Jewish religious leaders vehemently denied this great truth because accepting it would mean admitting that the Man they had killed was their own long-awaited Messiah.

Ask your group why it is so important for us to hold firmly to our belief in Christ's resurrection. Discussion should bring out that it validates Jesus' claim that He was the Son of God and provides irrefutable proof that He is the Savior of the world. It also proves the validity of the Old Testament prophecies that foretold of Jesus' suffering and resurrection (see Acts 17:2-3), thereby showing that unfulfilled prophecies will be fulfilled one day. Finally, if Jesus Christ was not resurrected, we have no hope that we will be resurrected either. In fact, if we deny Christ's resurrection, we have no Savior, no salvation, and no hope of eternal life. A supporting passage can be found in Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:12-20.

7. Paul's defense before Agrippa is recorded in chapter 26. For the third time in the Book of Acts, the Apostle recounted how his life was turned around through his experience on the road to Damascus. Based on verses 19-20, what was the outcome of that experience?

Verses 19-20 indicate that Paul followed through with unhesitating obedience. Initiate follow-up discussion by asking your group what the benefits of immediate obedience to God are. Answers should bring out that we will have confidence in God, and our lives will be a testimony to others of true commitment. The Bible teaches that those who walk in obedience are blessed of God, and ultimately, God will be glorified. Paul certainly saw these benefits worked out in his life as he continued to follow the leading of God's Spirit.

8. In chapter 27, Paul was taken by ship toward Rome. As winter approached, the weather became more and more dangerous for traveling by sea. The ship made a good start from Crete, but in time, they encountered great difficulty in a storm. When the weather became so tempestuous that a shipwreck was certain, Paul stepped forward and offered words of encouragement and comfort to the terrified sailors. What was his message, and on what basis was he able to offer it so assuredly? Acts 27:20-26

His comforting message was that there would be no loss of life, though the ship would be wrecked. He was able to offer this reassurance because an angel of God had appeared to him and made that promise. God had promised that he "must be brought before Caesar" (verse 24), so he knew that he would survive. Included in that promise was the statement that "God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." The verb in the phrase "God has given" implies that the lives of those

on board were "granted as a favor," and suggests that this promise was in response to Paul's prayers that their lives would be spared.

Bring out to your group that often people pray when they find themselves in great peril. While God may respond to a sinner's desperate cry for help, it is much better to have a relationship with Him that assures us of His care for us in every situation.

9. Paul carried on his ministry even while imprisoned in Rome. According to Acts 28:23, "There came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening." The final verse of the Book of Acts relates that Paul continued "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." As we come to the close of this book, what are some of the key lessons that we can learn from the life of Paul?

Your students' responses to this question should be a good way to wrap up our study of the Book of Acts. Some of the thoughts brought out could include:

- *No one is beyond the saving grace of God.*
- *God has a plan and a place in His service for everyone.*
- *The Holy Spirit will direct and empower a life that is fully yielded to God.*
- *We may face persecution and opposition in our ministry efforts, but God can sustain and encourage us.*
- *It is important to stay focused on our spiritual goals.*

CONCLUSION

The Spirit of God inspired Paul's longing to carry the Gospel to Rome and provided the means for the Apostle to get there, orchestrating a sequence of events that put him in contact with government officials who wanted him to tell them about Jesus, and enabling him to preach Jesus Christ in many locations. Though opposition was fierce, Paul was reassured by the knowledge that God would bring him safely to his goal. His example of commitment, and his willingness to suffer and die for the Gospel if need be, were widely imitated in early Christianity, and helped the Early Church grow despite periods of intense persecution.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

James' Letter

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

James 1:1 through 5:20

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." (James 2:18)

BACKGROUND

By A.D. 49, many of the early believers had left Jerusalem to live in areas outside of Judea due to the persecution that arose after Stephen's death. Since these individuals who were "scattered abroad" no longer had day-to-day contact with the leaders of the church, James wrote this epistle to encourage them to endure in spite of trials, to continue growing in Christ, and to evidence their faith by actions that were appropriate for believers.

More than any other book in the New Testament, James focuses on the necessity for followers of Christ to act in accordance with their faith. The author was convinced that what Christians believe must affect what they do. His repeated emphasis on practical aspects of the life of faith is similar in many ways to Proverbs and other portions of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

While there is no clearly defined structure in James' epistle, a number of themes are woven throughout the five chapters. These include faith that is revealed by actions, remaining steadfast in trials, wise speech, the wisdom of God, the worthlessness of riches, and perseverance in prayer. His instruction, though written nearly two thousand years ago, can still serve as a how-to book on genuine Christian living.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. James began his epistle by challenging the recipients of his letter to patiently endure when faced with difficult circumstances. The word "temptation" in James 1:2 refers to both outward adversities and trials. The phrase "trying of your faith" in verse 3 implies a test designed to prove the quality of something. In verse 4, what reason did James give for patient endurance of temptations and trials?

James asserted that through patient enduring, those experiencing temptations and trials could become "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Explain to your group that the word perfect *in the original Greek indicates something that is complete and fully developed.* Entire *has a similar meaning,*

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defined as "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.

It might be interesting to note that of the thousands of biological creatures on earth, only humans have the ability to communicate through verbalized speech. Clearly, speech is a very special gift from our Creator. As Christians, we want to be very careful that our communication with others is always done in a manner that reflects holiness of heart and our dedication to God. To conclude discussion of this question, you may wish to ask your class to give some examples of times when someone's words were helpful or encouraging to them.

5. In verses 13-18 of chapter 3, James took up the topic of genuine wisdom, pointing out that just as one can identify a tree by its fruit, one can identify godly wisdom—the "wisdom from above"—by observing its characteristics. What eight qualities of godly wisdom does he list in verse 17?

James describes the wisdom from above with the following words.

- *Pure – unmixed with evil because it is a gift from a holy God*
- *Peaceable – describes the inner state of mind of the Spirit-filled life*
- *Gentle – tender-spirited*
- *Easy to be intreated – open to persuasion and accepting of divine guidance*
- *Full of mercy – extending grace to others*
- *Full of good fruits – demonstrating godly actions*
- *Without partiality – honest, fair*
- *Without hypocrisy – straightforward, and without a hint of subterfuge or concealment*

Ask your group to name some typical life situations where the godly wisdom evidenced by these characteristics would be important. Their suggestions may include in an ungodly work environment, when our beliefs are challenged, when differences of opinion or conflicts arise, in building a strong marriage, in raising children, etc. The list will quickly become lengthy! These should lead to the obvious conclusion that godly wisdom put into practice will impact every area of our lives. Clearly, it is an attribute we want to develop in our Christian walk.

6. In chapter 4, James described behaviors that are evidence of a carnal nature, such as strife, wrong desires, worldliness, and disunity. In verses 7-10, he presented the remedy in a series of imperative commands. What two actions does he mention in James 4:7, and why are both so vital for a victorious Christian life?

The two actions mentioned in James 4:7 are to "submit to God" and to "resist the devil."

Begin discussion of the second question by asking your group to define the two words as they relate to the

Christian life. This should establish that to submit to God means to wholeheartedly seek for and yield to His will, laying aside all self-will. To resist the devil means to take an uncompromising stand against Satan's deceptions, his solicitations to evil, and his efforts to sway, coerce, or intimidate.

Discussion of why these actions are so vital should bring out that a wholehearted and voluntary yielding of ourselves in consecration to God is how we are sanctified. However, resisting the devil is necessary even after we have received that experience because the enemy of our souls will do all he can to entice and distract us. Even though the temptations are outward rather than inward after we are sanctified, we must maintain an ongoing determination to withstand his devices in whatever manner they come.

7. Planning for the future is a familiar theme in today's society. High school students are encouraged to practice for SAT tests, apply for scholarships, and make early inquiries to colleges they might like to attend. Young professionals are advised to draft business plans and set goals for advancement in their field of choice. Middle-aged individuals are counseled to evaluate their resources and talk to a financial advisor in order to ensure they will have a comfortable retirement. In chapter 4, James addressed the making of plans. He gave an example of a merchant who had thought of everything including time (today or tomorrow), location (such and such a city), duration (spend a year there), purpose (buy and sell), and goal (achieve a profit). However, one important aspect had been left out. What was that aspect? How would you summarize James' admonition about looking ahead to the future? James 4:13-15

The missing aspect of this plan was that the merchant had left out seeking God's will.

Your students' summaries of James' admonition should bring out that he was not discouraging his readers from planning and doing, but only from planning and doing apart from a reliance on God. These verses are a caution against an attitude of presumption and independence from God. As Christians, we want to be sure that all our plans are made with God in mind and are totally submitted to Him. When this is the case, we will not be angry, frustrated, or unhappy if circumstances change and our plans do not come to pass, because we know that God is in control and He will allow only what is best for us.

8. In James 5:13-15, the author instructed those who were afflicted (facing any troubling circumstances in life) to pray, and the cheerful to sing psalms of praise to God. What did he instruct the sick to do?

James told the sick to call for the elders of the church, asking them to pray. It is instructive that the Bible puts the responsibility on the sick person to

approach the ministry and request prayer. By so doing, they take the first step of faith by indicating their desire to follow God's Word in this matter.

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.

CONCLUSION

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.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Paul's Letter to the Galatians

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Galatians 1:1 through 6:18

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

BACKGROUND

The exact geographic location of the Galatian churches remains uncertain. In Paul the Apostle's time, the Romans gave this name to an area in north central Asia Minor that came into their possession around 25 B.C., which they made into a province. In broader traditional usage, Galatia referred to a small southeastern portion of that province encompassing such cities as Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia. Most likely the letter was addressed to the churches in these locations which Paul had founded on his first missionary journey, as recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts.

Bible scholars estimate that Paul wrote this letter around A.D. 53-55. Like many of the New Testament letters authored by Paul, this epistle was written as a corrective message to churches going through challenging times after being founded under his authority, teaching, and tender care. It addressed the first major doctrinal controversy that plagued the Early Church in its formative years—a contention regarding whether Gentile believers had to adhere to requirements of the Mosaic Law, specifically the rite of circumcision. Apparently a group of teachers from Jerusalem had come and undermined Paul's teaching. Their faulty teaching that the Gospel required adherence to the old Law brought great bondage rather than the freedom offered by the Gospel of justification through faith in Christ. Of the epistle's six chapters, the first four and a half primarily concern this issue, and the remaining chapter and a half focus on how the Gospel should be lived out in daily life.

While the main theme of the letter is a defense of the doctrine of justification by faith and warnings against reverting to the requirements of Jewish legalism, Paul first established his authority as an Apostle. Other highlights include a charge to stand firm in Christian liberty, a comparison of the works of the flesh to the fruit of the Spirit, and a warning that what is spiritually planted, either to the flesh or the Spirit, will grow into a crop with eternal consequences.

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SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

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?

Paul expressed amazement that the Galatians were deserting what they had been taught (verse 6). He asserted that "another gospel" was not a gospel at all, but a source of trouble and a perversion or twisting of the truth (verse 7). Finally, he invoked a curse from God upon anyone who preached something other than what the Galatians had received from him in the beginning (verses 8-9). Point out to your group that the word "accursed" is translated from the Greek word anathema*, indicating something God has commanded to be destroyed. This strong language revealed Paul's concern that the Galatians were headed toward apostasy.*

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.

2. Paul stated in Galatians 2:19 that he had died to the Law, meaning that he no longer tried to justify himself by keeping the Law, and thus was free from its dominion. The following verse, Galatians 2:20, introduces one of the Apostle's most significant theological concepts. How would you explain what it means to be "crucified with Christ" and yet continue to live?

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.

Point out to your group that the verb tense of the original Greek word translated "crucified" is very instructive—it denotes not only a decisive crisis experience, but also a continued state of being. While we believe and teach an instantaneous experience of sanctification, the connection with Christ must be maintained and the believer must continue to

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grow 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 freewoman." 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 surpass others. "Seditions" could be translated divisions or dissensions, and "heresies" refers to factions or dissenting groups. "Envyings" indicates ill will or bitterness that would deprive others of good things.

The phrase "and such like" in verse 21 indicates that Paul could have listed many other works of the flesh, but these were enough to make the point that these evils would not be in the lives of those who walked in the Spirit.

7. In contrast to the works of the flesh, verses 22-23 of chapter 5 list the fruit of the Spirit—the evidence that is apparent in the lives of those who are controlled by the Spirit. The first three (love, joy, and peace) are inner characteristics reflecting a person's relationship with God. The next three (longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness) are qualities related to a believer's dealings with others. The final three (faith, meekness, and temperance) are inner attitudes. What are some specific ways these godly attributes can be exemplified in our lives?

This is a broad question, and your students' responses will likely be numerous and varied. Some examples might be that we can demonstrate peace even in the midst of stressful circumstances. We exemplify longsuffering when we are patient in times of suffering or persecution. We can respond in meekness when falsely accused.

The point should be made that while godly actions (or works) will be the natural result of yielding our lives to God, they are something we do. In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit cannot be created by our own efforts; it is produced by a power we do not possess.

8. Paul's dual list of works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:19-24 is bracketed before and after by the clear commands, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (verse 16) and "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (verse 25). How would you describe what it means to walk in the Spirit?

Class discussion of this question should bring out that to "walk in the Spirit" means that as believers we must have hearts that are sensitive to the direction of the Holy Spirit, and exercise our wills to live and act in obedience to Him. Such a walk will lead believers in a way of life that culminates in eternity with Christ.

Follow up by directing your group's attention to the second part of verse 16, which says that one who walks in the Spirit "shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Explain to your class that the word lust *in this passage means "strong desire" and does not necessarily have a moral inference; it merely refers to any human desire. A person who is being led by the Spirit may be tempted, but he does not long for sinful things*

because the Spirit and carnal desires are absolutely opposed to one another.

9. The Apostle closed this epistle by writing the final verses himself, rather than dictating them to a scribe (Galatians 6:11). He noted that those who were insisting upon circumcision were doing so in order to avoid the stigma associated with the Cross of Christ, and "that they may glory in your flesh" (or take pride in their own supposed religious superiority). In contrast, what did the Apostle say that he was determined to glory in, and why do you think he stated this so forcefully at the close of his epistle? Galatians 6:14-15

Paul stated that he was determined to "glory" (to exalt or boast) in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

As your group discusses why the Apostle stated this so forcefully, they should conclude that to Paul, the Cross represented not only the sacrificial death of Christ, but also his own personal deliverance. He could say, "The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world," because the world—which to Paul was his Jewish heritage and pharisaical righteousness rooted in his practice of the Law—had no more power over him. It was dead as far as he was concerned. For that reason, the Cross was a joyous and exultant reminder to the Apostle of his freedom from bondage. Now he only cared about glorying in the Cross of his Lord Jesus Christ.

The Cross and the Blood of Jesus are the only hope of salvation for us as well. There is a stigma to following Jesus in our day, but we need to remember how vitally important it is to cling to the truth of the Gospel.

CONCLUSION

Paul challenged Galatian believers to stand firmly within the "good news" of spiritual freedom purchased by Jesus Christ on Calvary, and not to revert to the old requirements of the Law. He insisted that justification was not obtained by any human effort, but by a simple response of faith to God's unspeakable gift of grace in Christ. That justification is still available today.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Part 1 of Paul's Letter to the Romans

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Romans 1:1 through 7:25

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:17)

BACKGROUND

Paul's Epistle to the Romans is generally accepted to provide one of the most concise summaries of the Gospel message in all of Scripture. At the conclusion of his third missionary journey, while wintering in Corinth around A.D. 57, the Apostle began making plans to travel to Rome. In anticipation of that trip, he wrote this epistle with the intent of introducing himself to Gentile and Jewish believers in that city and presenting his core message: that salvation is not obtained through the Law nor by the most zealous of religious practices. Rather, it is a gift of grace, received by faith in God's promise to forgive sins for the sake of Christ's death on the Cross.

While Paul's other New Testament letters deal primarily with the Church and the challenges facing early believers, his epistle to the Romans focuses more on God and His great plan of redemption. The word *God* occurs over 150 times in the book, or an average of once every forty-six words—a more frequent usage than in any other New Testament book. Other words Paul used often in Romans are *law*, *Christ*, *sin*, *Lord*, and *faith*; all of these subjects were predominant themes in the epistle.

Paul began by asserting that Christ was the God-ordained fulfillment of the rituals of the Jewish faith and the pronouncements of prophets through the ages. After introducing himself to the saints at Rome, he gave a brief summary of his message in verses 16-17 of the first chapter. In successive chapters, the Apostle went on to point to the unrighteousness and guilt of all mankind, emphasizing that both Jew and Gentile were without excuse for their rejection of God because He has revealed Himself to all. He explained that while the Law brought knowledge and understanding of sin, no one could be justified by works—righteousness comes only through faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Using a comparison of Adam and Christ, he established that just as sin was imputed to mankind through one man (Adam), justification is offered to mankind through one man (Jesus Christ).

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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

to the heathen Gentiles. Paul made it clear that the Jews were just as guilty as everyone else, and that God's law applied equally to all.

Ask your class to compare individuals of our day who are moral or religious but not righteous, to the legalistic Jewish people of Paul's day. The point should emerge that both groups cling to an assumption that they have a good standing before God because of external influences or actions. However, a Christian upbringing or the performance of certain commendable activities will never make a person right before God. We can only be justified through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, and that was the message Paul was intent upon communicating in his explanation of the Gospel.

5. Romans 3:23 states that all mankind has sinned. The following two verses contain three words which are key in Paul's explanation of the provision God has made to remedy this sinful condition: "justified," "redemption," and "propitiation." The word "justified" has the sense of being judicially pardoned. "Redemption" implies liberation from captivity through a ransom price paid. "Propitiation" expresses the concept of appeasement or conciliation. Using these definitions, briefly note how each word figures in God's plan of redemption.

Your group should conclude that the word "justified" in God's plan of salvation means to be judicially pardoned by an act of God's free grace and thus declared righteous and absolved from the penalty of sin. "Redemption" alludes to liberation from the captivity of sin because the ransom price was paid by Christ's death on Calvary. "Propitiation" points to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, through which the wrath of God against unrighteousness is appeased.

These are words we hear frequently in Christian circles, but it is valuable to understand their precise meaning in order to fully appreciate the great provision God has made for our eternal salvation.

6. Paul knew that adherents to the Law would point to righteous Abraham as a rebuttal of the teaching of justification through faith, so in chapter 4, Paul presented an analysis of how Abraham was made righteous. The Apostle pointed out that it was not by works (verses 1-8), nor by fulfilling the requirements of the Law (verses 9-12). Based on verses 13-16, what was the basis of Abraham's righteousness? Why is this significant for us?

The basis of Abraham's righteousness was faith. This is significant for us because it assures us that we do not have to attempt to "earn" our salvation by human effort. Faith is not something we do; it is simply trusting in what God has done by His grace. Faith is based upon our relationship with *God, not our performance* for *God.*

7. First-century Christians lived in an atmosphere where persecution and suffering were prevalent, and in order to endure, they needed to have a deep understanding of the benefits that were theirs through justification. What were some of the effects and blessings of justification by faith that Paul listed in Romans 5:1-11?

Class discussion likely will include the following benefits mentioned by Paul:

- *Peace with God – verse 1*
- *Access by faith into God's grace – verse 2*
- *Ability to see the value of tribulations – verses 3-4*
- *Experiencing the love of God – verse 5*
- *Escaping the wrath of God – verse 9*
- *Joy in God – verse 11*

If time permits, you may wish to ask for personal examples that illustrate some of these effects and blessings in the lives of your group members. For example, perhaps someone could tell of a time of tribulation that taught a valuable spiritual lesson, or an instance when God demonstrated His love by giving hope in a seemingly hopeless situation.

8. The word *commendeth* in Romans 5:8 is significant. In this usage it includes the sense of "recommending" or setting forth in such a way as to appeal to the heart. Name several specific ways that God's love has commended itself to you.

Be prepared with an example of your own to start the discussion. Your class should see that the ways in which God's love commends itself to each of us are as unique as we are. Examples could include enlightening one in spiritual darkness, sending conviction on the heart, giving repeated opportunities to one who is resistant, renewing strength in a time of trial, providing for material needs, etc. The reality is, all of the blessings God provides commend His love toward us, and we benefit when we recognize that and thank Him for them.

9. In Romans 6, Paul addressed several foundational doctrines of the Gospel including the nature of sin and its penalty. Based on verses 1-11, how would you summarize Paul's description of what it means to be free from sin?

Your students' summaries will vary, but they should make the point that it is possible to live a victorious life free from all sin (inward and outward)— in fact, that is God's intention for those who come to Him in faith for salvation. Direct your group's attention to the rhetorical question posed in verse 1 which asks, in effect, "Since we are justified, should we continue in sin in order to reveal how great grace is?" Paul's purpose was to reject the false assumption that salvation by grace allows one to continue in sin, so he provided the answer: an emphatic "God forbid."

Depending upon the level of doctrinal understanding of your class, this may be a good opportunity to review the nature of sin. The word "sin" indicates both willful, defiant acts that transgress divine law, and the underlying condition of opposition to divine law from which those sinful acts spring. Sin separates man from God, and is the root of all opposition to and conflict with Him.

While a victorious life without sin is possible, the Bible teaches that the relationship with God can be severed. Individuals who have been born again can choose to go back into sin, just as Adam and Eve, in their righteous state, chose to commit sin. In Romans 6:15, Paul repeated his earlier question with slightly different words, saying, "What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?" Again his answer was, "God forbid," providing clear evidence that it is God's will for every Christian to live without sin.

If time allows, you may wish to delve more deeply into the erroneous teaching of "eternal security." That doctrine is based upon the teachings of John Calvin (1509-1564). In contrast, 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.

A chart that briefly states the five main points of difference between Calvinistic teaching and Arminian teaching is included in the supplementary material at the end of this unit.

10. In Romans 7, the Apostle Paul described himself prior to his Damascus Road experience, and described the conflict that raged within while he was a religious sinner. Though he had genuinely wanted to do right, the power to do so was lacking because it was overcome by a stronger prevailing force: the nature of sin. In verses 14-25, Paul wrote of the awful failure of his former efforts to break free from sin's dominion. While the Law had stirred up his conscience, it could not empower the obedience which it enjoined. Still, he recognized the value of the Law. What words did he use to describe the Law in verses 12 and 14? In spite of those words, what did the Law fail to do?

Paul stated that the Law was "holy," "just," "good" (verse 12) and "spiritual" (verse 14) because it was God's Law. However, the Law could not enable him to overcome the tyranny of his sinful nature.

Expand this point by reviewing the function of the Law, as outlined by Paul in verses 8-13, which was to reveal sin. In verse 9, Paul appears to be speaking of his own experience as a child prior to having any real understanding of what sin was. However, in time the child who once lived without condemnation

was confronted by the Law and became aware of his own sinful behavior and its moral implications; Paul expressed this by saying that he "died" a spiritual death.

In order to end your class session on a positive note, explain that while the lesson text ends with Paul's troubled question, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (verse 24), the Apostle goes on in the next chapter to describe victory that is possible for those "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

CONCLUSION

In this first section of Paul's epistle to believers at Rome, the Apostle asserted that all individuals are born in sin, and explained that the Law was not designed to make man righteous but to reveal man's unrighteousness. He went on to explain that salvation and a righteous standing before God is not obtained through works, but through faith in Jesus Christ.

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DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Part 2 of Paul's Letter to the Romans

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Romans 8:1 through 11:36

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:1)

BACKGROUND

After describing in chapter 7 the futility of trying to live righteously while still in bondage to sin, in chapter 8 Paul went on to describe victory over the former controlling force. He taught that while forgiveness for committed sin is obtained at justification, the ultimate provision for man's sinfulness is the experience of entire sanctification, which deals with the sin nature. When the Apostle asserted in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation . . . ," he was looking at the totality of sin: both committed sins and the carnal nature of sin with which all humanity is born. The phrase "no condemnation" refers to more than mere judicial acquittal; it also indicates deliverance from the condition described in Romans 7:7-25 (the sinful disposition and inclination of the flesh). Once freed from the dominion of sin, the sanctified believer is enabled by the Spirit to live in the righteousness provided by God.

The Apostle seemingly was concerned his readers might conclude that God's plan of justification apart from the Law meant that God had rejected the Jews. Perhaps for that reason, in chapter 9, he began a three-chapter segment explaining Israel's role in God's plan, and how God's righteousness is revealed and illustrated by Israel's history.

Chapter 9 deals with election and divine sovereignty, and emphasizes that the promises of God are obtained by faith, not bloodline. Paul illustrated God's sovereignty by using the patriarch Abraham as an example, pointing out that God ordained that the Messianic line would come through Isaac, the son of promise, rather than through Abraham's eldest son, Ishmael, who was the son of the bondwoman, Hagar. The Apostle made it clear that the true children of God were the children of promise (those who believed in the God of Abraham), rather than the children of the flesh (those who are merely Abraham's biological descendants).

The theme of chapter 10 is rejection and human responsibility. In this portion of text, Paul used Israel's rejection of Christ as an example, explaining

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that while Israel had the opportunity to respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they had refused it. He asserted that salvation is offered to all, both Jew and Gentile, and each person is individually responsible for the choice he or she makes. Though Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, his love and concern for his Jewish kinsmen is evident throughout this passage.

In chapter 11, the final segment of Paul's three-chapter explanation of Israel's role in God's plan, the Apostle concluded that after the Jew's rejection of God, the Gospel message was extended to the Gentiles. Paul explained that God's purpose in turning away from Israel was a desire to provoke Israel to jealousy as the Gentiles embraced what the Jews had refused. Then the Apostle looked ahead to the day of restoration when Israel would once again be the people of God, this time through faith in the shed Blood of Jesus Christ.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. In Romans 8, the Apostle focused on deliverance from sin and the sinful disposition and inclination of the flesh, sometimes referred to as the "sin nature" or the "carnal nature." What does this deliverance from the sin nature—the experience of entire sanctification—accomplish in our lives?

Your class will likely offer a variety of responses centering on the fact that the cleansing act of entire sanctification provides restoration of the pure nature humanity enjoyed before the fall. Thoughts brought out may include that sanctification results in unity with God and other sanctified believers. It produces a perfect heart—a state where a person loves the Lord with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and where thoughts, desires, and actions are motivated by devotion to God. The sanctified heart is continually seeking after God and His will. Sanctified people desire to cultivate purity in spirit, soul, and body, and to avoid anything that would contaminate any part of their beings.

Group discussion should include the fact that we are not made mentally, physically, or emotionally perfect as a result of sanctification: we are made morally perfect. We are still subject to human frailties, and will continue to face the mental, physical, and emotional limitations that are a result of the fall. While the experience of sanctification is instantaneous, we must continue to grow in spiritual maturity and Christlikeness.

It will also be important to make sure your class understands that sanctification does not eliminate the possibility of spiritual failure. Sanctified people can still choose to overrule what they know is right and fall back into sin, but that certainly is not necessary. God has provided the means for us to live victoriously.

2. In Romans 8:28, Paul asserted that God works all things together for good for those who love Him. How

NOTES

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.

7. In Romans 10:3, Paul referenced the failure of the Jews to grasp the true meaning of information available to them in the Scriptures they studied so zealously. Paul's declaration that they endeavored to "establish their own righteousness" indicated the Jews' self-righteous pride in their own efforts. They were seeking to live up to the commandments of the Law only to prove their own worthiness. Paul went on in the next verse to assert that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." What do you think he meant by that statement?

Your class should conclude that Jesus Christ was "the end of the law" because He fulfilled its purpose and goal by His sacrificial death for mankind. The Law "ends" because obedience to it is no longer the basis for a relationship with God.

You could expand your class discussion of this question by asking your group what it means to believe. They should conclude true belief is more than acknowledging the fact that Jesus Christ died, or even that He died to provide redemption for all people everywhere. There must be a deeply personal realization that Jesus Christ died for us as individuals, and then a trust and reliance on the fact that His sacrifice avails for our sins, to the point of responding in obedience to His Word. To illustrate this, use a chair as an example. We can look at a chair and believe it is a chair. We can believe it was made of materials strong enough to support our weight. We can believe it was assembled correctly. But true *belief is when we sit in the chair and actually rely on the chair to hold our weight off the ground.*

8. In Romans 11:33-36, Paul concluded his synopsis of Israel's role in God's plan with a spontaneous outpouring of praise to God. Who could have conceived of the whole scenario with Israel and the Gentiles as God had done? Paul realized that God's ways are past finding out, and that His wisdom and knowledge were beyond him. In reference to Paul's thought expressed in verse 36, in what way are all things "of" God, "through God," and "to" God when it comes to our salvation?

All things are "of God" because He originated the plan of salvation. It was not our idea. We did not say, "I have sinned against God and need to work out a way to come back to Him." In our spiritual darkness, we did not see our need of a way back, and even if we did, we are not wise enough to come up with how that could be accomplished. The plan of salvation is all "of" Him.

All things are "through God" because we could never have freed ourselves from the prison of sin and carnality. It could only happen through the death of

Jesus on our behalf—it is through Him that we obtain salvation.

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.

DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Part 3 of Paul's Letter to the Romans

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Romans 12:1 through 16:27

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12:1-2)

BACKGROUND

Having concluded his discourses concerning the Gospel (chapters 1-8) and God's dealings with the nation of Israel (chapters 9-11), at this point in his epistle Paul transitioned to practical application. As he instructed his readers regarding the basics of Christian behavior, his primary emphasis was how the transformed life was to be exemplified both in secular society and within the body of believers.

In chapter 12, the Apostle began this section by pointing to the necessity for entire consecration, admonishing the Roman believers to give themselves to Christ as living sacrifices. They were to resist conformity to the world and embrace the transformation that comes through Jesus Christ. He went on in this chapter to describe how Christian love should be demonstrated among believers (verses 3-13), and then toward one's enemies (verses 14-21).

In chapter 13, Paul dealt with the Christians' responsibilities as citizens and outlined principles related to submitting to authority. Since it is God who grants the power held by governmental rulers, he encouraged the Roman Christians to submit to "the powers that be." Specifically, this submission was to manifest itself through the paying of taxes and demonstrating respect for those in authority.

Chapters 14 and 15 focus on the relationship between weak and strong believers. The words "weak" and "strong" found in this passage represent two tendencies of the spiritual mind: one that is exceedingly hyper-sensitive, and the other that is more liberal. While liberty in the Gospel was one of Paul's themes, the limits of liberty and the importance of not causing a weak brother to violate his conscience is the emphasis of the last half of chapter 14, where Paul cautioned against putting a stumbling block in another brother's way. Seemingly harmless behaviors could damage others whose consciences were particularly sensitive, so

OPENER

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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Point out to your group that Paul did not instruct believers to present their abilities, money, time, recreational pursuits, families, or any other particular aspect of their lives. He simply instructed them to put their whole being at God's disposal. When a person does that, God will guide regarding the specifics for that individual.

2. Paul went on in Romans 12:2 to state that believers were not to be "conformed" to the world, but rather "transformed." The Greek word translated *conformed* literally means "to be molded or stamped according to a pattern." Withstanding pressure to conform will take effort. What are some ways we can actively resist being "molded" or "stamped" with the characteristics and philosophies of the world?

Your class will likely come up with a number of specific methods of resistance. These might include some of the following:

- *Choosing friends from those of like faith rather than the ungodly.*
- *Refusing to follow the example of unbelievers in habits, attitudes, recreational pursuits, associations, and attire that are unbecoming to a follower of Christ.*
- *Guarding against anything that would dim our vision for Christ.*
- *Setting aside activities that distract us from earnestly seeking Him or cause us to be consumed with temporal concerns.*

Lead your class to conclude that God wants a clear line of demarcation between His children and the world. The world's philosophies and activities are usually selfish and often corrupt. For that reason, much of the world must be "off limits" to those who want to maintain purity and holiness before God.

Make sure your class understands that a refusal to conform to the world must go deeper than outward actions. We are to be transformed by the "renewing of our minds." A person could meticulously avoid worldly behaviors and still be proud, covetous, selfish, stubborn, arrogant, or have a whole range of other characteristics or mindsets that are displeasing to God. Only when the power of God renews and redirects our minds can we be truly transformed.

3. In verses 9-21 of chapter 12, Paul gave a series of brief injunctions that emphasized how an inward transformation was to be evidenced in love for the brethren. Review the list of instructions in these verses. Which directive stands out to you as being particularly applicable to the circumstances of your life, and how might you put the principle into action?

This question is designed to help the students apply these principles to their personal situations. Since they may initially be hesitant to share their responses, it may be helpful to begin the discussion

by providing a handout or compiling a list of the injunctions in these verses. The Roman believers were exhorted to:

- *Extend love without pretense; hate evil and uphold good (verse 9)*
- *Be loving toward their brethren in Christ (verse 10)*
- *Be productive in performance of duties (verse 11)*
- *Maintain a spirit of rejoicing, and be patient and prayerful even in trouble (verse 12)*
- *Give to saints in need and be hospitable (verse 13)*
- *Bless their enemies (verse 14)*
- *Share each other's joys and sorrows (verse 15)*
- *Be humble toward all and not conceited (verse 16)*
- *Refrain from retaliating, and be honest (verse 17)*
- *Live in peace with others (verse 18)*
- *Leave retribution or punishment to God (verse 19)*
- *Overcome evil by responding with good (verse 20-21)*

Once your list is complete, have your students offer their thoughts about how these principles could be put into action. If your group is reluctant to share personal experiences, you may need to encourage participation by sharing an example from your own life. Alternatively, the discussion could be set up on a hypothetical basis. For example, you might ask: How might verse 17 be helpful in diffusing a tense relationship with a co-worker?

Conclude your discussion of this question by emphasizing that following these guidelines will certainly give us a good framework for living peaceably with all, both inside and outside the church.

4. In Romans 13:8, Paul stated that followers of Christ have an obligation of love to others, "for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." He repeated the same thought in verse 10. Why do you think the Apostle regarded love as a "fulfillment" of the Law?

Class discussion should bring out that when we discharge our duty of love properly, doing so encompasses all duties or responsibilities toward others. No other law is needed because genuine love includes all the obligations of the Law.

5. In chapter 14, Paul addressed interactions between strong and weak (or spiritually immature) believers. He admonished strong Christians to be cautious and protective in their dealings with the weak, not to pass

judgment on a weaker believer's perspective, and to refrain from contending with him about insignificant details. In verses 2-3, what example did Paul use to make his point clear?

Paul used the example of contrasting opinions regarding the eating of certain meats. Some of the Roman believers (perhaps those who had been delivered from idolatry) apparently felt it was wrong to eat meat that had been offered to idols. Since idols were merely inanimate objects, Paul knew that there was no spiritual reason for believers to abstain from eating this meat. However, he instructed individuals who supported either position not to disparage those with an opposing perspective.

The principle Paul was presenting is still vital for believers in our day. While we enjoy liberty in the Gospel, we must always be mindful of how our actions will affect others. We should take care to avoid any actions that might cause someone to stumble in his walk with God by imitating a behavior that his own conscience would condemn.

6. Romans 15:13 is a brief prayer that Paul prayed for the Roman believers, expressing his desire that they might "abound in hope." Studies show that a common factor among those who are depressed and discouraged is that they lack hope. What does Paul identify as the source of hope and how do we obtain it?

By referencing "the God of hope," Paul was pointing to God as the Source. The foundation for this hope is to be filled with joy and peace, and we obtain it by believing in the living God who acts and intervenes in human life, and who can be trusted to keep His promises.

To amplify this topic, ask your class how the hope of unbelievers differs from that of Christians. Class discussion should bring out that most people understand hope *as being wishful thinking, as in, "I hope something will happen." The dictionary definition of* hope *is "a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen." This is not what the Bible means by hope. The Christian's hope is confident expectation concerning the future because it is based on God's promises, character, and faithfulness.*

7. As Paul explained his future travel plans, he requested the prayers of the saints in Rome. What is implied by the fact that he requested they "strive" in their prayers to God for him? Romans 15:30-32

Paul felt that striving would be necessary because he expected resistance from the enemy. Point out to your class that fervent prayer takes effort. In fact, the Greek word translated "strive" denotes struggling, contending, and even agonizing. It alludes to the strong effort such as that expended by wrestlers in the Greek games or by soldiers in a military conflict. It is evident that Paul was not enjoining a merely

cursory mention of him before God, but the intense travail of a person who is in desperate earnest.

As a visual illustration of the need to persevere in prayer, you could bring a package with many knots tied around it. Ask your group: If there were a $100 bill inside, would they expend the effort needed to untie the knots? What if the knots were tight? The point is, if we want something badly enough, we will persist.

It may be helpful to discuss hindrances that may arise when we attempt to devote time to pray, and strategies for overcoming the attempts of our spiritual enemy to derail our efforts.

8. Paul closed his epistle in chapter 16 by sending greetings to a lengthy list of individuals (verses 1-16). His personal comments went to both men and women, Romans and Greeks, prisoners and prominent citizens, slaves and free. Some of these people are mentioned elsewhere in Scripture; others are referred to only here. In verses 21-23, a number of fellow workers with Paul joined him in extending greetings to the saints in Rome. What does this wide-ranging exchange of greetings reveal about the nature of the fellowship of believers?

Your group should conclude that the variety of ethnic backgrounds and status in society are evidence of the uniting influence of the Gospel—a beautiful example of what Christianity is and does in crossing cultural, social, and economic lines.

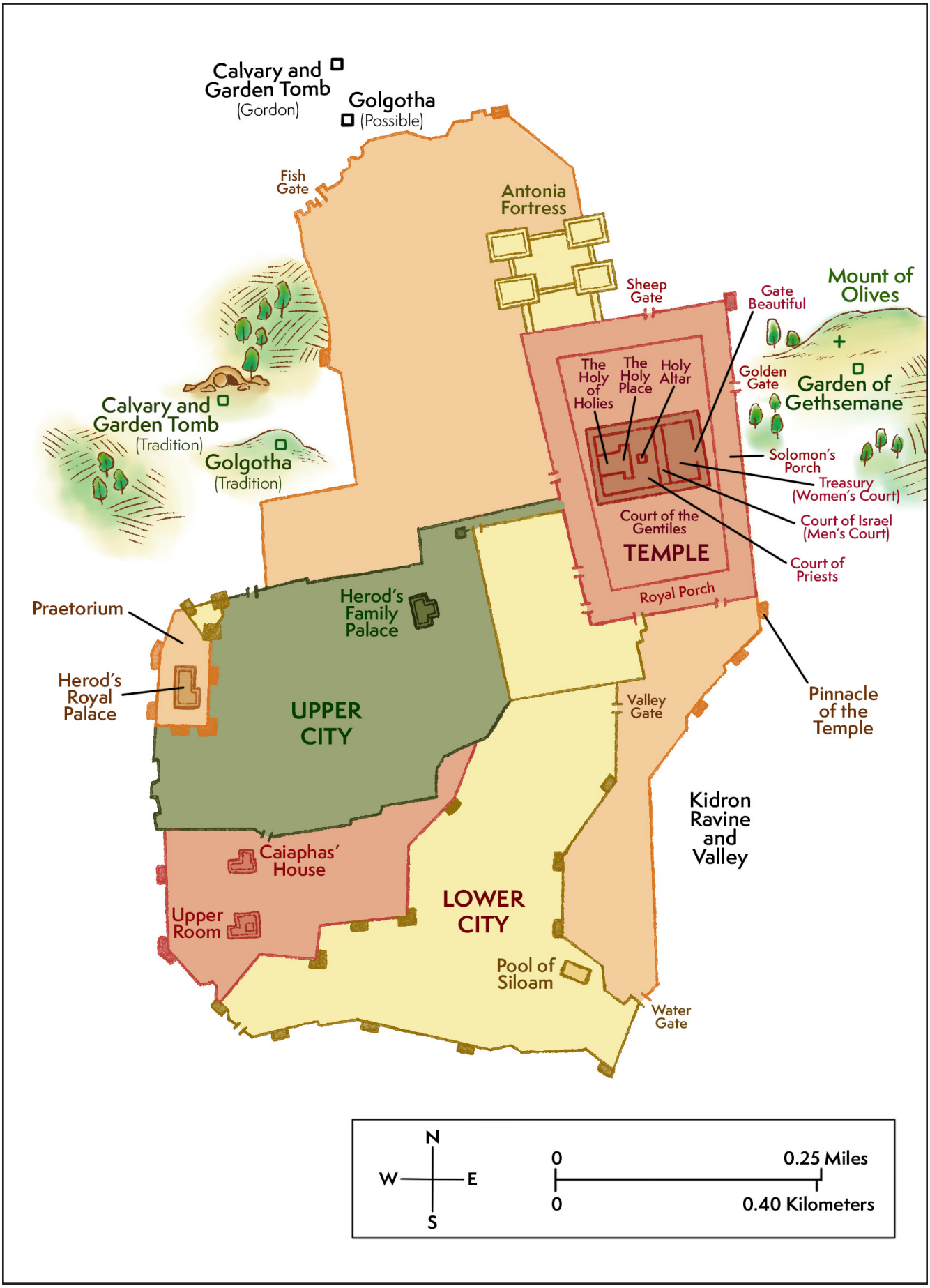
Of the twenty-four names Paul mentioned, six were women, and thirteen occur in inscriptions or documents connected with the emperor's palace in Rome. According to Philippians 4:22, there were Christians among Caesar's household, so some of these individuals may have been among the servants who worked for Caesar.

Throughout this chapter, Paul frequently characterized individuals with a single comment. For example, in verse 23 he observed that Gaius was his host (a man of hospitality), and that Quartus was the man with a brotherly heart. It would be beneficial for all of us to consider: If people were to sum me up in one sentence, what would that sentence be?

CONCLUSION

Paul's epistle presented the Gospel to Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome, but through the ages his words have encouraged Christians of all backgrounds to faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ.

New Testament Jerusalem



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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. (Mark 11:1-11)

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 thirty 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. (Matthew 26:36-46)
- Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss. (Matthew 26:47-50)
- Jesus is arrested and taken to Caiaphas. (Matthew 26:57)

FRIDAY

- Early in the morning, Jesus endures a Jewish trial. (Matthew 26:59-68)
- Before daybreak, Peter denies Jesus three times. (Matthew 26:58, 69-75)
- Jesus stands before Pontius Pilate, is sent to Herod, and is sent back to Pilate. (Matthew 27:1-2 • Luke 23:6-11)
- Soldiers crown Jesus with thorns and mock Him. (Matthew 27:29-31)
- Jesus is crucified at 9:00 a.m. (Mark 15:25)
- There is darkness from noon to 3:00 p.m. (Matthew 27:45)
- The veil in the Temple is torn from top to bottom. (Matthew 27:51)
- Jesus' body is buried in a borrowed tomb. (Matthew 27:57-60)

SATURDAY

Jesus' body remains in the tomb. (Matthew 27:62-66)

EASTER SUNDAY[1]

- 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 sepulchre. (Matthew 28:1 • Mark 16:1 • Luke 23:55-24:1 • John 20:1)
- 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 sepulchre 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 sepulchre, find it empty, and leave. (Luke 24:12 • John 20:2-10)
- Mary Magdalene, having followed Peter and John to the sepulchre, 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 24:12-36)

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

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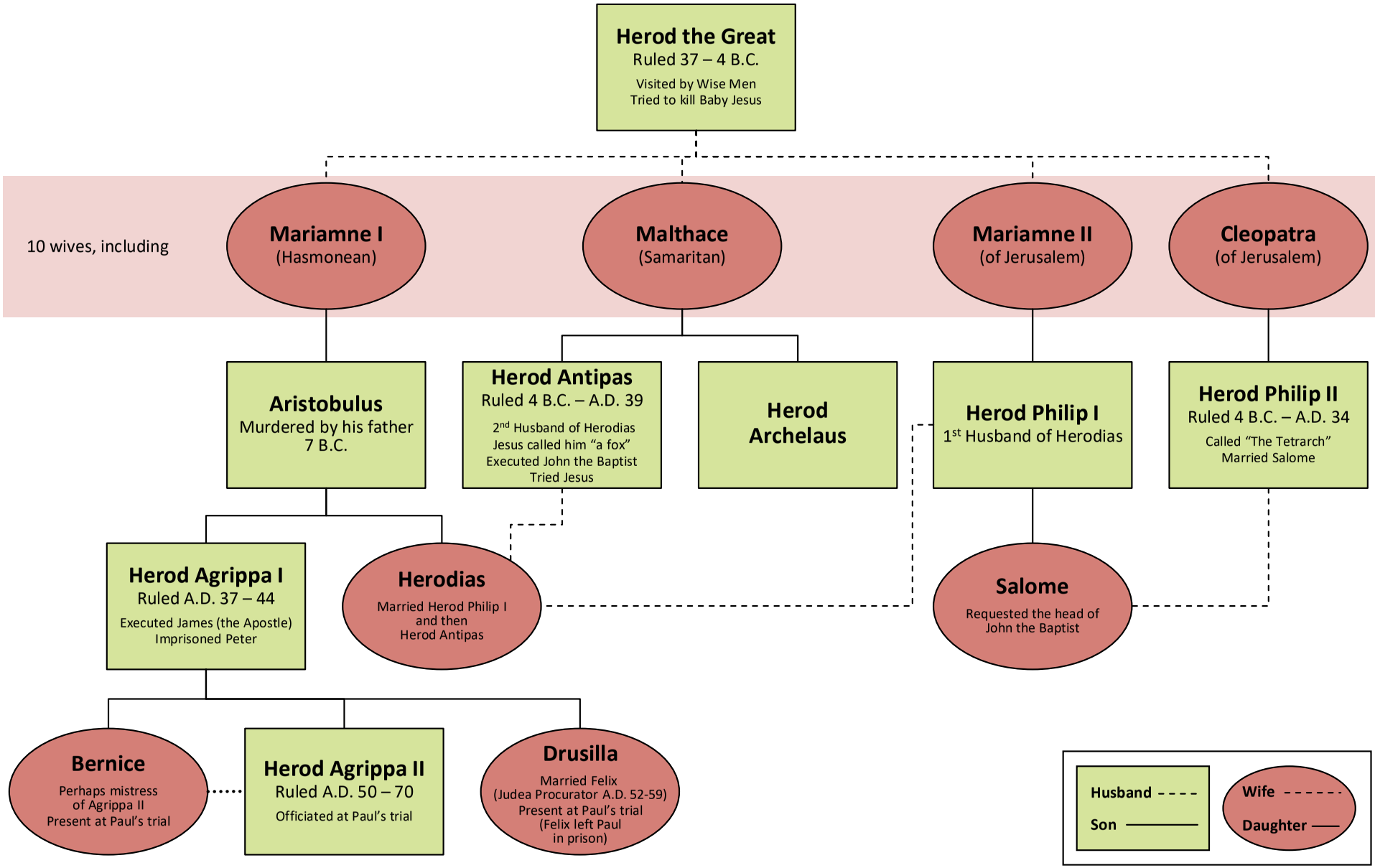
Paul's First Missionary Journey

Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Paul's Journey to Rome

The Family of Herod the Great



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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.

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