

Adult

Sabbath School Lessons

Christ and His Growing Church



JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER 1987

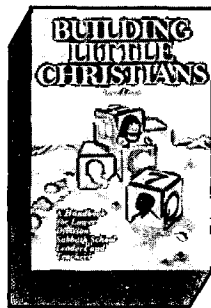
BUILDING LITTLE CHRISTIANS

This complete handbook for children's divisions will tell you everything you need to know to conduct successful Sabbath school programs and lesson studies. Ideas on decorating the Sabbath school room, filing and maintaining supplies, finger plays, discipline, nature. Plus diagrams, patterns, program outlines, information on songs, storytelling, visual aids, and much more.

Author Alice Lowe has had years of experience with small children, and this invaluable how-to manual covers everything from how to enroll a new baby in cradle roll to the proper slant for a flannel board. \$12.95.

At your Adventist Book Center.

The Complete
Handbook
for Children's
Divisions



12

Contents

1. Truth at All Costs
2. The Spirit Leads On
3. Breaching the Wall of Separation
4. Light to the Gentiles
5. The Barriers Crumble
6. Paul Leads the Advance
7. The Gospel Crisscrosses the Empire
8. The Road to Jerusalem
9. A Prisoner for Christ
10. In Defense of Faith
11. Witness and Deliverance
12. Paul in Rome
13. Seeking to Save the Lost

**Editorial Offices: 6840 Eastern Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20012**

Lesson Author: Walter R. L. Scragg

Editor: Leo R. Van Dolson

Assistant Editor: Charlotte Ishkanian

Pacific Press Editor: Lincoln Steed

Circulation Manager: Bob Kyte

Art and Design: Pacific Press

The Adult Sabbath School Lessons are prepared by the Department of Church Ministries of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the lessons is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Lesson Committee, the members of which serve as consulting editors. The published lesson quarterly reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author.

Scripture references other than from the King James Version quoted by permission in this quarterly are as follows:

TLB. From *The Living Bible, Paraphrased*. Copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton. Used by permission.

NASB. From *The New American Standard Bible*, copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1973, 1975. Used by permission.

NEB. From *The New English Bible*, copyright © by the Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1961, 1970. Used by permission.

RSV. From the *Revised Standard Version*, copyright 1946, 1952, and © 1971, 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and used by permission.

Adult Sabbath School Lessons (standard edition). (USPS 702-480). Published quarterly by Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1350 North Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687, U.S.A. One year subscription in U.S.A., \$4.10; single copy, \$1.25. One year subscription to countries outside U.S.A., \$5.85; single copy, \$1.65. All prices at U.S.A. exchange. Second-class postage paid at Nampa, ID. When a change of address is desired, please send both old and new addresses.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Adult Sabbath School Lessons (standard edition), P. O. Box 7000, Boise, ID 83707.

Editions in Braille available. See p. 97. Easy English Edition Available.

Copyright © 1987 by Pacific Press Publishing Association

Adult Sabbath School Lessons (USPS 702-480)/No. 369 / July-September 1987



Why Do Christians Give Offerings?

- To ensure God's continued protection?
- Because everyone is expected to give?
- To appease one's conscience?
- To express love and gratitude to God?
- To hasten the work of God in the earth?

No Other Way

"The Lord does not need our offerings. We cannot enrich Him by our gifts. Says the psalmist, "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." Yet God permits us to show our appreciation of his mercies by self-sacrificing efforts to extend the same to others. This is the only way in which it is possible for us to manifest our gratitude and love to God. He has provided no other way"

(Review and Herald, Dec. 6, 1887).

PERSONAL GIVING PLAN	
Tithe	10%
Church budget	6%
Conference budget	2%
World Budget	2%

Express your gratitude this quarter through systematic planned giving.



Meet the Author

**Of
This Quarter's
Lessons**

Walter R. L. Scragg was born and educated in Australia. He spent ten years in evangelism before working with the "Voice of Prophecy" and later, "Faith for Today." He served as radio and television director in Australia and at the General Conference.

In 1975 he was elected president of the Northern Europe-West Africa Division, then was called home to hold the same position for the South Pacific Division.

He has written six books, including three for juniors, and numerous magazine articles. He has authored three Bible correspondence courses and four sets of Sabbath School lessons. He and his wife, Betty, have three adult children. His hobbies include gardening, cooking and writing.

Watch at your local Adventist Book Center for the supplementary book. It is written by W. R. L. Scragg and is being published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Introduction to Acts 6-28

Christ and His Growing Church

The book of Acts recounts the thrilling story of the triumphant advance of the Christian movement in the pagan world of the first century A.D. The gospel commission, "Go ye into all the world" (Mark 16:15), demanded imagination, large Spirit-directed plans, and continual readiness to meet new situations and ideas.

As we continue our study of Acts we will learn much from this powerful account of the Holy Spirit at work in the early church, including the following lessons:

1. The church could not escape into an other-worldly state of mind. It had to become involved in witnessing to the world in which it found itself.
2. The church must organize itself and respect its own decisions made in accordance with the Word of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
3. Peter, and later Paul, offered models in preaching, practice, and witness that the church must follow if it is to succeed.
4. While future judgment of the ungodly was certain, the church had to wrestle with injustices and learn to survive such disasters as the beheading of James, the stoning of Stephen, and the imprisonment of Paul.

To heed the command "Occupy till I come" meant adjusting to the passage of time, living as a part of society, both affecting it and being affected by it, and alerting the dying world that eternal life is available in Jesus.

The book that teaches these lessons holds great significance to Seventh-day Adventists who today surely will identify with the issues faced in Luke's day.

Acts: The Spread of the Gospel

Acts 1-7 To Jerusalem	Acts 8-12 To Judea and Samaria	Acts 13-28 To the Uttermost Part
The ascension; Pentecost; The Jerusalem church	The church persecuted and extended	Paul's three missionary journeys, trial, and imprisonment

Truth at All Costs

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 6:1 through 8:3.



MEMORY TEXT: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The church may expect guidance from the Spirit—both in dealing with internal situations and in meeting opposition from without—as it remains fearlessly devoted to its mission.

Overview: Acts 6:1 — 8:3			
6:1-15	7:1-29	7:30-50	7:51—8:3
The Seven	Stephen's Defense		Martyrdom and Persecution
The seven chosen; Stephen accused	Abraham to Moses	Israel's Apostasies	Deaf to the truth; Stephen stoned; The church scattered for witness
	Abraham's faith; Joseph in prison; Moses forced to flee Egypt	Moses receives the law; Moses rejected; The sanctuary	

INTRODUCTION: The first glimpse we have of the Christian community is of an organized people seeking to replace Judas. Immediately we see Peter chairing a meeting.

Organization depended on:

1. A unity of purpose and mission in order to carry the witness of Jesus according to His command.
2. A clear picture of the issues needing resolution and of the best method to solve them.
3. A willingness to accept decisions made by the body.

In the book of Acts we learn about several issues that required concerted, organized action. In each case the church met the challenge. The church replaced Judas, appointed the seven, resolved the problem of Peter's eating with Gentiles, and gave instruction to the Gentile Christians concerning their relationship to church practices. The church discussed, sought and found consensus, then acted.

The early church developed a strong organization (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:1-11) and could make decisions for the body (Acts 15:23, 24). It could send

representatives abroad (verse 30) and organize an offering for the saints in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17; 1 Cor. 16:1). The church had deacons (Acts 6:5; see 1 Tim. 3:10-13), elders (Acts 11:30; see James 5:14), apostles (Acts 15:2; see Romans 16:7), and prophets (Acts 21:10; see 1 Cor. 12:28).

This organization helped the church spread throughout the Roman Empire. The church still was a people-centered family, but it also was able to solve problems, to plan, and to implement those plans. Paul called the church the “body of Christ” (Eph. 1:22, 23), a “building fitly framed together” (2:20-23), perceiving in it the structure through which God would save all who called on Him.



I. THE DEACONS (Acts 6:1-15).

Ellen White speaks of “the zeal and power shown by the seven deacons” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 90), although Acts 6 itself does not call them deacons. The seven were appointed to meet a specific humanitarian need—the need to care for the widows, the orphans, and the poor. But the deacons rapidly developed a ministry paralleling that of the apostles. Thus God can and does bless those whose talents are dedicated completely to Him and to the service of His church.

1. The Seven Chosen (Acts 6:1-7).

The Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire represented a large percentage of all Jews. Greek-speaking Jews apparently had a special affection for the temple, which probably explains in part why the disciples made it a center for evangelism and worship.

ANALYZE: Examine the steps the church took in solving its first major internal dissension:

1. Recognizing the problem (Acts 6:1, 2).
2. Proposing a solution (verses 3, 4).
3. Making a decision (verses 5, 6).

God blessed the church as it moved carefully, democratically, and compassionately. When the Twelve called the believers together, they requested their cooperation in delegating authority to others.

What qualifications should the church look for in choosing leadership? Acts 6:3; 11:24; compare Luke 1:6.

“He who holds forth the word of life is not to allow too many burdens to be placed upon him. He must take time to study the word and to examine self. If he closely searches his own heart, and gives himself to the Lord, he will better understand how to grasp the hidden things of God.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 252.

REVIEW the way in which Luke gives brief reports on the progress of the church’s assigned mission. What purpose would he have in doing this? Acts 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31.

Two significant events are included in this section of Acts. First, the church elected Nicolas, a convert to Judaism, as one of the seven. At that point in the progress of Judaism, the conversion of Gentiles to Judaism occurred fairly frequently. Nicolas was the first Gentile to be mentioned in Acts as having accepted the Christian faith. He came into the faith via Judaism. Second, Luke affirms that many priests joined the movement (Acts 6:7). Probably the teaching that Jesus had suffered and died as the Lamb of God and the fact that the veil of the temple was rent at the moment of His death influenced those priests who responded to accept Christianity.

2. Stephen Accused (Acts 6:8-15).

What methods may the church use in defending itself against the false accusations of others? What do you find most effective in your own society? Acts 6:9, 10; 4:13.

In what sense was the evidence the witnesses gave against Stephen false? Acts 6:11-14; Matt. 26:59-61; John 2:19-21.

The remarkable character of Stephen (Acts 6:5, 8, 10) became evident as he appeared before the Council. The man who would shortly elaborate the history of Moses appeared to the Council surrounded by a heavenly aura similar to that which once was seen on Moses' face (Acts 6:15).



II. STEPHEN'S SERMON — Abraham to Moses (Acts 7:1-29).

Stephen's speech had three key elements:

1. God had sent deliverers to Israel in times of crisis, but they had been rejected, along with the teaching or law that God gave.
2. Despite having the sanctuary in the wilderness and, later, the temple in Jerusalem, Israel had slipped into idolatry.
3. He was implying that Jesus was connected with all of Jewish history.

Stephen's sermon-history offered two views of Israel. The first view is of the Israel through whom God brought the message of salvation for generation after generation. The second view of Israel is that of people athirst for the prophets' blood.

1. Abraham's Faith (Acts 7:1-8).

Stephen began with a survey of history that the Jews knew well. In order to gain a better understanding of this sermon, note the emphases Stephen gives and some of the things he omits.

How should those who receive God's call regard their present situation? Acts 7:4-7; Gal. 3:16-18.

The Israelites had come into possession of Canaan only because God had

given it to them. Before it finally became theirs, God would have to deliver them from slavery in Egypt. The themes of deliverance and worship in the temple occur in verse 7 and recur throughout the speech.

What replaces the “covenant of circumcision” in the life of the Christian? Acts 7:8; Gal. 5:6; Col. 2:11, 12.

ILLUMINATION: “Learned Jews from the surrounding countries were summoned for the purpose of refuting the arguments of the prisoner. Saul of Tarsus was present, and took a leading part against Stephen. He brought the weight of eloquence and the logic of the rabbis to bear upon the case, to convince the people that Stephen was preaching delusive and dangerous doctrines”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 98.

2. Joseph in Egypt (Acts 7:9-18).

What contrasting attitudes on the parts of Joseph and his brothers show Christians how they should relate to misunderstanding and misrepresentation? Acts 7:9, 14-16; Isa. 53:3, 5.

“This is the first step in Stephen’s argument that the messengers of God have always been opposed by those who were for a given time representatives of the Hebrew nation.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 198.

What was Stephen’s purpose in recounting, in verses 10 through 15, the story of the famine in Egypt and of Jacob’s family moving there?

Stephen was “seeking to show that the very ones who afflicted Joseph came to be dependent upon the bounty resulting from his wisdom. And so the Jews of Stephen’s day must needs turn for their spiritual sustenance to Jesus Christ, whom they have afflicted.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 198.



3. Moses Forced to Flee Egypt (Acts 7:19-29).

Behind Stephen’s survey lay the subtle accusation that the way Joseph and Moses had been treated were examples of the way the Jews treated their deliverers.

“Look at yourselves,” Stephen says. “Can’t you see that you are following precisely the same foolish path as your ancestors?”

How may leadership suffer when jealousy and self-interest dominate the thinking of the people? Acts 7:9, 25-28.

Stephen implied that, both in the case of Joseph and in the case of Moses, attitudes toward their leadership actually delayed deliverance. The opportunity lost when Moses’ position and abilities were rejected did not recur until

a further 40 years of slavery and hardship had passed. Note the different ways in which a patriarchal incident may be interpreted.

III. ISRAEL'S APOSTASIES (ACTS 7:30-50).

How did God show that His presence did not depend on sanctuary or temple? Acts 7:30. (See also verses 2, 10.)

Stephen invoked the event that Jews may have long regarded as critical to their relationship with God—the time when God appeared to Moses and declared His name (Ex. 3:6-15). Citing this event, Stephen posed the question in the minds of his hearers, What kind of people are we when we will not even listen to Moses to whom God spoke His sacred and hitherto hidden name?

1. Moses Receives the Law (Acts 7:35-38).

What parallel existed between Moses and Jesus Christ? Acts 7:35-38.

In reviewing the history of Moses, Stephen made the following points:

1. Like Jesus, he came as liberator (Acts 7:35; Luke 4:18).
2. Like Jesus, he performed miracles (Acts 7:36; Luke 6:18, 19).
3. He spoke of a coming prophet “like unto me”—a reference to the Messiah with which his audience agreed (Acts 7:37; 3:22).
4. Like Jesus, he conveyed truth from God to people (verse 38).

In verses 36 and 38 Stephen proposes what has become a common theme of many Christian authors: the “church in the wilderness” period of Israel’s history sets forth the ideal relationship between God and His people. The Old Testament prophets thought likewise (Jer. 2:2, 3; Hos. 11:1-4; Amos 2:9, 10). John the Revelator saw a vision that placed the church in the wilderness (Rev. 12:14-17).

2. Moses Rejected (Acts 7:39-50).

The first 38 verses would meet with agreement on the part of Stephen’s audience as he established God’s providence and protection on behalf of Israel, but they would have been troubled by his selection of events and his interpretation of them. Stephen created a view of a specially chosen and favored people. Now he contrasted with this their idolatry and rebellion as an astounding, almost unbelievable act of ingratitude and treachery.

What false principles lie at the heart of human rebellion against God? Acts 7:41, 49, 52, 53.

Where may we, like Israel, look to understand God and His plan of salvation? Acts 7:44; Rev. 15:5.

SEARCH AND LEARN: In giving the name “witness” or “testimony” to the tabernacle what important feature of the wilderness sanctuary came into focus? (Ex. 16:34). To which elements of the sanctuary did it give its name? (Ex. 26:33, 34; 31:18; Lev. 24:3; Num. 9:15)?

The tent was a witness to the invisible God among His people. No tent, not even if it contained the ark of the testimony, could represent God adequately. But His character, His holy name, and His Sabbath not only were known but also testified of Him.

John followed similar reasoning when he gave the same name to the heavenly sanctuary (Rev. 15:5). John’s reference follows directly after the declaration of the character of God (verses 2, 3) and precedes the punishment of the disobedient with the seven plagues (verses 7, 8).

What danger exists when we glory in the work of our own hands, however praiseworthy? Acts 7:47-50; Dan. 4:30, 31.

Stephen contrasted the relatively humble wilderness tent with the glorious temple of Solomon (Acts 7:46, 47). He did not condemn the building of the temple but rather the conclusion drawn—that God was confined to the temple of Solomon and, by implication, to the temple of Herod.



IV. MARTYRDOM AND PERSECUTION (Acts 7:51-60; 8:1-3).

When Stephen “connected Christ with the prophecies and spoke as he did of the temple, the priest, pretending to be horror-stricken, rent his robe. To Stephen this act was a signal that his voice would soon be silenced forever.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 100. Abruptly concluding his sermon, Stephen delivered a strong rebuke to his judges. (See Acts 7:1-53.)

Where does the authority of Jesus to forgive sins and act as Saviour of the world originate? Acts 7:55, 56; John 12:28-32; Rom. 8:34.

ILLUMINATION: “For him [Stephen] the fear of death was gone. For him the enraged priests and the excited mob had no terror. The scene before him faded from his vision. To him, the gates of heaven were ajar, and looking in, he saw the glory of the courts of God, and Christ, as if just risen from His throne, standing ready to sustain His servant.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 100, 101. In the same way Jesus stands ready to aid all who call on Him (Heb. 10:19, 20; Dan. 12:1, 2).

How did the martyrdom of Stephen relate to the fulfillment of a key time prophecy? Dan. 9:27; Acts 8:1.

“The one week—seven years—ended in A. D. 34. Then by the stoning of

Stephen the Jews finally sealed their rejection of the gospel; the disciples who were scattered abroad by persecution 'went everywhere preaching the word' . . . ; and shortly after, Saul the persecutor was converted, and became Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 699.

For the last time in the New Testament we hear Jesus called "Son of man." Apparently Luke saw this moment as a watershed. From now on the gospel widened its outreach, and widened it again, until it became a truly worldwide message. The vision of Jesus Christ as cosmic King at the right hand of God without the veiling of the Jewish law showed that He was open to all people everywhere. Christians fixed their hopes on the King of kings, the universal Lord whose salvation had appeared to all (Titus 2:11). Now, Stephen declared, Jesus reigns in the heavenly temple, and all hopes for salvation must center there.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

1. Church organization is of God. Ellen White reviews the biblical basis for organization in the chapter entitled "The Seven Deacons" in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 87-96. "The order that was maintained in the early Christian church, made it possible for them to move forward solidly, as a well-disciplined army, clad with the armor of God. The companies of believers, though scattered over a large territory, were all members of one body; all moved in concert, and in harmony with one another. When dissension arose in a local church . . . such matters were referred to a general council of the entire body of believers, made up of appointed delegates."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 95, 96.

2. Stephen's courage had a basis. "Not only did he speak in the power of the Holy Spirit, but it was plain that he was a student of the prophecies, and learned in all matters of the law."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 97.

3. Review how the Bible directs the focus of our worship away from any earthly place to the presence of God (Heb. 1:1-4; 8:1, 2; 10:12-23; Col. 1:13-19; Eph. 3:14-21).

SUMMARY: Those who look to this world for security and salvation will fail to obtain these objectives. Those who look to Christ at the right hand of God have His mighty and continuing assistance. Through Him they will find security and salvation.

APPLICATION

- The story of Acts instructs me as a witness to the ascended Lord. What have I learned about witness and mission from the following?

1. The way that some of those who seemingly had been appointed to serve tables quickly become powerful witnesses. How would I react if the Spirit opened such unimagined opportunities to me?

2. The heavy reliance of Stephen, and earlier, Peter, on an intimate knowledge of the Bible?

3. The unflinching loyalty of Stephen to the truth? How may I develop similar loyalty even if the demands on me never approach what Stephen had to face?

- Relate the spread of the early church to the specific situation in which you and your local church find yourselves. How can you improve your contribution?

The Spirit Leads On

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 8:4 through 9:31.



MEMORY VERSE: "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Even that which creates havoc or places persons under the control of evil forces and blind prejudice will yield before the onward thrust of God's cause. The Lord provides and the Spirit guides.

OVERVIEW: Acts 8:4—9:31		
8:4-25	8:26-40	9:1-31
Philip and Simon	Philip and the Ethiopian	Saul Converted
Samaria entered; Simon believes; The Holy Spirit given; Simon rebuked	Isaiah's prophecy; The Ethiopian baptized	The Lord appears to Saul; Ananias and Saul; Barnabas and Saul

INTRODUCTION: The origins of Christian baptism go back to John the Baptist. But the ordinance is based on the command of Jesus and the practice of the disciples and the early church. The Jews initiated Gentile converts into Judaism by circumcision, self-baptism, and the offering of sacrifices. John adapted the Jewish custom of proselyte baptism, using it as a symbol of cleansing from sin. In this lesson we find Philip baptizing Samaritans (Acts 8:13) and the Ethiopian (verse 38). The practice of baptizing "in the name of Jesus" reflects the fact that the name of the Lord became a symbol to the early church of Jesus' glorious character and unlimited power.

John's baptism limited itself to water. Christian baptism involves water and the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16). John's baptism called for repentance (Acts 3:8). Baptism in the name of Jesus not only offers forgiveness of sins to those who repent but also symbolizes the outpouring of the gift of the Holy Spirit on the individual being baptized. (See Acts 2:38; 19:1-6.) The ancient pagan world gave magical properties to its washings and immersions. Christianity denies that. In Romans 6:3-7 baptism is said to symbolize for the Christian the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we are baptized we attest publicly that Jesus has taken our sins and that our new life as members of the family of God is even then beginning. The Greek word

baptizoo means “to immerse,” as in the dyeing of cloth. The book of Acts records the fact that as soon as Saul, the persecutor, was converted he was baptized (Acts 9:18).



I. PHILIP AND SIMON (Acts 9:4-25).

1. Samaria Entered (Acts 8:3-8).

The tensions between the Jews and the Samaritans went back several centuries. Ezra (chapter 4) and Nehemiah (chapter 4 and 13:28) record the jealousy of the Samaritans as Jerusalem rose again. In 167/166 B.C. the Samaritans dedicated their temple in Mount Gerizim to *Zeus Hellenios*, not in order to worship the pagan deity but in order to gain favor with the Greeks. As a result Samaria escaped the depredations of Antiochus Epiphanes. When the Jewish revolt under the Maccabees succeeded, John Hyrcanus, one of the Maccabean leaders, destroyed the temple on Mount Gerizim.

How did the Christian gospel succeed in overcoming the antagonism between Jews and Samaritans? Acts 8:6, 7; Luke 9:51-56; John 4:39-42.

We do not know the city where Philip went. It may have been the capital Sebaste or some other center. What is surprising in the story is the total response of the city to Philip's preaching. In many parts of the world, even today, lay preachers find similar response. We never can tell how the Spirit will bless until the Word is preached and people are called to Christ.

2. Simon Believes (Acts 8:9-13).

Who alone has the right to declare a person “great” in the sight of God? Acts 8:9; Luke 1:15; 7:16.

What care must God's people take as wonder-workers arise in the last days? 2 Cor. 11:14; 2 Thess. 2:3, 4; Rev. 13:13, 14.

“The Samaritan Simon impressed his fellow-countrymen greatly by the exercise of his magic powers, so much so that they accepted his own account of himself and regarded him as the Grand Vizier [a high executive officer] of the supreme God, the channel both of divine power and of divine revelation.”—F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), p. 179.

Into this hothouse of magic and self-importance came the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12). Philip drew on the power of Christ and proclaimed the sovereignty of God. Immediately the claims of Simon appeared in their falsity. Simon yielded to superior power and attached himself to Philip (verses 12, 13).

3. The Holy Spirit Given (Acts 8:14-17).

Opponents of baptism by immersion sometimes take this passage to assert the right of confirmation. They argue that baptism may be confirmed and the Holy Spirit given by a clergyman. However the passage does not teach this, and the New Testament contains no such references.

ILLUMINATION: "Note the three steps that enabled the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit: (1) Their own confession of faith by baptism (v. 12), (2) the apostles' prayer (v. 15), and (3) the apostles' laying on of hands (v. 17)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 217.

MON

4. Simon Rebuked (Acts 8:18-25).

What lack of understanding of the gifts of the Spirit lay behind Simon's offer to purchase the gifts he had not received? Acts 8:20-23.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Review Paul's cautious attitude toward certain claims of the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit that were creating problems in the Corinthian church. Note the negative aspects mentioned in the following passages: 1 Cor. 12:30, 31; 14:4, 5, 9, 19, 22, 23.

How should we relate to modern charismatics who rely on what they describe as the gift of tongues? We should show the same caution that the early church did. In the book of Acts the gift of tongues is associated with the ability to "speak the languages of other nations."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 283. We do not know the precise nature of the gift of tongues in the Corinthian church. We do not know whether modern ecstatic speech is the same as the incident at Corinth, or that it has the same source. We do know that Paul discouraged a reliance upon whatever manifestation was taking place. When what are thought to be charismatic expressions fail to direct those using them toward keeping the commandments, including the Sabbath, and toward the truth about human nature, the source seems suspect. In today's religious world the charismatic movement bridges between Catholics and Protestants as one of the strong ecumenical forces. As we contemplate what we have learned about events at the end of time, this fact in itself offers a note of caution.

The gift of prophecy ranks higher than the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 14:5). We need to appreciate more than we do this gift so bountifully given to the church today. We must allow it to carry out its appointed task for the church.

What warning is given in Simon's experience against reliance on money as a means of securing power or privileges? Acts 8:18-20; compare James 5:1-8; Luke 12:18-21.

Simon's act has brought the word *simony* to the English language. Simony means the buying or selling of a religious privilege. Closely related to it is the misuse of positions of authority within the church for an individual's personal financial gain.

In the book of Acts, the only accurate record we have of the incident involving Simon, his future remains open. Many legends exist about the future activities of this Samaritan. For a time a sect flourished around his legend. For Luke, the story illustrated the power of the name of Jesus and the continuing power of the gospel as it overcame obstacle after obstacle. It opened the way for the gospel to spread throughout Samaria (verse 25).



II. PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN (Acts 8:26-40).

1. The Guidance of the Spirit (Verses 26-29).

Who directs the work of the faithful servants of God? Acts 8:26, 29, 39.

Although not an apostle, Philip received continual prompting from Jesus. Similar promptings come to us today through the Bible, the writings of Ellen White, and the leading of the Spirit.

ILLUMINATION: “When God pointed out to Philip his work, the disciple did not say, ‘The Lord does not mean that.’ No; ‘he arose and went.’ He had learned the lesson of conformity to God’s will. He realized that every soul is precious in the sight of God, and that angels are sent to bring those who are seeking for light into touch with those who can help them.

“Today as then angels are waiting to lead men to their fellow men. . . . In the experience of Philip and the Ethiopian is presented the work to which the Lord calls His people.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1057.

2. The Prophecy of Isaiah (Acts 8:26-33).

STUDY AND LEARN: Take note of the use of Isaiah 53 in the New Testament as a prophecy concerning the suffering of Jesus. Why do you think that this prophecy held such importance? Acts 8:32, 33; Luke 22:37. Note also such references as Mark 14:61; 15:28; and 2 Corinthians 5:21. Practically every thought in Isaiah 53 appears in the New Testament.

3. The Ethiopian’s Conversion and Baptism (Acts 8:34-40).

EVALUATE: List guidelines from Philip’s witness to the Ethiopian that would be useful to the members of your local church as they witness for Christ. Acts 8:28-39.

The baptism of our Lord and the baptism of the Ethiopian (verses 38, 39) give us the clearest understanding of how the early church practiced baptism. Immersion is the true method. Although evidence exists from the sec-

ond century after Jesus of baptism by pouring and sprinkling, as well as baptism by immersion, the apostles knew nothing except the practice of immersing the body completely under water.

How are we expected to witness to Jesus through baptism? How may we preserve this witness after baptism? Rom. 6:3-6.

IV. PAUL MEETS JESUS (Acts 9:1-31).

In chapter 9, Luke prepares the reader for the mission to the Gentiles. The conversion of Paul is an essential part of this mission.

Acts gives three separate accounts of Paul's conversion—one indication of how important the event was to the early church. Paul's ministry seems to be the major subject of Luke's narrative. Paul himself related the other accounts of his conversion to the crowd in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3-16) and in testimony before Agrippa and Festus (26:4-18). Paul also wrote about it in Galatians 1:13-24.

1. The Lord Appears to Saul (Acts 9:1-9).

Caiaphas, High Priest from 18-37 A.D., gave Paul permission to arrest followers of Jesus, bring them back to Jerusalem, and to have them tried. Aretas, king of the Arabs in Nabatea, had control over city security in Damascus. A large community of Jews both attracted the attention of Paul and influenced Aretas. The size of the Jewish community in Damascus may be judged from the persecution of 66 A.D. when 20,000 Jews perished.

ILLUMINATION: "The mind that resists the truth will see everything in a perverted light. It will be fastened in the sure toils of the enemy, and view things in the light of the enemy.

"Saul of Tarsus was an example of this. He had no moral right to be an unbeliever. But he had chosen to accept the opinions of men rather than the counsel of God."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1057.

What may we learn about our Christian responsibilities from Paul's reaction to the call of the Lord? Acts 9:5, 20. See also 1 Cor. 15:8-10; Phil. 3:6-8.

A bright light and a voice frequently accompany a divine revelation. (See Luke 2:9; 9:32.) Paul had no doubt that he actually saw Jesus (1 Cor. 15:8). This experience stands alongside Stephen's as a testimony to a living Lord who now reigns with the Father.

2. Ananias and Saul (Acts 9:10-22).

What can we learn from Ananias's response about the correct reaction of the Christian to God's commands? Acts 9:10, 17. Other examples include 1 Sam. 3:9, 10; Luke 1:38; Isa. 6:8.

This humble, devoted servant of God had no idea that his assistance to the blinded Saul would have such far-reaching consequences.



What were God's plans for Paul's future work? Acts 9:15, 16. How did Paul later bear testimony to the results of trusting the purposes of God? Rom. 8:28.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Stephen declared Jesus the "Son of man" (Acts 7:56), a title Paul never uses. Peter's sermons in Acts 2, 3 call Jesus Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36). Note Paul's designation of Jesus in Acts 9:20.

How does conversion affect our sense of responsibility toward others? Acts 9:21, 22. Why was Paul able to sustain his first love and continue his witness? 1 Cor. 2:2; Phil. 3:12-15.

3. Barnabas and Saul (Acts 9:23-31).

"We have seen how at crucial moments in his career certain people were instrumental in winning Paul for the Church. First, the Church owed Paul to the prayer of Stephen. The Church owed Paul to the forgiving spirit of Ananias. Now we see the Church owing Paul to the large-hearted charity of Barnabas."—William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Scotland: St. Andrew Press), p. 75. Barnabas thought the best of Paul when the rest, even the apostles, naturally were suspicious. In thinking the best of others Barnabas reflected his Saviour.

What consistent policy marked Paul's life? Acts 9:22-24, 29, 30.

Various solutions have been suggested for reconciling the apparent conflict between Luke's account of Paul's conversion and the events immediately after, and Paul's own story in Galatians 1 and 2. Acts omits the visit to Arabia (Gal. 1:17) and has Paul making a visit to Jerusalem. Galatians says that the visit occurred three years after his return to Damascus from Arabia. The two accounts are not contradictory, but Luke's account needs the added information of Paul's own record to make it more complete. In *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 126-128, Ellen White follows closely the chronology of Galatians, delaying the visit to Jerusalem until after Paul had gone to Arabia and returned to Damascus for a period.

What do we learn about God's control over events in our lives from Paul's experience in Jerusalem? Acts 22:17-21.

Although Paul had heard the Lord talk to him and although he had visits from angels, it was the church through which he received enlightenment and was granted the privilege to work and witness.

“[Jesus] has all power, both in heaven and on earth; but He respects the means that He has ordained for the enlightenment and salvation of men; He directs sinners to the church, which He has made a channel of light to the world. . . . All is done in the name and by the authority of Christ. Christ is the fountain; the church is the channel of communication.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 122.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

1. Consider what the Lord may need to do if we fail to witness: “Instead of educating the new converts to carry the gospel to those who had not heard it, they were in danger of taking a course that would lead all to be satisfied with what had been accomplished. To scatter His representatives abroad, where they could work for others, God permitted persecution to come upon them. Driven from Jerusalem, the believers ‘went everywhere preaching the word.’ ”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 105.

2. Paul so dominates Christian thinking that we forget that Barnabas was much more respected and widely known in Christian circles when Paul came on the scene. Take time to study the character of Barnabas as revealed in Acts. Write a brief statement about him. See Acts 4:36, 37; 9:26-28; 11:22-30; 13:1-8; 13:43-52; 14:12-17; 15:2, 3, 22-35.

3. Read Ellen White’s comments on the conversion of Paul in the chapter entitled “From Persecutor to Disciple” in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 112-122. “[Paul] calmly reviewed his past experience, and made sure work of repentance. He sought God with all his heart, resting not until he knew for a certainty that his repentance was accepted and his sin pardoned. He longed for the assurance that Jesus would be with him in his coming ministry. He emptied his soul of the prejudices and traditions that had hitherto shaped his life, and received instruction from the Source of truth. Jesus communed with him, and established him in the faith, bestowing upon him a rich measure of wisdom and grace.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 125, 126.

SUMMARY: Divine providence marked the witness of Philip and the conversion of Paul. God can be expected to provide for His church in the face of opposition and persecution.

APPLICATION

- Simon sought to manipulate Peter through offering money. Am I ever guilty of manipulating others through unfair methods?
- The Ethiopian said, “How can I understand unless someone will give me the clue?” (Acts 8:31, NEB). Am I always ready to explain the word to others? Have I failed anyone by staying quiet or not preparing for opportunities to witness?
- Concerning the early church we read: “It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31, NIV). Is that true of my church?

Breaching the Wall of Separation

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 9:32 through 11:30.



MEMORY TEXT: "In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:35).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: In breaching the wall of separation between Gentile and Jew with the message of Christ's salvation, God showed that in Jesus all human beings are one. He also pointed the way to Christ's reign of eternal peace.

OVERVIEW: Acts 9:32—11:30			
9:32-43	10:1-33	10:34—11:18	11:19-30
Aeneas and Dorcas	Cornelius's and Peter's Vision	Cornelius's Baptism	The Christians of Antioch
Peter heals Aeneas; Dorcas raised to life	Cornelius and the angel; Peter's vision; Peter meets Cornelius	Peter witnesses to Cornelius; The Holy Spirit fills the Gentiles; The church accepts the Gentiles	Barnabas and Paul in Antioch

INTRODUCTION: Revelations to Peter and Cornelius initiated the outreach to the Gentiles. The church did not initiate the new venture, God did. Jesus had given His followers clues to their responsibility, but God had to lead them in stepping out to meet their responsibility.

The rulers of the Jews marveled at the boldness of Peter and John and attributed it to their association with Jesus (Acts 4:13). The church prayed for boldness (verse 29); the prayer was immediately answered (verse 31). Paul preached with boldness. Not only did he begin that way (9:27, 29) but also the last word we have about him tells us that he was preaching and teaching with boldness ("confidence," Acts 28:31, KJV).

The church never felt confused about other religions and their concerns. It never blended in with other cults or systems. It witnessed untiringly and

boldly. What an example it has left those who are sometimes timid in faith! And yet God had to nudge the early church into action on behalf of the Gentiles. The command was clear enough. Every nation, every creature must hear of Jesus the Saviour of the world. What were they waiting for? We do not know.

Every day opportunity waits for God's latter-day people. What a pity we have to wait to be pushed when we know our task well enough!



I. AENEAS AND DORCAS (Acts 9:32-43).

Luke's love for detail shows through in the stories that follow. Names, places, and medical details tumble out from this skilled narrator. "Luke would have disagreed with the common modern suggestion that a faith based on miracles is not a true faith; where the healing (and judging) power of God is displayed in act as well as in word, there it is right for people to make their response to it, and the mighty work can act as a persuasive alongside the word."—I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 178.

THINK IT THROUGH: How far should we go in using publicity to ensure that modern miracles and exceptional conversions can have their maximum impact? Acts 9:34, 35; Luke 4:40-42. What principles should guide the church in its public relations?

STUDY Dorcas's Life of Service in Acts 9:36-43.

REACT: Consider the significance of the lifework of Dorcas. How may the modern church fulfill similar ministries? Evaluate how you and your church would work if you were placed in one of the following situations:

1. Where the government provides "cradle to grave" social welfare. Are there needs governments are unable to meet?

2. Where the community of believers is too poor to have surplus clothing or food or any cash resources to spare. How can members in these circumstances minister to others' needs? Is sharing our personal experience with Christ as satisfying as ministering to people's physical needs?

3. Where local needs seem to overshadow more distant appeals; or vice versa. How important is it to keep the needs of the world church in mind?

A miracle that comes from God involves judgment on His part. Jesus often combined the concept of healing with forgiveness. There were times when entire villages were healed. In such instances it would not be logical to say that all had come into a right relationship with God. But in most in-

stances of individual healings those healed received acceptance with God. Such an act on God's part presumes that the person healed will continue in a life of holiness and obedience. For this reason we should expect that miracles from the divine Source will be attested by a movement toward truth and a desire to know and follow the divine will.



II. CORNELIUS'S AND PETER'S VISIONS (Acts 10:1-33).

1. Cornelius and the Angel (Acts 10:1-8).

What kind of person was Cornelius? How did other centurions feature in Luke's story? Acts 10:1-4; Luke 7:1-10; 23:47; Acts 27:43.

The Roman army divided into legions. Legions divided into ten cohorts of six hundred soldiers each. A cohort had six centuries with a centurion over each.

In New Testament times many Gentiles grew weary of the endless pagan gods with their immoralities and foolish practices. In Judaism they found an attractive alternative. These "God-fearers" formed relatively large groups. They did not convert to Judaism but admired it and adopted many of its beliefs and practices including monotheism (the worship of one God). The early church found them to be a fruitful field for soul-winning. Cornelius came from such a group.

Note that his family not only joined him in his devotion to God but also in unselfish service to those about them. His family was not saved because of his decision but because they shared it with him. (See Acts 11:14.)

How did the life of Cornelius compare with the requirements of faith? Acts 10:35, 43. See Isa. 64:5; Rom. 2:13-15.

The significance of an angel visiting a Gentile was not lost on Peter nor on his audience (Acts 11:13, 18).

2. Peter's Vision (Acts 10:9-23).

ILLUMINATION: "As yet none of the disciples had preached the gospel to the Gentiles. In their minds, the middle wall of partition, broken down by the death of Christ, still existed, and their labors had been confined to the Jews; for they had looked upon the Gentiles as excluded from the blessings of the gospel. Now the Lord was seeking to teach Peter the world-wide extent of the divine plan."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 135, 136.

How does Peter's vision address such modern issues as racism, sectional interests, and national rivalries—particularly as they affect Christian relationships and witness? Acts 10:11-16.

What wrong view of God's saving work did the vision seek to correct? Acts 10:34; 11:18.

Peter's vision instructed him that there were no grounds for refusing to eat and fellowship with Gentiles.



What are some methods that the Lord uses to interpret a vision that seems to give personal guidance? Acts 10:17-20.

Individuals frequently have dreams, visions, and strong impressions about how they or others should act. For the Christian such events may represent the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Events prove whether these come from the Lord or are the result of a physical or mental condition, self-delusion, brainwashing, or some other non-divine factor.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Look carefully through Acts 10:1-38, noting the following:

- **The number of times that divine agencies are mentioned in the story.**
- **The emphasis on the character of Cornelius.**
- **The references to witnesses.**

3. Peter Meets Cornelius (Acts 10:24-33).

How should we interpret the vision given Peter? Acts 10:28, 29. What attitudes of mind should prevail when seeking to overcome cross-cultural tensions? Acts 10:33.

According to scribal law, clean animals lost their status when mixed with unclean. Once they were contaminated in this way the devout Jew must not eat any of them. In Peter's mind not one thing in the sheet should be eaten; all were defiled or unclean. He received assurance about his own situation—a major step in opening the way for the mission to the Gentiles which Barnabas and Paul soon would undertake.

“The polemic indicated in these passages is directed, not against the [Old Testament] distinction between ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ animals, but at the concepts and practices developed in later Judaism that the ‘clean’ would become ‘common’ or ‘defiled’ by contact with unclean (or other ‘common’ or ‘defiled’) objects.”—Colin House, *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, p. 153.

ILLUMINATION: “In the vision clean and unclean beasts stood on the same footing, being let down from heaven in the same sheet. They represented thus a general mixing of things, among which none was to be called common, or unclean. In interpreting the vision one should recognize that, although it was given in the setting of physical hunger (v. 10), it did not concern food, it concerned men. It was for the souls of men, of every kind everywhere, that Peter was to experience a hunger. . . . Gentiles, ordinarily considered unclean, were awaiting the spiritual ministrations of Peter. He

must not hesitate to serve them. They were no longer to be considered unclean.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 250.

“In [chapters 8-10] we see that heaven is much nearer to the Christian who is engaged in the work of soulsaving than many suppose. We should learn through them also the lesson of God’s regard for every human being, and that each should treat his fellow man as one of the Lord’s instrumentalities for the accomplishment of His work in the earth.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Comentary*, vol. 6, p. 1059.



III. CORNELIUS CONVERTED AND BAPTIZED (Acts 10:34—11:18).

1. Peter Witnesses to Cornelius (Acts 10:34-43).

SEARCH AND LEARN: Review the Old Testament basis for Peter’s statement in Acts 10:34, noting how the Scripture provided grounds for the position taken by the New Testament church. Lev. 19:15; Deut. 16:19; 2 Sam. 14:14; Rom. 2:11.

Peter spoke to Cornelius and his group as if they were Jews. Obviously they knew the Scriptures well and may have known much about Jesus. He was not evangelizing a pagan but a God-fearing adherent of Judaism.

What responsibilities do we bear when we accept the Resurrected One as our Lord? Acts 10:42, 43.

“As Peter pointed those present to Jesus as the sinner’s only hope, he himself understood more fully the meaning of the vision he had seen, and his heart glowed with the spirit of the truth that he was presenting.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 138, 139.

The message that saves a person is simple: “It is to him that all the prophets testify, declaring that everyone who trusts in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43, NEB). In Jesus Christ God says “Yes” to the repentant sinner (2 Cor. 1:19, 20). Through faith we say “Yes” to what God has done in Jesus Christ. When the yes of our faith meets the yes of God’s grace then, in Jesus Christ, we are saved. It is as simple as that. Although the Christian must continue to search out and obey the will of God and live a righteous life, salvation is made possible only by God’s gracious act in Jesus Christ. True faith not only accepts God’s work of salvation but also works by love to purify the soul.

2. The Holy Spirit Fills the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48).

The gift of tongues was given at Pentecost in order to enable the workers in the early church to carry the gospel to every nation in the language of each nation involved. Nothing in this passage would indicate that the gift of tongues was ecstatic gibberish or anything other than the same kind of gift bestowed at Pentecost.

What clue are we given in Acts 10:47, 48 as to how we should relate to those of other cultures or races who find salvation in Jesus Christ?

3. The Church Accepts the Gentiles (Acts 11:1-18).

SEARCH AND LEARN: Peter's speech was intended to convince Peter's fellow leaders in Jerusalem. What parts of his speech would help them to accept the decision to baptize Gentiles? Acts 11:5-17.

In leaping over the thought barriers that divided Jew and Gentile, the critical thing for Peter, for the others with him, and for the Jerusalem leaders was the descent of the Holy Spirit. How could that be denied? On what grounds could they refuse water-baptism when Spirit-baptism already seemed evident?

**IV. THE CHRISTIANS AT ANTIOCH (Acts 11:19-30).**

Because those who had contended with Peter (Acts 11:1) conceded that Cornelius's baptism represented God's will they "held their peace" (verse 18). Now the way was open for further advance. However the consent of the leaders at Jerusalem did not mean that the mission to the Gentiles began immediately. Those scattered by the persecution went farther and farther afield, "preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only" (verse 19). Such a major step as Peter proposed had to wait for future events.

Antioch had grown rapidly after its founding in 300 B.C. With more than a quarter of a million inhabitants, it stood third in size in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria.

What influence can one devoted, well-organized church have in the larger community of believers? Acts 11:26, 27; 13:1-3.

The important and aggressive center at Antioch had no difficulty in recognizing the authority of the central body in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1, 2).

Once again the sometimes-underrated Barnabas entered the picture (verses 23, 24).

In order to better understand how God can use one humble person who is devoted completely to His cause, list the qualities of Barnabas and the results of his activities. Acts 4:36, 37; 11:22-26.

SEARCH AND LEARN: By what methods and for what purposes did the early church receive offerings? Acts 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1, 2; 9:14; Acts 4:34-37.

One lesson continues to illuminate Acts for the modern church: God needs every possible mind and hand to do His work. "The cause of God in the earth to-day is in need of living representatives of Bible truth. The ordained ministers alone are not equal to the task of warning the great cities. God is calling not only upon ministers, but also upon physicians, nurses, colporteurs, Bible workers, and other consecrated laymen of varied talent who have a knowledge of the word of God and who know the power of His grace, to consider the needs of the unwarned cities."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 158, 159.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

1. Review Luke's understanding of salvation history in Luke 1:69; 2:30-32; 5:32; 13:29, 30; 24:19, 21, 27, and in Acts 3:25, 26; 4:11, 12; 7:56; 15:11. Note that salvation history roots itself in human history, not outside nor apart from it.

2. "To-day God is seeking for souls among the high as well as the lowly. . . . It requires moral courage for them to take their position for Christ. Special efforts should be made for these souls, who are in great danger, because of their responsibilities and associations."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 139, 140.

3. "God has made His church on the earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself. Neither does He give one man a knowledge of His will for the entire church while the church—Christ's body—is left in darkness."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 163.

4. "Much is said concerning our duty to the neglected poor. Should not some attention be given to the neglected rich? Many look upon this class as hopeless, and they do little to open the eyes of those who, blinded and dazed by the glitter of earthly glory, have lost eternity out of their reckoning."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 1060, 1061.

SUMMARY: Even good and Spirit-filled persons may fail to move at the pace God requires, but once the will of God is evident, nothing should delay or hinder obedience to it.

APPLICATION

- Peter's vision speaks to all about race, class, sex, and cultural discrimination. What am I doing about breaking down barriers and permitting all to reach their God-given potential?

- The angel said of Cornelius, "Your prayers and acts of charity have gone up to heaven to speak for you before God" (Acts 10:4, NEB). How may I be sure that what I do says the right thing to God?

- Cornelius said, "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us" (Acts 10:33, NIV). How do I relate to the messages from the pulpit and on the printed page? Do I listen eagerly for God's revelation of His will?

- Have I ever done anything to reach out to the rich or highly educated in my community? What might I do?

Light to the Gentiles

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 12:1 through 13:52.



MEMORY TEXT: "I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Through the power of Christ the church may accomplish its mission, breaking down barriers and reaping a harvest of souls for the kingdom of God in every community and every nation.

OVERVIEW: Acts 12:1—13:52

12:1-25	13:1-16	13:17-52
Prayer and God's Action	The Mission Begins	Paul's Preaching Convicts and Converts
James beheaded; Peter delivered; Herod dies	Barnabas and Paul sent out; Elymas the sorcerer	A Saviour, Jesus; Forgiveness and justification; A light of the Gentiles

INTRODUCTION: Luke had a particular viewpoint and objective in mind as he wrote. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he used the information that was available, including some existing documents, in the presentation of his history. Luke was in touch with the early actions and speeches of church leaders. The patterns of the speeches he records follow those used by Jews of that day in interpreting the Old Testament.

However, we should be aware that these speeches are not word-for-word reports. They are short summaries. A look at the story of Cornelius shows that the angel had more to say to Peter than Luke wrote (Acts 10:22, 23). Luke reports these speeches in his own words, accurately giving the gist of the main thoughts.

"The whole of the book of Acts should receive careful study. It is full of precious instruction; it records experiences in evangelistic work, the teachings of which we need in our work today. This is wonderful history; it deals with the highest education, which the students in our schools are to receive."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1051.



I. PRAYER AND GOD'S ACTION (Acts 12:1-25).

1. James Beheaded (Acts 12:1-5).

Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great. He had abilities as an administrator. The emperors Gaius and Claudius valued him and extended his territories until they almost matched those of his grandfather. Because this later Herod is said to have died in 44 A.D., we can be quite certain that the events recorded in Acts 12 took place shortly before that date.

Herod curried favor with the Jews. Like a wind vane he followed their reactions and molested the early church when it suited him and the Jews.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Review the role of the Herod family in the New Testament, noting their general attitude toward Jesus and the church.

1. Herod the Great (Matt. 2:13-16)
2. Herod Antipas (Luke 3:19, 20; Mark 6:22-28; Luke 23:11, 12)
3. Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1, 2, 20-23)
4. Herod Agrippa II (Acts 26:27-32)

The Herod family persecuted, vacillated, and blasphemed. The early church looked upon the Herods as the personification of kingly power raised up against God's work. Whereas ancient Israel confronted Assyria and Babylon, among others, the new Israel confronted Rome with its Herods and Pilates. Such tyranny projected on a global scale and continuing to our time typifies the work of the beasts and the false prophet in Revelation 12 and 13 and the Little Horn of Daniel 7 and 8.

How should Christians understand and relate to a situation in which one godly person dies a martyr's death and another escapes? Acts 12:1, 2; Luke 18:7, 8.

2. Peter Delivered (Acts 12:6-19).

The church prayed for James as much as for Peter. Herod had the intention of murdering Peter also. He took great precautions to secure the prisoner following the practice of the Romans when guarding a dangerous criminal (verses 4, 6).

When we do not see an immediate answer to a continuing problem, what should we do? Acts 12:5, 12.

"While, upon various pretexts, the execution of Peter was being delayed until after the Passover, the members of the church had time for deep searching of heart and earnest prayer. They prayed without ceasing for Peter; for they felt that he could not be spared from the cause. They realized that they had reached a place where, without the special help of God, the church of Christ would be destroyed."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 145.

What reactions found in this incident demonstrate how difficult it is for the Christian to accept God's benefiting action? Note a former experience of a similar nature. Acts 12:14, 15; Luke 24:10, 11.

3. Herod Dies (Acts 12:20-25).

Josephus, the Jewish historian, recorded the same terrible death for Herod that Acts mentions. Herod was engaged in a continuing quarrel with the Phoenicians. At the ceremony of reconciliation they flattered the king. Herod was stricken suddenly by a painful illness that led to his death. The church recognized what happened to him as a divine judgment.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Review the prophecy of the little-horn power in Daniel 7. Note especially the attacks against God's people mentioned in verses 21 and 25, the results of the judgment before the Ancient of Days as it affects God's people in verse 22, and how the judgment affects the little horn in verses 26 and 27. At times the cosmic drama of the great controversy between Christ and Satan has had a mini-reproduction in the lives of the saints.

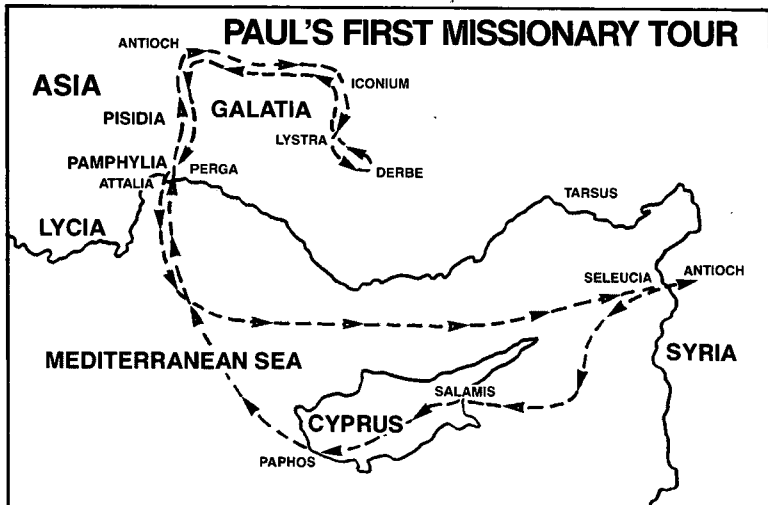


II. THE MISSION BEGINS (Acts 13:1-16).

According to Colossians 4:10, Barnabas and John Mark were cousins. Probably while they were in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas stayed in the home of Mary, Mark's mother.

1. Barnabas and Saul Sent Out (Acts 13:1-5).

This chapter begins with Barnabas and *Saul* (verse 2) and ends with *Paul* and Barnabas. (Verse 9 introduces the change of the name by which Paul was known.) During their first journey, Paul showed his talents as an evangelist and organizer and developed as a natural leader.



What role does prayer and fasting play in assisting us to relate to the plans of God? Acts 13:2, 3; Mark 9:29.

ILLUMINATION: “Fasting presumably reflected a spirit of willing self-denial and of humility before God, sometimes of penitence for sin. Often when accompanying intercession with God for certain specific requests it expressed sincerity and selflessness. . . . The chief benefit to be obtained from fasting is a clarity of mind that comes with complete or partial abstinence from food and that enables a person to perceive God’s will more distinctly.”—*SDA Bible Dictionary*, (1979 edition), pp. 362, 363.

The preaching of the Word of God in the synagogue of the Jews (Acts 13:5) would have been on the Sabbath, a custom followed both by Jesus and Paul.

2. Elymas the Sorcerer (Acts 13:6-16).

God regards those who employ powers gained from evil spirits as the vilest of sinners (Gal. 5:20, RSV).

How did the church relate to those who attempted to subvert the faith of new believers? Acts 13:8-11.

“No quarter given!” That was the example they set.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Review the biblical teaching on magic and sorcery: Ex. 7:11, 12; Dan. 2:2; 2 Kings 9:22; 2 Chron. 33:6.



III. PAUL’S PREACHING CONVICTS AND CONVERTS (Acts 13:17-25).

1. Centered in a Saviour, Jesus (Acts 13:17-25).

Paul’s approach shows a marked difference from the sermon of Stephen. He began at a different point in his outline of Jewish history (compare Acts 13:17 with Acts 7:2). He had a different purpose (compare Acts 13:32, 33 with Acts 7:51, 52). He referred to different messianic prophecies (compare Acts 13:22 with Acts 7:37). A similar analysis may be made in comparing these sermons with Peter’s speech in Acts 2:14-39. Because Luke was writing to a Greek, Theophilus, such brief historical surveys would inform his audience of important aspects of Old Testament history.

How does the book of Acts anchor our faith in Jesus and a God who acted in history for our salvation? Acts 13:21-23.

Jesus, the Saviour of the world, did not appear as a miraculous figure from solely nonhuman sources, nor did God take an ordinary person and radically alter him. The Saviour had a human ancestor, David, about whom

much was known and to whom God made specific promises about the future Deliverer. In this context Paul introduced Jesus to the Jews as their Saviour.

How does the ancestry of Jesus fulfill prophetic hopes? Acts 13:23; Gal. 3:16, 29.

For his mission Paul linked prophecy and history in a convincing array of promise and fulfillment. It was effective then; it is effective today. The Seventh-day Adventist Church accepts the New Testament link between history and God's saving acts and sees it continuing throughout history since Jesus' day. Prophecy meets history and confirms faith again and again. Similar views prevailed among the Protestant Reformers.

What sources did Paul use in order to establish the promise of the Saviour? Acts 13:22. (See Psalm 89:21; 1 Sam. 13:14; Isa. 44:28.)

"David had divine credentials for his task, which Paul proceeds to quote. The citation is a composite one. *I have found (in) David* comes from Psalm 89:21, while *a man after my own heart* comes from 1 Samuel 13:14. *Who will do all my will* is similar in wording to Isaiah 44:28."—I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 225.

Critics of Adventist methods of interpretation sometimes accuse the church of "proof-texting." By this they mean that we put together Bible statements from different books and backgrounds, no matter what period or person they come from. We do this because of our conviction that the Bible after all is one book from one Mind and that the One who is the same yesterday, today, and forever would not lead us astray or make His Word contradictory. However, we should be careful to examine the context of a passage thoroughly in order to understand its correct meaning and application. After having done so we may use it confidently with other texts to make a point they have in common.

2. Forgiveness and Justification (Acts 13:26-43).

Paul assumed the ignorance of his audience about the role of the Jewish leaders in Jesus' crucifixion.

At this point in Paul's ministry, opposing groups of Jews had not yet started to track him from city to city.

How may God use human agents to fulfill His purposes even though they are unaware of His doing so? Acts 13:29. Compare Psalm 118:22; Isa. 53:3. What modern instances can you think of where people have acted in ignorance as divine agents in fulfilling prophecy?

What does Paul's example teach us about the spirit with which we should approach the presentation of the saving message? Acts 13:32, 38, 39.



“The apostle’s appeal to Old Testament prophecies, and his declaration that these had been fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, carried conviction to many a soul longing for the advent of the promised Messiah. And the speaker’s words of assurance that the ‘glad tidings’ of salvation were for Jew and Gentile alike, brought hope and joy to those who had not been numbered among the children of Abraham according to the flesh.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 172, 173.

In Peter’s sermon at Pentecost he preached repentance and forgiveness. In Acts 13, Paul preaches forgiveness and justification. Both offered salvation only in Christ. Both presented human sinfulness and the divine provision for a right relationship with God. Neither overlooked the need for holy living after the individual had been justified by God in Jesus Christ.

What can we learn from Acts 13:42, 43 about nurturing the interest of those who are interested in the glad tidings of God’s grace?

3. A light to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-52).



SEARCH AND LEARN: Study Acts 13:44, 47 and Luke 4:16-19 to discover how Luke enhances the significance of the Sabbath by making it a day on which God declares major initiatives.

Paul declared that Judaism no longer was God’s instrument and that the Gentiles were to receive God’s favor. The great crowds who wanted to hear Paul (Acts 13:44) would never have fit into the synagogue. Unlike Jesus, who declared His program in the Nazareth synagogue, Paul used a public place and addressed a composite audience of Jews, proselytes, God-fearing adherents of Judaism, and pagan Gentiles. This key event in the book of Acts took place on the Sabbath day. Luke’s respect for and observance of the Sabbath, along with his failure to say anything negative about it, affirms that it was the practice of first century Christians to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

What example did Paul give on how to meet opposition among the mixed crowd that heard him? Acts 13:45-48. List some situations faced by your local church in which judgments may have to be made about whether to remain silent in the media or to seek to make things plain.

How does God use both lay and church-employed persons to spread His truth abroad? Acts 13:48, 49.

The text links the belief of the Gentiles with the rapid spread of the word of the Lord throughout the region. Acts teaches witness as the first responsibility of the believer, whether newly-converted, or a seasoned campaigner like Paul.

FRD

ILLUMINATION: "In laboring where there are already some in the faith, the minister should at first seek not so much to convert unbelievers, as to train the church-members for acceptable cooperation. Let him labor for them individually, endeavoring to arouse them to seek for a deeper experience themselves, and to work for others. When they are prepared to sustain the minister by their prayers and labors, greater success will attend his efforts."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 196.

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

1. Read Ellen White's comment on Peter's experience in prison in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 143-154. "It is the work of angels to come close to the tried, the suffering, the tempted. They labor untiringly in behalf of those for whom Christ died. When sinners are led to give themselves to the Saviour, angels bear the tidings heavenward. . . . A report is borne to heaven of every successful effort on our part to dispel the darkness and to spread abroad the knowledge of Christ."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 153, 154.

2. "Not without a struggle does Satan allow the kingdom of God to be built up in the earth. The forces of evil are engaged in unceasing warfare against the agencies appointed for the spread of the gospel; and these powers of darkness are especially active when the truth is proclaimed before men of repute and sterling integrity."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 167.

3. Study such key passages about salvation as John 15:1-17; Col. 2:6-15; 1 John 5:1-12; 2 Peter 1:3-11; John 3:1-21.

SUMMARY: In this lesson we meet the great evangelist and theologian Paul as he begins his mission to the Gentiles. Immediately we have been brought face to face with his insistence that salvation can be found only in Christ.

APPLICATION

- The Spirit said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." God calls all Christians to witness for Him. To what work has He separated me?
- Paul and Barnabas persuaded those who followed Christ "to continue in the grace of God." Do my words and my life persuade others to continue in their faith? What might I do to have a more constructive influence?

NOTES:

The Barriers Crumble

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 14:1 through 15:35.



MEMORY TEXT: "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up" (Acts 15:16).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Reactions to the message of the gospel may be mixed, producing great anger on the one extreme and great joy on the other. The gospel advances, overcoming internal conflicts and surviving opposition that threatens even the lives of God's servants.

OVERVIEW: Acts 14:1—15:35		
14:1-18	14:19—15:3	15:4-35
Gentile Enthusiasm	Summons to Jerusalem	Dissension Resolved
Spreading the good news; "gods" in human form; Preaching to Gentiles	Paul the pastor; Home to Antioch; Circumcision or not?	Peter's speech; James' adjudication; Decision conveyed

INTRODUCTION: Trying to recreate the situation that existed nearly 2,000 years ago is not easy. Although circumcision surfaced as a key issue in the early Christian church, it typified a range of issues centering on the law of Moses.

1. God had given circumcision as a sign that He was the God of the Hebrew people (Gen. 17:9-14). Those not circumcised had no part in the covenant.

2. What was to be the sign for the gospel covenant? The early church recognized the baptism of water and the Spirit as the special gospel sign (Acts 1:5; 11:16, 17; Col. 2:11, 12; Eph. 4:30).

3. If circumcision were not obligatory for Gentiles, what other ceremonial and civil demands of the law of Moses applied to them?

4. How should the new Israel be defined? This week's memory verse (Acts 15:16) seeks to answer this question.

Dissension and controversy arose because the church burst out from Judaism with a universal message. Converts included Palestinian Jews who hoped for restoration of the kingdom of Israel and a strict interpretation of the law. Then Jews from the Dispersion entered the church, many of them with more liberal attitudes, yet anxious to preserve their identity in alien lands. Giving up circumcision would pose problems to them. Those Gentile

converts who had long acquaintance with Jewish history and law probably would understand the demand for circumcision, even though resenting it. Samaritan converts had views similar to those of the Jews. Most Gentiles regarded circumcision as unnecessary and objectionable. It is remarkable that the early church weathered this storm and retained its unity.

**I. GENTILE ENTHUSIASM: (Acts 14:1-18).****1. Spreading the Good News (Acts 14:1-7).**

What effect did the conversion of the Gentiles have on the Jews? Rom. 11:11, 12; Acts 13:48; 14:1, 2.

How does the New Testament present the situation of the Jews and the Gentiles at that time? Who are the elect? Eph. 2:14-16; 1:4-10. Compare Acts 13:48, 49.

The New Testament broke down the concept of an elect nation and completely rejected it. Likewise, it rejected any attempt to create a spiritual elite or to single out any specific ethnic group to replace Israel as God's chosen people. God called the new Israel His "special treasure" because it comprised the oneness brought about through Jesus (Eph. 1:10).

ILLUMINATION: "With the sowing of the seed, the apostles were careful to give to all who took their stand for the gospel practical instruction that was of untold value. This spirit of earnestness and godly fear made upon the minds of the new disciples a lasting impression regarding the importance of the gospel message."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 186.

2. "Gods" in Human Form? (Acts 14:8-13).

SEARCH AND LEARN: Compare the reactions of the Jews to the miracle of Peter and John (Acts 3, 4) with the Gentile reaction to Paul's miracle (Acts 14:8-13). What do varied reactions to successful Christian enterprises today teach about Christian witness and its follow-up?

Note the storyteller's touch in verses 11-13: The mention of the native tongue, the superstitions of the local people, the temple outside the gate, and the one practice of sacrifice. All enrich with detail an already enthralling episode.

3. Preaching to Gentiles (Acts 13:14-18).

How should Christians avoid any self-glory that might accrue from their efforts on behalf of the Lord? Acts 14:14; 1 Cor. 1:29-31; Gal. 6:14.

Paul's brief address to the crowd in Lystra brings to us the first speech in Acts directed solely to pagan Gentiles. Cornelius was a God-fearer, and the crowds Paul and Barnabas addressed up to this point were God-fearers.

THINK IT THROUGH: How would you evaluate Paul's approach in terms of modern witnessing? Which of his points would you consider effective in your circumstances? How would you supplement them in meeting a non-Christian in your society? See Acts 14:14-17.

MON

II. SUMMONS TO JERUSALEM (Acts 14:19-28; 15:1-3).

In the face of physical violence and persecution, how did the Lord provide for His work, and what purpose did it later serve? Acts 14:19, 20; 2 Cor. 12:8-10; 2 Tim. 3:10-12.

Jesus enjoyed popularity one minute and a few minutes later barely escaped with His life (Luke 4:22-28). The fickle crowds teach us to trust the One who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). Paul remained content with his changing situation (Phil. 4:11).

ILLUMINATION: "Among those who had been converted at Lystra . . . was a young man named Timothy. When Paul was dragged out of the city, this youthful disciple was among the number who took their stand."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 184, 185.

At Derbe, on the eastern border of Galatia, the disciples reversed direction and headed home to Antioch. The attacks and opposition did not stop them from going back again later to Lystra and Iconium.

SEARCH AND LEARN: We usually think of Paul as engaged primarily in opening new work. Acts presents another aspect of his ministry. Review his pastoral role. Consider how church officers may assist in this function. Acts 14:21-23; 13:43; 14:27.

The model adopted for the organization of those early churches copied aspects of the Jewish synagogue system. Elders ruled the synagogues. The elders of Acts 14 carried out a function similar to that of local church elders today who lead a congregation in the absence of a pastor.

What principles of church relationships should govern local churches? 1 Cor. 16:15, 16; 1 Thess. 5:12-15.

"Officers were appointed in each church, and proper order and system was established for the conduct of all the affairs pertaining to the spiritual welfare of the believers. . . . This careful training of new converts was an important factor in the remarkable success that attended Paul and Barnabas as they preached the gospel in heathen lands."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 185, 187.

When an issue with the potential to cause dissension troubles a local congregation, where should the people look for counsel? Acts 15:1-3. What makes a situation serious enough to request wider counsel?

Although the issue of the law of Moses, specifically the matter of circumcision, caused serious argument in Antioch, no one seemed to question the work among the Gentiles.

III. DISSENSION RESOLVED (Acts 15:4-35).

“The fact that the early church referred the vexing question of circumcision to a council of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem is a highly significant precedent for church organization. It stands against the theory that a final decision in ecclesiastical matters should be made by one man acting as an autocrat. It also illustrates the need of counsel and authority on a wider level than that of a local congregation.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 306.


SEARCH AND LEARN: Review and compare the two records of Paul’s visit to Jerusalem over the Gentile issue, listing below the added information gained from Galatians 2:1-10. Be prepared for a class discussion on the key issues raised in Acts 15:1, 5 and Galatians 2:1-10.

What do we learn from Paul’s letter to the Galatians about what constitutes an appropriate reaction to divisive attitudes in the church? Gal. 2:11-14; 3:1-6.

“The typical service and the ceremonies connected with it were abolished at the cross. The great antitypical Lamb of God had become an offering for guilty man, and the shadow ceased in the substance. Paul was seeking to bring the minds of men to the great truth for the time; but these [those in Paul’s day who were constantly dwelling on circumcision] who claimed to be followers of Jesus were wholly absorbed in teaching the tradition of the Jews, and the obligation of circumcision.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1061.

1. Peter’s Speech (Acts 15:4-12).

What witnesses does God give of His acceptance of the sinner? Acts 15:8-11. Note at least three in these verses.

 **ANALYZE:** List below the procedural steps taken in the Jerusalem Council:

1. Acts 15:6—Assembled to consider the issue.

2. Verse 7—Considerable discussion.

3. Verse 12— _____

4. Verses 13-19— _____

5. Verse 22— _____

6. Verse 23— _____

How would you contrast the yoke the Christian gladly bears with that imposed by Judaism in apostolic times? Acts 15:10; Matt. 11:29; 23:4.

When a proselyte to Judaism undertook to fulfill the law, he was said to have taken the yoke of the kingdom of heaven. Only a few, like Paul, could ever claim that they had fulfilled all the written and oral demands of the law. Even then Paul said that the painstaking effort brought him no peace of conscience.

2. James' Adjudication (Acts 15:13-21).

To what person did the early church give the leadership of its work? 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19. Compare James 1:2-8.

Legend has it that James, the brother of Jesus, had "camel knees," a reference to his frequent recourse to prayer. Although Jesus' family did not at first accept His nature and mission, they were converted. James, a man of character and integrity, played a vital leadership role in the early church. He wrote the epistle of James.

ILLUMINATION: "James sought to impress the minds of his brethren with the fact that, in turning to God, the Gentiles had made a great change in their lives, and that much caution should be used not to trouble them with perplexing and doubtful questions of minor importance, lest they be discouraged in following Christ."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 195.



SEARCH AND LEARN: How does God continue to rebuild the fallen house of David? Review Acts 15:16-18 and compare it with Amos 9:11-15. How does the resurrection and exaltation of Christ rebuild the house of David? Acts 2:33-35.

James' ruling placed four restrictions on the Gentiles. (See Acts 15:20.) As we consider their possible application to God's people today, these principles come through clearly:

1. No unnecessary restrictions should bar the way for converts (Acts 15:19).
2. Immorality is not to be tolerated.
3. Christianity does not place itself under the jurisdiction of "Moses"—a

reference to the Judaism of Jesus' day which regarded Moses as saviour of the nation and authoritative agent to convey law and custom for the nation (Acts 15:21).

3. The Decision Conveyed (Acts 15:22-35).

The leadership continually pleaded for Christians to be tolerant of one another's situation (Rom. 14:1-6). People of diverse cultures can and should live together in Christ, with understanding of one another's backgrounds and mutual acceptance, provided Christian morals are not at stake.

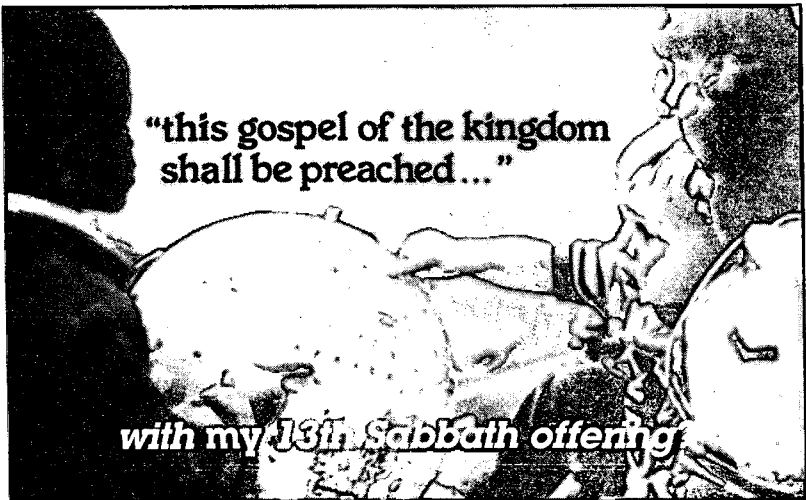
"Where no compromise of principle was involved, Paul was the most conciliatory of men (cf. Acts 16:3; 21:26; 1 Cor. 9:19 [-21]; and in his epistles he himself urges that those Christians who are strong in faith should voluntarily restrict their liberty."—F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., n.d.) pp. 313, 314.

What care should we show in making sure that both the basis of a decision affecting others and the explanation of it are correctly handled? Acts 15:25-28, 30-32.

Once before Barnabas had visited Antioch and encouraged and strengthened the faith of the Christian community (Acts 11:23). Now Silas and Judas, men with the prophetic gift, carried on a similar pastoral role. The Roman Empire had an excellent system of roads, ship communication, and travel routes. The church took advantage of them to maintain its unity.

The reverberations of the Jerusalem Council still linger in the church today. Because it found a path to unity in diversity of culture, we take courage to seek the same end. Because it felt able to resolve problems in an assembly of church representatives, we do likewise.

Thus God gives us principle and appropriate action—two sound bases for maintaining the mission of the church and preserving unity.



FRD

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

1. Ellen White reveals that tensions followed the council's action: "Not all, however, were pleased with the decision; there was a faction of ambitious and self-confident brethren who disagreed with it. . . . They indulged in much murmuring and faultfinding, proposing new plans, and seeking to pull down the work of the men whom God had ordained to teach the gospel message. From the first the church has had such obstacles to meet, and ever will have till the close of time."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 196, 197.

2. Scan the book of Galatians. It was written particularly to deal on a local level with the same problem the Council faced. Prepare for yourself a brief statement on the freedom we have in Christ and how it relates to:

- the demand for obedience to the Ten Commandments, and
- the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

3. "To substitute external forms of religion for holiness of heart and life, is still as pleasing to the unrenewed nature as it was in the days of these Jewish teachers. Today, as then, there are false spiritual guides, to whose doctrines many listen eagerly. It is Satan's studied effort to divert minds from the hope of salvation through faith in Christ and obedience to the law of God."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 387. Read the chapter entitled "Apostasy in Galatia," pp. 383-388.

SUMMARY: The Jerusalem Council supports a tolerant view within the church for areas of cultural difference, but offers no comfort to those who would downgrade the high moral and ethical principles expressed in the Ten Commandments and the standards God has set for the church.

APPLICATION

- The Word says, "We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). How do I regard difficulties and disappointments?

- The Word says that Paul "opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). Here is a suggestion that may help you open the door of faith to those about you. List at least three names from among family and acquaintances. Pray for these people every day and ask the Lord to guide you in finding words and actions that will lead them to Christ.

- The Bible reports concerning Paul and Barnabas that "they caused great joy unto all the brethren" (Acts 15:3). Do my reports and attitudes bring joy to those who share faith in Christ with me?

NOTES:

Paul Leads the Advance

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 15:36 through 17:34.



MEMORY TEXT: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:30, 31).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The gospel's universal appeal is attested to by the response it received in the heartlands of Greek philosophy and culture. There large numbers of people of various cultural and religious backgrounds declared their faith in Christ.

OVERVIEW: Acts 15:36—17:34

15:36—16:15	16:16-40	17:1-34
Into Europe Proffered	Salvation and Conversion	Conviction
Paul chooses Silas; Timothy; The call to Macedonia	In prison; The jailer saved; Onward from Philippi	Conviction and commotion; Eager students of the Word; Commanded to repent

INTRODUCTION: Outside of Palestine, the religious world fell into three main groups. To the east and north lay the pagan hordes that finally brought Rome to ruin. The New Testament makes little mention of them, although Paul includes "barbarians and Scythians" within the sweep of the gospel. The Greeks called them barbarians because their speech sounded like *bar-bar*, the Greek word for the yapping of dogs.

From the east and southeast the Persians, Hindus, and Chinese continually exported religious and philosophical ideas into the Roman Empire. Buddha had long been dead. Hinduism had amassed its multitude of gods. Zoroaster had proclaimed his cycles of light and darkness. Confucius had given ethical direction to the Chinese. In Greece and Rome ideas about life after death and the human soul had long since arrived from Egypt. Strange, exotic, and bizarre cults took root and flourished.

The great sagas of the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* mixed divine myth and human legend. Philosophy, law, literature, science, and art exploded outward, first from Athens, then from Rome, changing forever the way humanity orders its thoughts and actions.

In Paul's day the cult of the god-emperor had captured many adherents. Each city, province, and nation boosted its favorite god. Into such a jungle of sect and sophistication Paul led the advance of the gospel.



I. INTO EUROPE (Acts 15:36—16:15).

1. Paul Chooses Silas (Acts 15:36-41).

Barnabas probably had two reasons for wanting to take John Mark with him:

- They were related (Col. 4:10).
- He saw potential in the young man and wanted to see it developed.

Paul, on the other hand, feared that John Mark might let them down again as he had in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13). He also may have wondered about Barnabas's ability to work effectively among the Gentiles following the events in Antioch described in Galatians 2:13.

What does the dispute between Paul and Barnabas indicate as to how the Spirit can use different personalities? 2 Tim. 4:11; Col. 4:10.

While Luke naturally wanted to paint a positive picture of the early church, he did not hesitate on this and other occasions to record difficult and even unpleasant situations.

2. Timothy (Acts 16:1-5).

How important may one individual of lesser public image be to a dynamic leader? Phil. 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 4:15-17.

The relationship between Paul and his various associates proved productive. Paul recognized that the Holy Spirit assigns differing gifts to various individuals. (See 1 Cor. 12.)

REFLECT on the character of Timothy and the important role he played. Do this by scanning the epistles to Timothy.

ILLUMINATION: "Timothy was a mere youth when he was chosen by God to be a teacher, but his principles had been so established by his early education that he was fitted to take his place as Paul's helper. . . . As a precautionary measure, Paul wisely advised Timothy to be circumcised—not that God required it, but in order to remove from the minds of the Jews that which might be an objection to Timothy's ministrations. In his work Paul was to journey from city to city. . . . If it should be known that one of his companions in labor was uncircumcised, his work might be greatly hindered by the prejudice and bigotry of the Jews."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 203, 204.



How flexible should a Christian be in adapting to differing cultures or religions for evangelistic purposes? Compare Gal. 2:3 and 5:3 with 1 Cor. 9:19-23.

Paul apparently did not hesitate to circumcise if it would improve the effectiveness of his work (Gal. 5:11). "If expediency suggests that someone who is a Jew in every respect but circumcision (presumably because his Greek father would not allow it when he was an infant) be circumcised for his greater usefulness in the gospel, Paul would circumcise him; in such a situation circumcision is nothing but a minor surgical operation performed for a practical purpose."—F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (England: The Paternoster Press, 1977), p. 215.

3. The Call to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-15).

What do we learn from studying Acts 16:6-9 about how directly the Spirit guides the church?

In the continuing guidance of the Spirit we may discern the hand of the ascended Lord ("the Spirit of Jesus," see KJV margin). Paul could not escape the direction of his Lord any more than he could on the road to Damascus. To live a Spirit-filled life is to be "in Christ."

REVIEW the texts that follow in order to discover what steps might be taken to improve our submission to the guidance of the Spirit.

1. John 14:26 _____
2. John 16:13 _____
3. Psalm 119:105 _____
4. Col. 4:3, 4 _____

At this point in the narrative Luke begins to use the pronoun "we." Joining Paul, he became an eyewitness to many of the events that followed.

How is the spirit of Jesus reflected in Christian hospitality and ministry to those in need? Acts 16:15; Luke 4:18.

Christian hospitality featured large in the thinking of the early church (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9). In the light of the example of loving concern shown by such women as Martha, Dorcas, and Lydia, the Seventh-day Adventist church attempts to carry on this tradition in an organized way through its Community Services organization and the international Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). But most effective of all in outreach are individual acts of love and helpfulness.



II. SALVATION PROFFERED (Acts 16:16-40).

In the absence of a synagogue Paul continued his Sabbath observance in a place by the river where "prayer was wont to be made" (Acts 16:13). This apparently went on for some weeks (verse 16).

How are the potential dangers of mixing the practice of religion with personal gain illustrated? Acts 16:16-21. See also Acts 8:18-21.

How should a local church relate to situations where community misunderstanding and misrepresentation occur? Acts 16:22-26; Phil. 1:27-30; 1 Thess. 2:2.

Luke makes the following clear in the episode of the young girl with the evil spirit:

- It had nothing to do with religious belief but with human greed (verse 19).
- Luke knew of no record of a disturbance prior to their arrest (verse 17). Any disturbance came from the owners of the girl.
- False accusations against the Christian movement abounded (verse 21).
- Mob violence and illegal acts against God's cause may occur despite God's full power to protect and overrule (verses 22-24).

The charge brought against Paul and Silas raised two specters. First, anti-Jewish sentiment frequently ran high in the ancient world. "They were Jews" (verse 20). Second, Romans should not become involved with foreign cults (verse 21). The former charge raised irrational prejudices, the latter challenged patriotic fervor. The manipulating of human emotion against the church occurs at frequent intervals in Acts.

ANALYSIS: After reviewing the story of the conversion of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-34), list specific points that instruct us in Christian witness. What are the implications of the jailer's entire household being converted? Is conversion a family affair?

ILLUMINATION: Background on why Paul made a point of claiming Roman citizenship as mentioned in Acts 16:37 comes from the following: "In a famous earlier case a Roman citizen had been beaten by the orders of Verres, the notorious governor of Sicily, even while he cried out '*Civis Romanus sum*' (I am a Roman citizen). Such injustice could not be overlooked. Paul demanded a public apology."—Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 274, 275.

How does conversion affect the way a person treats others? Acts 16:33-36.

The simplicity of the conversion formula given to the jailer (Acts 16:31) reflects the common expression of faith in the New Testament "Jesus is Lord." (See Romans 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11.) It demonstrates commit-

ment and trust in Jesus Christ. The story of the jailer's conversion adds a practical result to the conversion.

III. CONVICTION AND CONVERSION (Acts 17:1-34).**1. Conviction and Commotion (Acts 17:1-9).**

Paul's travels took him along the well-made roads of the Roman Empire. The *Via Egnatia* began at Neapolis, the port of Philippi, ten miles (16 kilometers) distant. From there it passed through Amphipolis (33 miles or 53 kilometers) to Apollonia (27 miles or 43 kilometers) and then to Thessalonica (35 miles or 56 kilometers).

What did the early church persist in teaching as the two basic facts that give authority to the gospel? Acts 17:3; 3:18; Luke 24:26, 46. Compare 1 Peter 1:11. What made these facts particularly relevant?

Paul knew how mob violence could take over and threaten the lives of God's people. If a few determined bigots could put the church at risk then, we would expect that in the last days Satan will not hesitate to incite many against God's people.

What does 2 Thessalonians 2:5-12 indicate will take place as we approach the end of the world?

"The beloved of God pass weary days, bound in chains, shut in by prison bars, sentenced to be slain, some apparently left to die of starvation in dark and loathsome dungeons. No human ear is open to hear their moans; no human hand is ready to lend them help."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 626. But the divine ear hears, as it heard Paul; and the divine hand saves, as it delivered the apostle.

What will sustain our faith in times of peril and persecution? Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 12:10?

In spite of his many difficulties with authorities, how did Paul regard them? Rom. 13:1-6.

2. Eager Students of the Word (Acts 17:10-15).

What consequence follows from faithful, diligent study of the Word? Acts 17:12.

Jewish teaching downgraded the possibility of the Messiah suffering. Paul directed the attention of the Bereans to passages such as Isaiah 53.

While the Bereans pursued their study, Jews from Thessalonica set out to counter Paul's work. Doubtless they thought God wanted them to silence Paul.



3. Commanded to Repent (Acts 17:16-34).

"Stirred," "vexed," "exasperated," "provoked" are some of the words chosen by translators to reflect the troubled spirit of Paul as he tasted the stew pot full of idols and ideas in Athens.

How seriously may people be mistaken when they try to include different religious views into one system of belief? Rom. 1:23-25; 1 Cor. 10:18-22.

Attempts to mix Christianity with Eastern religions abound. Many try to extract the ethical principles of Christian teaching and incorporate them into a synthesis with other beliefs. Paul totally rejects such attempts. Today the church must guard the purity of its faith from such influences, however powerful or popular they may be.

What reactions may occur when sophisticated or intellectual people hear the gospel? Acts 17:16-21; 1 Cor. 1:22-24.

How did Paul seek to counter such attitudes in his speech on Mars' hill? Acts 17:22-31.

"They looked upon him [Paul] as a retailer of second-hand scraps of philosophy, a type of itinerant peddler of religion not unknown in the Athenian market-place. . . . Others preferred to class him as a herald of strange divinities—he spoke of Jesus and *Anastasis* (the Greek word for 'resurrection'), and in the ears of some frequenters of the Agora these two words sounded as if they denoted the personified and deified powers of 'healing' and 'restoration.'"—F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 351.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Study carefully Paul's speech in Athens (Acts 17:22-31), noting what he has to say about the following:

1. Who God is
2. What God does
3. Varying responses
4. Paul's appeal
5. God's action through Jesus

ILLUMINATION: "Many of the greatest scholars and statesmen, the world's most eminent men, will in these last days turn from the light, because the world by wisdom knows not God. Yet God's servants are to improve every opportunity to communicate the truth to these men. . . . The faith of the consecrated worker is to stand every test brought to bear upon it.

God is able and willing to bestow upon His servants all the strength they need, and to give them the wisdom that their varied necessities demand. He will more than fulfill the highest expectations of those who put their trust in Him.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 241, 242.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

1. Review the basis of Paul's conflict with Judaism by reading Romans 2 and 3. Note particularly Paul's evaluation of circumcision in Romans. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 201-210 deals with some of the issues met on the second evangelistic itinerary.

2. "God's faithful messengers are to go steadily forward with their work. Clothed with the panoply of heaven, they are to advance fearlessly and victoriously, never ceasing their warfare until every soul within their reach shall have received the message of truth for this time."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 220.

3. Paul's experience in Athens was not a completely happy one. One reason why is spelled out in *The Acts of the Apostles*: "The Athenians, clinging persistently to their idolatry, turned from the light of the true religion. When a people are wholly satisfied with their own attainments, little more need be expected of them. Though boasting of learning and refinement, the Athenians were constantly becoming more corrupt, and more content with the vague mysteries of idolatry."—Page 239.

SUMMARY: Legalism, bigotry, and intellectual pride pose continuing obstacles to the advance of the gospel. But under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, consecrated workers find ways to surmount such hurdles and move forward with the divine mission.

APPLICATION

● " 'Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household' " (Acts 16:31, NEB). Have I found salvation? What of my spouse, my children, my parents? In what way is my decision linked to theirs? How may I help them believe?

● " 'He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead' " (Acts 17:31, NASB). God has "winked" at my ignorance but now I must repent and obey. Have I prepared for the judgment in repentance and by an obedient, victorious life?

NOTES:

The Gospel Crisscrosses the Empire

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 18:1 through 20:1.



MEMORY TEXT: "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee" (Acts 18:9, 10).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: As the great controversy between Christ and Satan moves through time, God continually acts to aid His faithful servants and His church, even though Satan may stir up opposition and cause setbacks.

OVERVIEW: Acts 18:1—20:1		
18:1-23	18:24—19:12	19:13—20:1
Quest for "My People"	All Hear the Word	Success and Uproar
Success in Corinth; Before Gallio; Back to Corinth	Apollos joins the witnesses; Which baptism? The Word spreads	Honor to Jesus; Threat to the goddess Diana; Confusion and uproar

INTRODUCTION: Paul developed a team of workers who were assigned pastoral and evangelistic roles as new churches formed. Silas and Timothy helped by staying behind in Berea while Paul went on to Athens (Acts 17:14). But Paul had other helpers (verse 15). In Corinth two Jewish Christians, Priscilla and Aquila, joined him as co-workers (Acts 18:1, 2). Apollos joined the Christian effort in Asia Minor (verse 24). This suggests organization, infrastructure, and financial support.

From studying these events we gain a better picture of the way the gospel spread. Although Paul was the outstanding hero of the church's mission, he did not carry the burden alone. Christians crisscrossed the Roman Empire, carrying the gospel with them. Sometimes, as in the case of Priscilla and Aquila, they witnessed from their lay occupations. At other times, for instance in the case of Apollos, they witnessed full time.

Financial support came in two ways. A preacher might ply a secular trade (Acts 18:3), or, with the help of others, give full time to gospel preaching (verse 5). Silas and Timothy apparently worked at their trades in order to

support Paul in Corinth, as did Priscilla and Aquila. The early scene in Jerusalem, where Christians shared resources with each other immediately after Pentecost, now changed to systematic support of recognized evangelists and leaders.

While Paul did not stay long on his first visit to Ephesus (Acts 18:19, 20), apparently Aquila and Priscilla stayed on. They helped organize support for the ministry of Apollos (verses 26, 27), encouraging his obvious talents as a defender of the Christian faith and as a pastor (verses 27, 28).

Organization continued to develop. In Ephesus Paul acted much as a conference or mission president might in sending two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, on to Macedonia to strengthen the work there.

“God has placed in the church, as His appointed helpers, men of varied talents, that through the combined wisdom of many, the mind of the Spirit might be met.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 279.

SUN

I. QUEST FOR “MY PEOPLE” (Acts 18:1-23).

1. Success in Corinth (Acts 18:1-11).

Corinth and Ephesus held the key to Paul’s plans for expanding the Christian witness. He spent long periods in both cities. Luke records nothing of the moral, theological, and procedural problems that caused Paul to write letters to the church at Corinth, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.

“Thanks to its commercial advantages, Corinth enjoyed great prosperity in classical Greek times. It enjoyed a reputation for luxury and its name became proverbial for sexual laxity.”—F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 249.

How may lay persons contribute to the advance of the message in new areas? Acts 18:3, 4, 26, 27.

Paul formed a friendship with Priscilla and Aquila, relying on them for support (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19). Claudius expelled Jews from Rome in 49-50 A.D. for agitation over a certain Chrestus, thought by many to be a Roman misspelling of “Christ.”

How did Paul solve the problem of opposition from the Jews in Corinth? Acts 18:6, 7.

What resource did the church use to house and expand its congregations? Acts 18:7; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19.

The fascinating picture of side-by-side Sabbath services, one Christian, the other Jewish, shows how far Christianity had marched away from Judaism. Early Christianity made frequent use of the home church—as Adventists often do today.

What do we learn about early Sabbath observance by Christians from Paul's experience at Corinth? Acts 18:4, 7, 11; see also Acts 16:12, 13.

In Corinth Paul continued his custom of Sabbath worship. What a witness the church in Titus Justus' house presented as Jewish Christians and Gentile believers mingled in worship Sabbath after Sabbath! When Crispus and his family moved from the synagogue to the church next door it would have created a crisis (Acts 18:8). In the light of this, the Lord directly encouraged Paul to continue his quest for God's people (verses 9, 10).

2. Before Gallio (Acts 18:12-17).

This incident illustrates a point that Luke was careful to make. Well informed and tolerant Roman officials did not trouble the Christian movement. Like Gallio they confused it with Judaism or refused to rule against the Christians as Agrippa and Festus did later (Acts 26:32).

How should Christians relate to civil authorities? Rom. 13:1-6.

In spite of a record of injustice and physical maltreatment at the hands of Romans as well as Jews, Paul upheld civil authority.

3. Back to Antioch (Acts 18:18-23).

Once again Paul returned to his base in Antioch. His brief stop in Ephesus showed his interest in this strategic center.

In what ways may Christians express gratitude for God's care and deliverance? Acts 18:18; 1 Thess. 5:18.



II. ALL HEAR THE WORD (Acts 18:24—19:12).

Between the events recorded in Acts 18:18 and 18:23, Paul traveled more than 1,500 miles (2413 kilometers). In the meantime another evangelist had arrived at Ephesus, the chief city in the province of Asia. Church records show that Alexandria in Egypt had a Christian presence by this time, but it is not mentioned in the Bible. Here is yet another evidence that we know very little about the large number of people who took the gospel to all the world in the first century.

1. Apollos Joins the Witnesses (Acts 18:24-28).

Acts 18:23 begins what is known as the third missionary journey of Paul. In this section we find that "God's will" (verse 21) brought Paul back to Ephesus.

What characteristics should mark those who witness for Christ? Acts 18:25-28.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Review the situation produced by the presence of different pastors and evangelists in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12). What attitudes can help heal such factions in our church life (1 Cor. 3:1-15)?

ILLUMINATION: “There is to be no unkind criticism, no pulling to pieces of another’s work; and there are to be no separate parties. Every man to whom the Lord has entrusted a message has his specific work. Each one has an individuality of his own, which he is not to sink in that of any other man. Yet each is to work in harmony with his brethren.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 275, 276.

2. Which Baptism? (Acts 19:1-7).

Not water alone, but water and Spirit meet God’s pattern in baptism. Apollos knew nothing of the influence of the Holy Spirit in the life of John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), of the conception of Jesus through the Holy Spirit (verses 34, 35), of the descent of the Spirit on Jesus (3:21, 22), nor of Jesus’ Spirit-filled ministry (4:18). He had no acquaintance with Pentecost or other Spirit-blessed events. In fact, he did not even know that there was a Holy Spirit.

How does this story demonstrate the uniqueness of God’s saving action in Jesus Christ? Acts 19:4, 5.

Like John the Baptist, Apollos testified about Jesus but fell short of proclaiming a fully Christian gospel. In accepting further instruction, the twelve men (Acts 19:7) showed a correct attitude toward receiving additional truth. “With deep interest and grateful, wondering joy the brethren listened to Paul’s words. By faith they grasped the wonderful truth of Christ’s atoning sacrifice and received Him as their Redeemer. They were then baptized in the name of Jesus, and as Paul ‘laid his hands upon them,’ they received also the baptism of the Holy Spirit, by which they were enabled to speak the languages of other nations and to prophesy. Thus they were qualified to labor as missionaries in Ephesus and its vicinity and also to go forth to proclaim the gospel in Asia Minor.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 283.



3. The Word Spreads (Acts 19:8-12).

How broad should the scope of our Christian outreach be? Acts 19:10.

The church cannot afford to rest easy when it has established a presence in a community, a nation, or an ethnic grouping. It is our responsibility to carry the gospel to every person. While Paul moved somewhat quickly from city to city, he sought to make Christian communities stable and to provide them with opportunities for growth.

III. SUCCESS AND UPROAR (Acts 19:13—20:1).

While the story of Acts rolls on through three decades, the epistles of Paul were flowing out to his beloved churches. Warning, encouraging, formulating doctrine, proclaiming Christ, they brought unity of thought and lifestyle.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Read and analyze Ephesians 1, noting especially what it means to be incorporated in Christ. What is the significance of the church being the body of Christ (Eph. 1:1-23; 1 Cor. 12:11-31)?

Very little in Ephesians relates directly to the narrative of Acts. Paul spent two years in this important center, one of his longest stays anywhere. The book of Ephesians brings us Paul at his very best. His understanding of God's eternal plan (Eph. 1:9, 10), his call to rely on God's grace entirely (2:6-9), his urging Christians on to holy living (3:14-21), and his practical counsel in the final three chapters are designed by the Spirit to build up the church.



1. Honor to Jesus (Acts 19:13-22).

What risk faces those who seek to manipulate the power of Christ for their own ends? Acts 19:13-16.

The Scripture and Ellen White urge the Christian to steer clear of spiritism. However, a more prevalent problem emerges from this incident. Hypocrisy cloaks the life in many ways. The experience of the sons of Sceva challenges us to reexamine the commitment of our lives to Jesus Christ.

What would you suggest as modern equivalents to the burning of the magical scrolls and books in ancient Ephesus? Acts 19:18-20.

Archeologists have found examples of "Ephesian writings"—magical charms worn around the neck or the body for protection or power. The story of the sons of Sceva underlines the nature of Ephesian society. Christians there learned in time that magic had no link with Christianity.

2. Threat to the Goddess Diana (Acts 19:23-27).

Try to picture what was going on in ancient Ephesus—exorcists strolling the streets and performing their arts, people wearing magic charms, others bringing cloths to Paul so that the owners might be healed. And at the heart of the city stood a great shrine to a pagan deity.

What principles sustain the Christian against the forces of idolatry, spiritism, and the occult? 2 Cor. 4:4-6; Eph. 4:14, 15; 5:10-13.

Education and sophistication give no immunity against the satanic forces that ruled the mob at Ephesus. "Could the veil be lifted from before our eyes, we should see evil angels employing all their arts to deceive and to destroy. Wherever an influence is exerted to cause men to forget God, there Satan is exercising his bewitching power. When men yield to his influence, ere they are aware the mind is bewildered and the soul polluted."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 290.

How do present-day actions of Satan parallel the situation in Ephesus? Acts 19:26, 27; Rev. 12:10-12; 13:13, 14.

Not just Ephesians, not just the inhabitants of the province of Asia, but many throughout the world at that time venerated Artemis, to whom the Romans had given the name Diana. A threat against her put at risk a whole system of belief being manipulated by the evil one. United by false belief, they turned against the followers of the true God.

3. Confusion and Uproar (Acts 19:28-41).

As the end of the world approaches, how will vast numbers of people relate to the issues of truth and error? Acts 19:28, 32-34; Rev. 13:7, 8.

In the face of overwhelming apostasy, with multitudes seduced by the great counterfeit systems of the papacy, apostate Protestantism, and spiritism (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet of Revelation 13), God urges endurance (Rev. 13:10) and patience (14:12) on the part of the faithful remnant. To His faithful people God promises victory and deliverance (Luke 18:7; Rev. 15:2-4).

How will the cause of God prosper despite adversity, plots, and opposition? Acts 20:18, 19; 1 Cor. 16:9; Rev. 7:9, 10.

How does Acts demonstrate appropriate Christian loyalty to government, even though it may be used by opposing forces? Acts 19:35-37; 18:14, 15; 16:3, 38.

At the time that Luke wrote Acts the Roman authorities seem to have taken a neutral attitude toward the Christian movement. Judaism had liberty to function within the empire. A new religion could easily have suffered. Jews and Christians understood the differences but the Romans did not, hence the continual attempts of the Jews to prove that Christianity threatened law and order. Rome had its emperor at Caesar's palace, but the King of kings ruled in the heavenly courts. Judaism sought a new David for Jerusalem, but Jesus of Nazareth now ruled in the New Jerusalem. The Ephesians clamored for the glory of Diana, but the Lord of lords gathered to Himself those who gave Him alone their homage.

As followers of Jesus we shall always sing His praises: "They were singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, as they chanted: 'Great and marvellous are thy deeds, O Lord God, sovereign over all; just and true are thy ways, thou king of the ages'" (Rev. 15:3, NEB).



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

1. The chapter in *The Acts of the Apostles*, entitled "Corinth" (pp. 243-254) will help you understand the situation of the church at Corinth. Notice this statement about Paul's approach to the people there: "To Paul, the cross was the one object of supreme interest. Ever since he had been arrested in his career of persecution against the followers of the crucified Nazarene, he had never ceased to glory in the cross. At that time there had been given him a revelation of the infinite love of God, as revealed in the death of Christ; and a marvelous transformation had been wrought in his life, bringing all his plans and purposes into harmony with heaven."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 245.

2. "It is impossible to gain a perfect knowledge of God from nature alone; for nature itself is imperfect. In its imperfection it cannot represent God, it cannot reveal the character of God in its moral perfection. But Christ came as a personal Saviour to the world."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1068.

3. Review the Old Testament teaching on idolatry with a view to relating it to contemporary issues and attitudes (Isa. 40:18-31; Jer. 10:1-16; Dan. 3:1-18).

4. The effect on Paul of the incident at Ephesus is described this way in *The Acts of the Apostles*: "Amidst the constant storm of opposition, the clamor of enemies, and the desertion of friends, the intrepid apostle almost lost heart. But he looked back to Calvary, and with new ardor pressed on to spread the knowledge of the Crucified. He was but treading the blood-stained path that Christ had trodden before him. He sought no discharge from the warfare till he should lay off his armor at the feet of his Redeemer."—Page 297.

SUMMARY: Success after success, but always against difficulty and opposition, marks the story of the growth of true faith. Patterns repeat themselves, and the work of God goes on advancing.

APPLICATION

- In a sense the real hero of the Acts is the Word of God, which gives its authority to the disciples, confirms their faith, and converts sinners. How do I regard the Word? Does it sustain my Christian life and reinforce my witness?
- The example set by Aquila and Priscilla has inspired many lay workers since their day to form self-supporting evangelistic teams or to team up with an evangelist as personal workers. What can I do to participate in such a team and to encourage others in my church to participate?

The Road to Jerusalem

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 20:2 through 21:26.



MEMORY TEXT: "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: A faithful work for Christ, accomplished in our own lives, or in the growth of the church, will protect against the assaults of the evil one, whether from within or without.

OVERVIEW: Acts 20:2—21:26

20:2-38	21:1-16	21:17-26
Consolidation and Counsel	Prophecy and Destiny	Upholders of the Law
Miracle at Troas; Elders of Ephesus; Future dangers	Warnings at Tyre; "Thy will be done"	Advice from James; Taking a vow

INTRODUCTION: In these lessons we have seen that the church began as a band of witnesses—testifying to the salvation God had brought to the world in Jesus Christ. In order to understand more fully what we should about this witnessing band we need to note the following:

1. It included eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension (1 Cor. 15:3-8).
2. It experienced a direct, public testimony of the presence of the Spirit in its midst (1 Cor. 12:6-12).
3. It developed a clear leadership pattern from the very first days after Jesus' ascension (Eph. 4:11-13).

How can we become a witnessing church in these last days? In the book entitled *A New Frontier—Every Believer a Minister*, Rex Edwards suggests the following: "Christian witnessing is not something we *do*; it is something we *are*. It is a relationship with Christ through the Spirit which produces the fruit of Christian character. And this, unconsciously, even more than consciously on our part, draws men to Christ."—(Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1979), p. 100.

However, this does not mean that we wait for some mysterious moving of the Spirit before we witness. "The talk about 'love for God' may just be

empty mouthing unless the members of the congregation express their love for God not only in the church but also in their work, in the community, in the world.

“We sing ‘Onward Christian Soldiers!’ and wait to be drafted into His service.

“We sing ‘O for a Thousand Tongues,’ and we don’t use the one we have.

“We sing ‘Serve the Lord With Gladness,’ and gripe about all we have to do.

“We sing ‘I Love to Tell the Story,’ and never mention it all year.

“We sing ‘The Whole Wide World for Jesus,’ and never invite our next-door neighbor to church.”—Rex Edwards, *A New Frontier—Every Believer a Minister*, p. 109.

The last-day church must and will be a witnessing church. Its accomplishments will be much greater than those of the first-century church. By the Spirit’s power, it will finish God’s work on earth.



I. CONSOLATION AND COUNSEL (Acts 20:2-38).

We now come to one of Paul’s most active periods of ministry. Letters flowed from him to his many congregations. We do not possess the letter to Laodicia (Col. 4:16). Lost also is a further letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9). His great tract, The Epistle to the Romans, originated about this time.

1. Miracle at Troas (Acts 20:2-18).

What example of concern and diligence offers counsel to all who are called to lead the church? Acts 20:2-6; Rom. 14:7, 8; Phil. 4:12-14.

The Spirit, through Luke, has used the trials and difficulties faced by the apostle to instruct and bless all Christians. In the same way, issues and problems that came to both local churches and individuals led to the writing of the epistles which are a blessing to us as well. When we devote ourselves to God’s will, He may use all that happens to us to provide inspiration and encouragement to others.

As we display the changes Christ has brought in our characters, in what different ways will we influence others? 2 Cor. 2:14-16.

The New English Bible says, “We are indeed the incense offered by Christ to God, both for those who are on the way to salvation, and for those who are on the way to perdition: to the latter it is a deadly fume that kills, to the former a vital fragrance that brings life” (2 Cor. 2:15, 16, NEB).

- **How does the experience of Paul illustrate the kind of support faithful leaders should receive in meeting their responsibilities? Acts 20:4, 5; Rom. 16:8-15.**

NOTE: In Acts 20:7 we find the sole passage in this book that refers to the first day of the week as opposed to many references to the Sabbath. The same passage refers to breaking of bread. Was this meeting part of a weekly practice of meeting on Sunday that was now supplanting Sabbath keeping? Obviously not. It was a special farewell meeting that took place on Saturday night.

ILLUMINATION: "According to the Jewish method of calculating the new day from sunset, Paul would have met with the Christians on what was Saturday evening by our reckoning, and would thus have resumed his journey on Sunday morning."—I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 325.

How did the early church relate to Sunday? Did they regard it as a secular day or as a day of worship? Luke 24:1; 1 Cor. 16:1, 2.

Luke, a physician, observed the miracle that followed the accident at Troas. He satisfied himself that Eutychus was dead (Acts 20:9). Paul treated Eutychus in a way similar to the way Elijah and Elisha dealt with those to whom they restored life (1 Kings 17:21; 2 Kings 4:34).

2. The Elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:13-24).

Most ship voyages in the Mediterranean went along the coast. Crossing the open seas could be hazardous at certain seasons, as Luke points out later in Acts 27:9. However this ship ran "express," bypassing Ephesus.

What is the highest calling given the follower of Jesus Christ? Acts 20:19; Titus 1:1.

Paul refused to claim anything for himself (2 Cor. 10:1; 11:7). He showed by his humility how Christians should regard any success that attends their work. His tears showed his great concern for the spiritual welfare of his converts (Rom. 9:2; 2 Cor. 2:4). He endured in his mission, overcoming all kinds of difficulties that would have deterred a lesser person (1 Thess. 2:14-16).

In preaching and witnessing where should our emphasis lie? Acts 20:21; Heb. 6:1.

Just as Jesus set out determined to face the final crisis in Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), Paul went there knowing that he must face sorrows (Acts 9:16; 20:22). In both Luke and Acts the writer builds the climax of his story around a journey to Jerusalem and what will happen there.

How should the Christian relate to uncertainties that may threaten even life itself? Acts 20:22-24; 1 Tim. 1:12.

MON

ILLUMINATION: “What the church needs in these days of peril, is an army of workers who, like Paul, have educated themselves for usefulness, who have a deep experience in the things of God, and who are filled with earnestness and zeal. Sanctified, self-sacrificing men are needed; men who will not shun trial and responsibility; men who are brave and true. . . . For want of such workers the cause of God languishes, and fatal errors, like a deadly poison, taint the morals and blight the hopes of a large part of the human race.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 507.



3. Future Dangers (Acts 20:25-38).

What can we do to assure that our Christian witness fulfills our God-given responsibility to our friends and neighbors? Acts 20:25-27.

Paul recognized that God carried out long-considered and deliberate plans in sending Jesus Christ into this world. (See Acts 20:27; Eph. 1:11-14.)

THINK IT THROUGH: Review Jesus’ teaching regarding the Good Shepherd in John 10. How does this teaching relate to situations you observe in the church and the world around you?

In our history as a movement the Seventh-day Adventist Church has probably suffered more as a result of ravaging from within than from without. What Paul predicted in Acts 20:29 evidently occurred in Ephesus as well as in the surrounding churches (1 Tim. 1:19, 20; 4:1-3).

How does the Word of God work for the believer? Acts 20:32.

What is one way that the work of God can spread when financial resources are insufficient to support paid workers? Acts 20:33-35.

II. PROPHECY AND DESTINY (Acts 21:1-17).

In the custom of the Jews the farewell brought tears and cries of sorrow. In especially solemn times people knelt and prayed (Acts 7:60; 21:5), although the usual custom of the time was to stand.

1. Warnings at Tyre (Acts 21:1-7).

What warnings were given to Paul as he continued on his way to Jerusalem, and what kind of attention and affection sustained him as he faced the dangers of the future? Acts 21:3-5.

William A. Spicer, a former General Conference president, spoke frequently about the wonderful family to which we belong. Christians act within the community of the church to help each other heavenward.



MULTIPLE CHOICE: Check below how you assess Paul's reaction to the warnings given about dangers ahead. Would you call him:

- Foolhardy?
- Fatalistic?
- Stubborn?
- None of the above? (If this is your answer, how would you describe Paul's reaction?)

What do we learn about God's will and our submission from Paul's experience? Acts 21:4; Heb. 11:8-11.

2. "Thy Will Be Done" (Acts 21:8-16).

NOTE how the gift of prophecy was manifested through both men and women in the early church.

What was the significance of Agabus's binding his own hands and feet with Paul's belt? Acts 21:11.

Indications of the parallels between Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and Paul's include:

- Submission to the will of God (Acts 21:14; Luke 22:42).
- Determination to go on (Acts 21:13; Luke 9:51).
- Predictions of suffering (Acts 21:11; Luke 9:22-27, 43-45).

"Luke's emphasis on Paul's 'going to Jerusalem under the constraint of the Spirit' (Acts 20:22) is consistent with Paul's contemplation of his visit to Jerusalem in Romans 15:15-32 as something which was necessary to seal 'the priestly service of the gospel of God' which he had discharged thus far."—F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 345.

ILLUMINATION: "Never before had the apostle approached Jerusalem with so sad a heart. He knew that he would find few friends and many enemies. He was nearing the city which had rejected and slain the Son of God, and over which now hung the threatenings of divine wrath. . . . The same blind wrath which had once burned in his own heart, was now with untold power kindling the hearts of a whole nation against him."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 397, 398.



III. "UPHOLDERS OF THE LAW" (Acts 21:17-26).

1. Advice From James (Acts 21:18-21).

Some scholars find it quite difficult to reconcile Luke's account of the purification ritual that Paul agreed to go through with Paul's severe attacks

on legalistic Judaism in Romans and Galatians. Note the following:

- The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) did not suggest that Christian Jews should abandon the customs of their people.
- The law governed social, economic, and cultural life, in addition to spiritual matters.
- Christian Jews of that age did not see any conflict between following many aspects of Jewish law and being a follower of Jesus Christ.
- A Jew who abandoned his national culture would find it almost impossible to gain a hearing among his people.

How did Paul relate to the leadership in Jerusalem? Acts 21:19. What can we learn from his attitude?

THINK IT THROUGH: In the light of Acts 21:20-26, how much allowance should the church make for religious and cultural differences which do not deny Christian faith? Consider the following situations:

- Dress that is quite different. For example, Western compared with East Indian.
- A convert following tradition in a country where nationalism is bound up with religious belief.

NOTES:

2. Taking a Vow (Acts 21:22-26).

The four men mentioned in Acts 21:23 apparently had acquired some ceremonial defilement. The Nazarite vow (Num. 6:13-21) required sacrifice of one male lamb, one female lamb, one ram, and drink and grain offerings. Paul undertook to join the rite and pay the expenses. Paul expressed his view on accommodating Jewish custom and even ritual in 1 Corinthians 9:20.

Acts leaves no doubt about the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice (4:12; 16:31). One of the major emphases in the book is to uplift Jesus in contrast to other systems which seek to offer solutions to human need.

ILLUMINATION: "Man is to make earnest efforts to overcome that which hinders him from attaining to perfection. But he is wholly dependent upon God for success. Human effort of itself is not sufficient. Without the aid of divine power, it avails nothing. God works and man works. Resistance of temptation must come from man, who must draw his power from God. On the one side there is infinite wisdom, compassion, and power; on the other, weakness, sinfulness, absolute helplessness."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 482.

**FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:**

1. Ellen White's chapter "Paul's Last Journey to Jerusalem" in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 389-398, gives excellent background for this lesson. Here is a sample: "No fear of giving offense, no desire for friendship or applause, could lead Paul to withhold the words that God had given him for their instruction, warning, or correction. From His servants today God requires fearlessness in preaching the word, and in carrying out its precepts."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 394.

2. "This was the golden opportunity for all the leading brethren to confess frankly that God had wrought through Paul, and that at times they had erred in permitting the reports of his enemies to arouse their jealousy and prejudice. But instead of uniting in an effort to do justice to the one who had been injured, they gave him counsel which showed that they still cherished a feeling that Paul should be held largely responsible for the existing prejudice."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 403.

3. For additional information on how the Jews related to the gospel, read Romans 11.

4. "Paul desired his brethren to see that the great glory of a sin-pardoning Saviour gave significance to the entire Jewish economy. He desired them to see also that when Christ came to the world, and died as man's sacrifice, type met antitype."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, pp. 237, 238.

SUMMARY: At every opportunity we should encourage each other and warn of what the future may hold, all the time continuing unswervingly toward the final destiny God has made possible for us in Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION

- How am I encouraging myself? My family? The members of my own church? How am I relating to the counsel we have been given about future dangers to our faith?
- Do I always say "Thy will be done" when others seek to deter me from what seems a difficult but correct decision or course that I must take?
- Many Sabbath School classes around the world have formed themselves into witnessing bands. They encourage one another in sharing their faith, often deciding on group evangelistic projects. What can I do to encourage my Sabbath School class to become a witnessing band if it has not yet done so?

NOTES:

A Prisoner for Christ

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 21:27 through 23:35.



MEMORY TEXT: "Thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:15).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: A life lived wholly in God's service may bear a frequent and continuing witness before all, even to those who wish us harm or are indifferent.

OVERVIEW: Acts 21:27—23:35		
21:27-40	22:1-29	22:30—23:35
Riot at Jerusalem	Discord in the Temple	Uproar in the Sanhedrin
Hubbub in the temple; Permission to speak	Pupil of Gamaliel; Sent to the Gentiles	A clear conscience Dissension over Paul; Plot uncovered; Sent to Caesarea

INTRODUCTION: Herod the Great had built an outer section of the temple called the Court of the Gentiles. Gentiles could worship or visit in the outer court, but not in the inner court. Notices in Greek and Latin warned Gentiles not to enter the inner court. The Jewish authorities had the power to sentence to death any Gentile entering that forbidden section. Roman citizenship would not help. Although Paul had not brought Trophimus, an Ephesian, into the inner court, he was suspected of having done so. This false charge was used to stir up the crowds against him.

Caesarea, where Paul remained a prisoner for two years, boasted a magnificent temple to Augustus. From A.D. 6 onward the Romans had made it the center of their government for Judea. The name of Pontius Pilate appears on an inscription on the temple found in Caesarea in 1961.

Jerusalem proved difficult to administer. From about A.D. 44 the Zealots took over leadership in the growing independence movement. They held the belief, based on an ancient oracle, that world dominion would pass from the Romans to the Jews about this time. Roman rulers kept their eyes open for possible insurrections (Acts 21:37, 38).

Tarsus, Paul's hometown, first appears in ancient history, about 2,000

years before Christ. About 1200 B.C. the Phoenicians destroyed it, but later the Greeks rebuilt it as a trade center. Rome made it the capital of the province of Cilicia in 67 B.C. A favored city, Caesarea received various honors from Rome. As Paul said it was "no mean city" (Acts 21:39).

Luke's reflection of actual conditions in Paul's time lends credibility to all aspects of his story and makes us aware of the tensions and interplay of events that follow in these chapters.



I. RIOT AT JERUSALEM (Acts 21:27-40).

1. Hubbub in the Temple (Acts 21:27-36).

The notice prohibiting Gentiles to enter the inner temple read, "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death."

What characteristics of Paul's ministry made the world take notice of his Christian witness and also provoked a strong negative reaction on the part of some of his hearers? 1 Cor. 2:4, 13, 14; Acts 21:28.

No patriotic or devout Jew in Paul's day would tolerate what seemed to be an assault on the law.

How does Satan plan to use public opinion, false witness, and violence against God's people in the last days? 2 Thess. 2:9; Matt. 24:21, 22; Dan. 7:25.

2. Permission to Speak (Acts 21:37-40).

The cry of the mob, "Kill him!" (Acts 21:36), echoed the cry against Jesus, "Crucify Him!" Twenty-seven years had passed, but prejudice and passion continued to sway the Jerusalem crowds. In their fury the mob demanded the murder of Jesus. Paul escaped, but his escape provided only a reprieve against the fate he would meet later in Rome.

What misunderstanding did the arresting officer have as to Paul's identity? How did Paul dispel that wrong impression and obtain permission to address the mob? Acts 21:37-40.

Josephus records the tale of an Egyptian Jew who led 30,000 Jews to the Mount of Olives, claiming that, like ancient Jericho, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down. Felix tracked him down, killing him, along with thousands of his followers.



II. DISCORD IN THE TEMPLE (Acts 22:1-29).

1. Pupil of Gamaliel (Acts 22:1-11).

Notice the effect on the mob when someone accused of being a saboteur

of their cause suddenly began to speak to them in Hebrew. Paul's erudition frequently worked to his advantage.

In the turnaround that faith in Jesus produces, what dramatic reversal of attitudes should we expect to experience? Acts 22:4; Gal. 1:23, 24.

"Luke is concerned to present Paul not only as a missionary and church planter but also as a witness on trial for the gospel. . . . His ultimate defence is that, as a pious Jew, he had been called by Jesus to serve him, and there was no other choice open to him; and he argues that Judaism, rightly understood, should culminate in faith in Jesus. His speeches unfold this case with careful variation and development."—I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 350.

SEARCH AND LEARN: In understanding this section and the next two lessons it is essential to have a clear grasp of the conversion of Paul. Review Paul's own comments in the epistles and the story as told in Acts, noting especially the deep impression this had on Paul and the immediate consequences. Gal. 1:12-16, 23, 24; Phil. 3:4-9; Acts 22:1-21.

Paul's conversion takes on something of the character of Moses' experience at the burning bush (Ex. 3:1-14) and that of Isaiah in the temple (Isa. 6:1-10). In each instance, previous attitudes were not only rejected but became objectionable or even revolting to the person involved. The change was radical, total, and all-consuming. In our own way we, too, are Pauls, turned around in the course of life by our encounter with Jesus of Nazareth. Like Paul, we need to be consumed with total commitment in life and witness to our Lord.

How does God sustain His witnesses in spite of their physical or other human weaknesses? Acts 21:33; Luke 12:11, 12; Rev. 13:10.



2. Sent to the Gentiles (Acts 22:12-21).

What differences in Paul's lifestyle resulted from his conversion? How were these differences observed in his life? Acts 22:12-16; Phil. 3:8-12.

ILLUMINATION: "Here lies the power of truth. The unstudied, unconscious influence of a holy life is the most convincing sermon that can be given in favor of Christianity. Argument, even when unanswerable, may provoke only opposition; but a godly example has a power that it is impossible wholly to resist."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 511.

In Acts 22:14, Paul stresses the continuity between the Old Testament and his own revelation of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the "God of our fathers" who

summoned Paul. When Paul mentioned the “Just One” (see Acts 3:14; 7:52) he was declaring to his audience in unequivocal terms that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah.

In Acts, Jesus Christ is Lord of the temple. There the gospel is first preached; there the communal life of the church flourishes (2:46); there the witness continues and grows (3:11; 5:42). In Acts our attention turns to the heavenly temple (7:44-49); yet God uses the temple of Herod for His purposes. Its sacrificial function has come to an end (Luke 23:45); God therefore turns it to His advantage in spreading the message of the risen, redeeming Lord to all the world. The symbol of the old covenant becomes the platform for launching the new covenant.

When Paul seemed to think that his duty was to share his new faith with the rulers in Jerusalem, how and why did the Lord overrule? Acts 22:17-21.

3. Roman by Birth (Acts 22:22-29).

What do we learn from Paul’s actions concerning the church’s need to defend itself when misunderstood and maltreated? Acts 22:25-29.

Acts insists that there are times when government oversteps itself and impinges on faith. It also gives several examples where the church or its leaders vigorously defend themselves. Paul repeatedly showed his cosmopolitan upbringing by drawing on Jewish practice, Roman law, and Greek wisdom to defend himself.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Examine Acts 22 with a view to evaluating how well Paul countered the charge levied in Acts 21:28. What understanding do you gain from Paul’s defense about the relation of his churches to the Jewish faith?



III. UPROAR IN THE SANHEDRIN (Acts 22:30—23:35).

This is the fifth time that the Sanhedrin has had to judge the merits of the new Christian faith. Only once, when Gamaliel spoke up, did it offer any letup from the torrent of attacks loosed against the Christian movement.

1. A Clear Conscience (Acts 22:30—23:10).

In commanding Paul to be struck, the high priest transgressed a saying, “He who strikes the cheek of an Israelite, strikes, as it were, the glory of God.” Paul declared the hypocrisy of Ananias, a robber of the people, and a puppet of the Romans. By his action Paul called into question the right of this type of person to be a high priest in Israel.

ILLUMINATION: “The judgment pronounced by the apostle was terribly fulfilled when the iniquitous and hypocritical high priest was murdered by

assassins in the Jewish war.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1065.

The early church may have seen the high priest's violent death as a direct fulfillment of Paul's prophecy. The incident echoes the avenging angel's punishment of Herod (Acts 12:22, 23). In the face of intense opposition the early church observed the unhappy fate of some of its bitterest opponents.

How did Paul's declaration of the resurrection focus attention on the vital issue—God's sending of Jesus as the Messiah and Deliverer? Acts 23:6-10; compare 5:17, 31, 33, 34.

The finding of common ground with the Pharisees in opposition to the position of the Sadducees protected Paul from the wrath of the Sanhedrin. It also points us to the value of finding common ground when we witness or seek to persuade or convict.



2. Dissension Over Paul, a Plot Uncovered (Acts 23:11-22).

How does affirming the truth prepare us for a greater witness to the Lord? Acts 23:11.

Jesus' promise to protect Paul in order that he might bear witness in Rome was timely in the light of the events that immediately followed (verses 13-15). Paul never doubted the outcome of his trials. This vision lent boldness to his witness and left the church free to pursue its witness without the continuing burden for Paul's future that might have hindered it.

What conspiracy was formed against Paul, and how did the Lord thwart it? Acts 23:12-22.

Paul's nephew had relatively easy access to Paul because the custom of the time demanded that friends and relatives help sustain prisoners. The tribune dealt kindly with the boy because he was quite young, but also took him seriously. We know little of Paul's personal life. He says that he suffered the loss of all things (Phil. 3:8). This may mean that his family disinherited him. His nephew had contacts with the extreme wing of Jewish activities—a position Paul himself occupied years before.

3. Sent to Caesarea (Acts 23:23-35).

Three times authorities declared Paul innocent (Acts 23:9, 29; 26:31). A triple finding of innocence did not save Jesus from the cross, nor did it release Paul from prison. Originally Paul had been charged, among other things, with bringing a Gentile into the temple (Acts 21:28). Because at this point the Asian Jews who brought the charge had disappeared, another charge had to be leveled. Nothing in Paul's teachings could lead to a guilty verdict in a Roman court. The Romans could find no reason to condemn him (26:31).

Life can hardly always be fair and just. The innocent often suffer. How should we relate to injustice? James 5:7, 8; compare 1 Pet. 2:20-24.

Jesus the Innocent calls us to consider Him and bear patiently even as He bore our sins. Meditate on Him to gain consolation and courage.

ILLUMINATION: "He left the sinless worlds on high, the ninety and nine that loved Him, and came to this earth, to be 'wounded for our transgressions' and 'bruised for our iniquities.' . . . He was a stranger and a sojourner on the earth,—in the world, but not of the world; tempted and tried . . . yet living a life free from sin."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 472.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

1. Take time to analyze and compare the trials of Jesus and Paul (Luke 22, 23 and Acts 23-26). You will note many similarities that will help you relate to life as Paul did.

2. "The cause of Christ was very near to Paul's heart, and with deep anxiety he thought of the perils of the scattered churches, exposed as they were to the persecutions of just such men as he had encountered in the Sanhedrin council. In distress and discouragement he wept and prayed: . . . [Jesus] revealed Himself to His faithful witness in response to the earnest prayers of the apostle for guidance."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 412, 413.

3. "To substitute external forms of religion for holiness of heart and life, is still as pleasing to the unrenewed nature as it was in the days of these Jewish teachers. . . . It is Satan's studied effort to divert minds from the hope of salvation through faith in Christ and obedience to the law of God."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 387.

SUMMARY: In the narrow world of religious prejudice and hatred, passions run hot, and the faithful servant of God is never far from death or injury. But God's purpose remains unwavering, pursuing a steady course toward its goal.

APPLICATION

- I need constantly to beware of prejudice that blinds me to truth, and to indifference that shrugs my shoulders, in order to overcome these faults.
- If I feel I have made a mistake, do I trust my Lord enough to accept His optimum plan for my future?
- Paul asked, What shall I do Lord? (Acts 22:10). How often do I ask that question—and seek an answer?
- Paul declared, "Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question" (Acts 23:6). What would I say if my hope was being tried?

In Defense of Faith

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 24:1—25:27.



MEMORY TEXT: "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God's purpose finds fulfillment in those who trust in Him completely and witness faithfully to the power of the gospel.

OVERVIEW—Acts 24:1—25:27	
Acts 24:1-24	Acts 25:1-27
Faith in the Resurrection	"Someone Called Jesus"
False accusers; The new way; The real issue	Appeal to Caesar; A hearing for Paul

INTRODUCTION: The book of Acts chronicles the process by which the followers of Jesus became recognized as the Christian church.

At Pentecost the disciples saw themselves as set apart by the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit. However, they still regarded themselves, and were regarded by others, as a part of Judaism. As late as Acts 24:5 they were "the sect of the Nazarenes." On Paul's arrival in Rome the Jews spoke of "this sect" (Acts 28:22).

The first reference in Acts to the church occurs in chapter 5:11, although Jesus spoke of the church in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17. The Greek word *ekklesia* (church) meant "those called out," or "those called together." In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) *ekklesia* identifies the covenant people. New Testament Christians made it their term for the body of believers, whether universal or local.

In Acts the earliest believers identify themselves as confessing, or following, "the name" of Jesus (Acts 3:16). For this reason the people of Antioch first called them "Christians" (11:26). Paul called the church "the way" (24:14)—a reference to the formula of salvation through Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Christians also answered to "the disciples" (Acts 9:1), or "the brethren" (28:15), but these terms were for internal use.

In Judea the church lived in tension with the Jewish authorities, who probably thought of it as a heretical sect. In the Gentile world Roman au-

thorities inched toward distinguishing between Jews and Christians, but the lines blurred at times. History records the frustration the Roman authorities first exhibited toward Judaism, then later toward Christianity.



I. FAITH IN THE RESURRECTION (Acts 24:1-27).

1. The False Accusers (Acts 24:1-9).

Ananias the high priest, members of the Sanhedrin, and the orator Tertullus pressed the charges against Paul before the governor, Felix, at Caesarea.

ILLUMINATION: “During this twilight period of Jewish history Palestine enjoyed anything but peace. Revolt was simmering under the surface, and in seven or eight years this was to break forth in open rebellion. What peace the land enjoyed was a Roman peace, imposed by force of arms. Felix had repeatedly suppressed political messiahs and broken the back of incipient revolts against Roman authority.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 421.

What methods do opponents of God’s work sometimes use to hinder its advance, or persecute its leaders? Acts 24:5, 6; Luke 23:2, 3.

These false, but clever, charges can be placed in three categories: “The first charge put him in the same category as many who stirred up strife about that time; the second associated him with a Messianic movement, and was calculated to arouse suspicion in a Roman official who knew how much trouble had lately been caused by political Messianism, and could not distinguish the political from the purely religious variety; the third marked him as an opponent of the established order, and thus repugnant to the ruling priestly class, whose privileges were protected by the Romans.”—F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1952), p. 422.

SEARCH AND LEARN: List the points made by Tertullus against Paul and Paul’s points made in his own defense. Acts 24:2-8, 10-21.

Tertullus’s Points	Paul’s Points



2. The New Way (Acts 24:10-16).

The Romans feared any agitation and watched carefully when crowds gathered (Acts 24:12, 18). Paul specifically refuted the charge that he had incited riot or subversion.

NOTE that Paul shared with the Jews belief in the law and the prophets (Acts 24:14) and resurrection (verse 15). Yet they called “the way . . . heresy” (verse 14).

The “hope” that Paul had (verse 15) stands in second place in Paul’s threesome of “faith, hope, and love” (1 Cor. 13:13). Hope gives joy (Rom. 5:2); hope never makes us ashamed (verse 5). We are saved by hope (Rom. 8:24). God is the God of hope (15:13). The second coming is our blessed hope (Titus 2:13). In Paul’s thinking the resurrection begins, sustains, and certifies the hope of the Christian (Acts 24:15). In the resurrection hope Paul shared common ground with the Pharisees and many other Jews.

How does the concept of a coming judgment govern the lifestyle of the Christian? Acts 24:15, 16; 23:1.

3. The Real Issue (Acts 24:17-21).

What fact initiates Christian witness and yet makes it subject to the scorn and doubt of unbelieving minds? Acts 24:21; 1 Cor. 15:12, 13.

In Paul’s mind all that he had done took its authority from the resurrection of Jesus. He had met the Resurrected One. He had no doubt about the resurrection. He conveyed this fact with great conviction. We may ask ourselves how deep our conviction is about the Lord who is risen and now reigns on high.

4. A Convenient Time (Acts 24:22-27).

SEARCH AND LEARN: Paul reasoned with Felix about righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. Felix, who now stood as judge, would later be forced to stand before the judgment throne of God. Review the New Testament teaching on the judgment from the following passages: Matt. 25:31-46; John 5:27-30; Rev. 22:11, 12.

What lessons may we learn from Felix’s reactions to Paul’s appeal about the importance of following the Spirit’s convictions? Acts 24:24-27.

ILLUMINATION: “God cannot lower the requirements of His law to meet the standard of wicked men; neither can man, in his own power, meet the demands of the law. Only by faith in Christ can the sinner be cleansed from guilt, and be enabled to render obedience to the law of his Maker.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 425.

Felix had married Drusilla, one of the notorious Herod family. The couple based their relationship on lust, power, and greed; even so, qualms of conscience seemed to have troubled the teenage Drusilla and her slave-born husband.

Drusilla, not yet twenty years old, had married another Roman puppet,

the king of Emesa, a small state in Syria. Felix hired a magician called Atomos, and with his help took her from her husband and married her. Paul's reasoning of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come" (verse 25) must have aroused some tension and embarrassment. Ellen White gives this insight: "The Jewish princess well understood the sacred character of that law which she had so shamelessly transgressed, but her prejudice against the Man of Calvary steered her heart against the word of life. But Felix had never before listened to the truth, and as the Spirit of God sent conviction to his soul, he became deeply agitated. Conscience, now aroused, made her voice heard, and Felix felt that Paul's words were true. . . . But instead of permitting his convictions to lead him to repentance, he sought to dismiss these unwelcome reflections."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 425, 426.

How does the Spirit work through the witness of the God-fearing and faithful Christian? John 16:7-11; Acts 24:25.

Felix lasted two more years as governor; then his career ended in disgrace.



II. "SOMEONE CALLED JESUS" (verse 19, TLB) (Acts 25:1-27).

Contemporary history rated Festus a rather good ruler. His rule did not last long enough for relations between Rome and Jerusalem to improve.

While at first glance it appears that the theme of chapter 25 repeats former chapters—Jewish accusations, Paul's rebuttals, Roman indecision—a major step forward occurs. "You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go," Festus ruled (verse 12, TLB). Thus the promise of 23:11 fell into place, "As thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."

1. The Appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:1-12).

How intent is Satan on ridding the earth of those who witness to the risen Lord? Acts 25:3, 15; 1 Pet. 5:8. How may we protect ourselves? Eph. 6:11, 12.

"In the future, men claiming to be Christ's representatives will take a course similar to that followed by the priests and rulers in their treatment of Christ and the apostles. . . . Satan will work with all his deceptive power to influence the heart and becloud the understanding, to make evil appear good, and good evil. The stronger and purer the faith of God's people, and the firmer their determination to obey Him, the more fiercely will Satan strive to stir up against them the rage of those who, while claiming to be righteous, trample upon the law of God."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 431.

What view of the church and its apostles does Luke continue to insist on despite the charges against Paul? Acts 25:7, 10, 11.

At this time Ishmael had taken office as high priest, but Ananias continued to wield great influence until his death in A.D. 66. The chief priests and leaders of the Jews (Acts 25:2) may well have included Ananias, who seemed intent on pursuing his vendetta against Paul and the Christian faith.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Review the similarity of the charges against Jesus and Paul (Acts 25:7, 8; Mark 2:16; 7:1-5; John 19:12). Note that the Jews never attacked Paul on the issue of Sabbath observance (but see John 5:16-18).

ILLUMINATION: “*Appellatio*, to which process Paul thus resorted, was the act by which a litigant disputes a judgment, and the effect was that the case was brought before a higher magistrate, normally the one who had originally appointed the magistrate of the lower court.”—E. M. Blaiklock, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1959), p. 430.



2. A Hearing for Paul (Acts 25:13-27).

Drusilla and Bernice were sisters, and Agrippa was their brother. “Agrippa the younger had the reputation of being an authority on the Jewish religion, and Festus decided that he was the man who could best help him to frame the report which he had to remit to Rome in connection with Paul’s appeal to the emperor.”—F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), p. 482.

A witness effectively made may long continue (Acts 24:25). How may even a secondhand witness influence another? Acts 25:19.

Paul’s insistence that Jesus lived angered the Jewish leaders but provoked and troubled Festus. He had no background to help him handle complex issues (Acts 25:18-20), but he did not overlook the force of the reports he studied in which Paul had asserted the resurrection of Jesus.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Study why Paul was so well-equipped to handle his repeated appearances before the highest officials. (See Acts 9:15; Luke 21:12-19; Gal. 1:11-14.)

ILLUMINATION: “Christianity will make a man a gentleman. Christ was courteous, even to His persecutors; and His true followers will manifest the same spirit. Look at Paul when brought before rulers.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 489.

What is there in Paul’s behavior that might guide us in our witness to Christ and His truth under difficult circumstances? Acts 21:40; 22:25; 25:7-10.

The puzzlement of Festus glares at us from the narrative. Paul “had committed no capital crime” (Acts 25:25, NEB); Festus needed “something to report” (verse 26); as yet he had nothing to put down “indicating the

charges against him" (verse 27). All of this must have been difficult for him. Bernice identified strongly with the Jews. In A.D. 66 she performed a Nazarite vow and attempted at some personal risk to avert the massacre of the Jews by the Roman procurator, Gessius Florus.

Paul came to his time of crisis prepared to meet it. How may we prepare for our own times of crisis? Heb. 12:1, 2; 2 Tim. 3:14-17.

Luke makes three important points:

- When Paul finally left Judaea, the provincial Roman authorities had acknowledged his innocence (Acts 25:25; 26:31).
- Agrippa, the one appointed by the Romans to rule over the Jews, agreed with these Roman authorities about Paul's innocence (26:32).
- Not just these high authorities, but large numbers of high officials heard the verdict of not guilty.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

1. "The apostle realized that the gospel had a claim upon whoever might listen to his words; that one day they would stand either among the pure and holy around the great white throne, or with those to whom Christ would say, 'Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.' He knew that he must meet every one of his hearers before the tribunal of heaven, and must there render an account, not only for all that he had said and done, but for the motive and spirit of his words and deeds."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 423.

2. "How wide the contrast between the course of Felix and that of the jailer of Philippi! The servants of the Lord were brought in bonds to the jailer, as was Paul to Felix. . . . Felix trembled, but he did not repent. The jailer joyfully welcomed the Spirit of God to his heart and to his home; Felix bade the divine Messenger depart. The one chose to become a child of God and an heir of heaven, the other cast his lot with the workers of iniquity."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 426.

SUMMARY: While evil and unjust men may be judging God's elect, God Himself judges in favor of His people and preserves their hope in the face of trial and difficulty.

APPLICATION

- Felix delayed his decision to a more convenient time. Am I also delaying the full surrender of my life that Jesus asks?
- There is a resurrection of the just and the unjust. Where will I stand when the words of Revelation 22:11, 12 are put into effect?
- Paul did not hesitate to witness to the specifics of his faith before rulers. Am I taking advantage of my opportunities to witness to all with whom I come in contact?

Witness and Deliverance

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 26:1 through 28:10.



MEMORY TEXT: “And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am” (Acts 26:29).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The world stands judged by the witness of God's faithful servants to the salvation that can be obtained through their risen and ascended Lord.

OVERVIEW: Acts 26:1—28:10	
Acts 26:1-32	Acts 27—28:10
The Call to Repent	Whose I am and Whom I serve
A hope kindled; God's servant and witness; Announcing the dawn; The sober truth	Disaster predicted; Trust in God; Safely to land; Malta miracles

INTRODUCTION: The impending judgment of God against a sinful world pervades the writings of Luke. In the Gospel, Jesus' teachings regarding the Son of man draw their authority from the predictions of Daniel 7:9-14. The coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven (Luke 21:27) not only causes God's people to look up with joy (verse 28), but also causes the knees of unrepentant sinners to knock together in fear (verse 26).

In the book of Acts the doctrine of the judgment is developed in a variety of ways:

1. The Jerusalem sermons of Peter divide between believer and unbeliever (Acts 2:40, 41).
2. Judgment against the hypocrites and the oppressors can be swift and final, as in the cases of Ananias and Sapphira and Herod (Acts 5:1-12; 12:21-23).
3. The deeds of those who killed the Righteous One and even now murder His servants are open to the eye of the ascended Lord (Acts 7:51, 52, 56).
4. Repentance and forgiveness of sin alone will preserve people from the doom pronounced on the hard of heart (13:24, 38-41).

The responsibility of the Christian witness in a world under judgment comes into sharp focus as Paul himself meets judgment before worldly tribu-

nals. Paul turned the tables and faced Felix and Drusilla with the coming judgment (Acts 24:24). Agrippa also had to face a decision about his future salvation (26:26-28).

The judgment hour message which prompted the early church has its parallel in the last day judgment hour message. The witness to all the world that first century Christians accepted (Acts 1:8), sharpens and intensifies in Revelation 14:6, 7. The Son of man has now entered the final phase of the investigative judgment (Dan. 7:9-13; 8:14). The model Paul provides serves last-day Christians admirably. Whatever our circumstances, to whomever we witness, we dare not sidestep the clear words of Scripture that place all under the urgency of impending judgment and in desperate need of God's forgiveness and saving grace.



I. THE CALL TO REPENT (Acts 26:1-32).

Paul's speech in the quiet and orderly audience chamber differed sharply in tone and feeling from that given to the rioting crowd on the steps of the fortress of Antonia (Acts 22). Paul's preeminent statement of motive and purpose explains the way he lived and worked. The pomp and circumstance surrounding these events might have overawed Paul and exalted the Roman officials (25:23). Luke, thinking otherwise, made Paul the central figure—a judgment history has not faulted.

In the light of Festus's evaluation of Paul's guilt (25:25), where did Paul direct attention in his defense? Acts 26:2, 3. What purpose did he have in mind? Verse 29.

1. A Hope Kindled (Acts 26:4-11).

Three times Paul declared himself a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5; Phil. 3:5). Despite the frequent attacks on the double standards of Pharisees in the gospels, Paul did not regard this affiliation negatively. He accepted it and seemed to feel good about it, but did not hesitate to mold it to the divine purpose for him (Phil. 3:5-9). If need be he would have given away all his social and cultural heritage to gain Christ (verses 9, 10).

How does God take our environment and cultural backgrounds and shape them to His purposes? Acts 26:4, 5; Heb. 11:23-29.

"In the schools of Egypt, Moses received the highest civil and military training. . . . Egypt at this time being still the most powerful and most highly civilized of nations, Moses, as its prospective sovereign, was heir to the highest honors this world could bestow. But his was a nobler choice. For the honor of God and the deliverance of His downtrodden people, Moses sacrificed the honors of Egypt. Then, in a special sense, God undertook his training."—*Education*, p. 62.

As it had been with Moses so it was with Paul. His brilliance now honored God. The background and skills learned in his training were not lost, but magnified to God's glory. We should look for similar processes in our lives

as we develop skills for God's glory.

How should we regard the future in the light of history? Ps. 71:14-16; Acts 26:6-8.

For the Israelite, history created hope. God had acted righteously to save the nation. He would act again. The God who acts in history to save His people is the true God of both Old and New Testaments. Jesus came as the latest in a series of saving events. His resurrection and ascension assure us that history still lies in God's control. The scriptural message of the God who acts to save finds clear expression in the great time prophecies of the 1260 and 2300 days. They affirm to us today that the God who intervened in human history in the past, will do so again.

How does God regard His promises? How should we relate to them? 2 Cor. 1:19, 20; Heb. 6:18, 19.

Promise and hope are not question marks raised against the future. They do not speak of what God might or might not do. They call us to the future where God waits to fulfill His promises. Promise and hope are ways God uses to speak to us about the constancy of His favor toward His people (Heb. 13:8).



2. God's Servant and Witness (Acts 26:12-18).

How should we regard our conversion? Acts 26:16.

THINK IT THROUGH: Do you think God's call to Paul is a model for all Christians, or was it limited to that brilliant apostle alone?

Paul's report of Jesus' words echoes what the psalmist says in Psalm 71:14. He has seen God's deeds and will see them yet again. Such an assurance accompanies every Christian.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Compare Paul's report of Jesus' promise to him (Acts 26:17, 18) with the apostle's description of God's work for the Colossians (Col. 1:13, 14). Note parallels also in Ephesians 1:7-10.

Conversion always demands a commissioning. God does not convert us in order to send us into isolation and retreat, but to equip us to witness to others and to let them know of God's willingness to rescue them from bondage.

What effect does our witness have on those who accept Jesus as Deliverer? Acts 26:18 (last clause); Eph. 2:19.

“The description of Paul as ‘servant and witness’ is reminiscent of Luke 1:2 where Luke describes how the gospel tradition was derived from those who are eyewitnesses and ministers (servants) of the word, and indicates that this group included people like Paul who had not accompanied Jesus during his earthly ministry.”—I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 396.

3. Announcing the Dawn (Acts 26:19-23).

What did Paul’s experience illustrate about immediate obedience? Acts 26:19, 20.

Paul’s example makes clear where obedience fits in to the scheme of salvation. What Paul patterned we must follow. The apostle’s insistence on holy living permeates his epistles. Galatians 5:13 to 6:10 and Romans 14 and 15 are examples of this. Paul’s stand against those who seek salvation through “works of the law” should never be interpreted as relieving the follower of Jesus from the necessity of not only repenting but also obeying.

How does the resurrection of Jesus relate to the universal call to salvation? Acts 26:22, 23.

Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20). But first He suffered (Isa. 53:10). The Messiah as Servant would be a light to all peoples (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3). That light announces the dawn of the new age, the new covenant, and the new creature. Paul, in turn, accepted suffering in order that the light might shine among the Gentiles.

4. The Sober Truth (Acts 26:24-32).

“Paul, Festus concluded, was so learned in his Jewish traditions that he had become utterly impractical. Such talk was the height of insanity. Down through the ages Festus’s response has been echoed by men and women too trapped by the natural to be open to the supernatural, too confined by the ‘practical’ to care about life everlasting.”—Frank E. Gaebelien, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981), vol. 9, p. 554.

How should we regard the call to salvation and repentance through Jesus Christ? Acts 26:25-27; John 15:3; 17:17.

ILLUMINATION: “Did the mind of Agrippa at these words revert to the past history of his family, and their fruitless efforts against Him whom Paul was preaching? Did he think of his great-grandfather Herod, and the massa-

cre of the innocent children of Bethlehem? . . . Did the pomp and display of that day remind Agrippa of the time when his own father, a monarch more powerful than he, stood at the same city, attired in glittering robes, while the people shouted that he was a god? . . . Something of all this flitted across Agrippa's memory; but his vanity was flattered by the brilliant scene before him, and pride and self-importance banished all nobler thoughts."—Ellen G. White Comments, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 1066, 1067.

NOTE Agrippa's thoughtful response in verse 28. It has become the classic response of those who recognize truth but are unwilling to give up their erroneous ways.

Paul did not let Agrippa's indecisiveness turn him from the challenge of trying to win Agrippa. Whether it took a short or long time, personal salvation outranked any other consideration. When the ceremony and pomp had ended, Agrippa confirmed, in private discussion, the opinion of Festus: Paul had broken no law.

WED

II. WHOSE I AM AND WHOM I SERVE (Acts 27:1—28:10).

Why do you think that Luke put so much emphasis on the story of the shipwreck and deliverance? The story carries conviction and vividly reconstructs contemporary conditions. Its details about seamanship in the first century and climatic conditions reflect firsthand experience. Luke accompanied Paul and could not forget the dramatic and dangerous experience.

What reasons can you offer for the respect given Paul during the voyage? Acts 27:3, 10, 21, 31.

Although Paul was a prisoner, his Roman citizenship, doubts about his guilt, his commanding personality, and his total commitment to Christ set him apart. Felix believed that Paul had access to financial resources (Acts 24:26) and that belief might have added to Paul's prestige on the secular level.

1. Disaster Predicted (Acts 27:1-20).

In Luke's two books, Roman centurions appear as responsible, courageous individuals. During Paul's ordeal in Jerusalem and Caesarea they acted with precision and integrity (Acts 22:26; 24:23).

SEARCH AND LEARN: Study the details of the stormy voyage, noting particularly the peril posed to God's purposes for Paul. In what ways does this voyage illustrate the dangers to God's people in the last days? Do you think Satan had a hand in attempting to destroy the apostle? (2 Cor. 11:25; Rom. 8:35-38).

We can almost sense the evil one resorting to trick after trick in an attempt to destroy God's servant: violent winds drove the ship off course (Acts 27:15); the mainsail had to be furled to avoid running aground on quicksand

(verse 17); cargo and gear were jettisoned when the ship began leaking badly (verse 19); hope that they would make a safe landing faded (verse 20). Then, as they came into rocky shallows, they dropped four anchors (verses 28, 29). Next the sailors attempted to desert (verse 30). In all this Paul remained rocklike in trust, confident that God would not desert him.



2. Trust in God (Acts 27:21-38).

Luke delighted in word pictures describing how God stayed close to His people, even in the most despairing situations. He included the parable of the prodigal son, of the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan. He told of Jesus risking public disapproval by following the despised Zacchaeus to his home. Now he tells us how God followed Paul into the perils of the deep.

What example did Paul set us of how to trust God when physical or spiritual threats surround us? Acts 27:23-26; 2 Cor. 1:8-11.

“No amount of experience or shrewd calculation could have given him this assurance; he ascribes his new confidence to a supernatural revelation made to him during the night by an angel of God. Not only would he himself survive to stand before the emperor; the lives of his shipmates were also to be spared for his sake. The world has no idea how much it owes, in the mercy of God, to the presence in it of righteous men.”—F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 512.

ILLUMINATION: Paul “had no fears for himself; he knew that God would preserve him to witness at Rome for the truth of Christ. But his heart yearned with pity for the poor souls around him, sinful, degraded, and unprepared to die.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 442.

What proverbial saying did Paul use that helps us understand the detailed and constant providence that governs God’s plans? Acts 27:34; 1 Sam. 14:45; Luke 21:18.

3. Safely to Land (Acts 27:39-44).

Because of one individual for whom God had a purpose, an entire shipload of 276 people was saved. God’s people, the salt of the earth, will also preserve the lives of many through their presence and witness.

4. Malta Miracles (Acts 28:1-10).

How did miracles enhance the witness of Paul and Luke and influence the acceptance of the gospel on Malta? Acts 28:3-10.

“Who can measure the results to the world of Paul’s lifework? Of all those beneficent influences that alleviate suffering, that comfort sorrow,

that restrain evil, that uplift life from the selfish and the sensual, and glorify it with the hope of immortality, how much is due to the labors of Paul and his fellow-workers. . . .

“What is it worth to any life to have been God’s instrument in setting in motion such influences of blessing? What will it be worth in eternity to witness the results of such a lifework?”—*Education*, p. 70.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

1. Read “Lives of Great Men,” in the book *Education*, pp. 61-70 to understand the commitment of Moses and Paul to God’s plan for them. “Sacred history presents many illustrations of the results of true education. It presents many noble examples of men whose characters were formed under divine direction; men whose lives were a blessing to their fellow-men, and who stood in the world as representatives of God. Among these are Joseph and Daniel, Moses, Elisha, and Paul,—the greatest statesmen, the wisest legislator, one of the most faithful of reformers, and, except Him who spoke as never man spake, the most illustrious teacher that this world has known.”—*Education*, p. 51.

2. “Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice might in justice have worn the fetters that bound the apostle. All were guilty of grievous crimes. These offenders had that day heard the offer of salvation through the name of Christ. One, at least, had been almost persuaded to accept the grace and pardon offered. Agrippa put aside the proffered mercy, refusing to accept the cross of a crucified Redeemer.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 438.

SUMMARY: Even though the world and its powers stand judged and condemned in the cross of Christ, God still offers repentance and forgiveness to those who will receive it. He preserves His people as witnesses as to what is possible through His providence and power.

APPLICATION

- By recording how Paul was preserved from storm, shipwreck, and serpent, Luke sign-writes the innocence of Paul across the pages of history. How has God written forgiveness and acquittal in my life?
- Does the hope God has kindled through His promises still flame constantly in my life? How may I preserve its presence and guidance?
- What did I learn from this lesson that I can share with someone this week?
- In what ways does the hospitality shown by Publius and others on Malta set an example I can follow? What effect will my following their example have on the advancement of God’s work?

NOTES:

Paul in Rome

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 28:11-31.



MEMORY TEXT: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Paul's arrest and trial led to the development of a strong work in Rome. God often uses adversity and apparent defeat to further the advance of His work on earth.

OVERVIEW: Acts 28:11-31

Acts 28:11-16	Acts 28:17-29	Acts 28:30, 31
The journey from Malta to Rome	Paul's defense before the Jews in Rome	Preaching and teaching for two years

INTRODUCTION: In this lesson we not only study the balance of the last chapter of the book of Acts but also review that part of Paul's life that is not included there. No reason is given in the book itself for Luke's ending his account with Paul's release from house arrest in Rome. Luke continued his association with Paul right up to the time of Paul's martyrdom about four years later. (See 2 Timothy 4:11.) The simplest explanation for the abrupt ending of the book of Acts is that Luke wrote this book during the time of Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, about A.D. 61-63.

In spite of the harm done the Roman empire by Emperors Caligula and Nero, the universal rule of Rome contributed to the spread of the gospel. "A fairly stable government, a common administrative system, Roman justice, an expanding citizenship, peace preserved by disciplined legions, roads pressing into every corner of the then-known world, a language (Greek) that was almost universally understood—these were factors that favored the program undertaken by the apostles.

"At first the new religion profited from its connections with Judaism. The chosen race had been dispersed to many corners of the empire, and its basic beliefs were eventually tolerated by the Romans. Christianity, as an offshoot of the older faith, shared in this toleration. But Judaism fell into disfavor. Its adherents were expelled from Rome during the reign of Claudius (Acts 18:2), and intense Jewish national aspirations led to rebellion in Palestine and to the disastrous wars of A.D. 66-70 that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. As the position of Judaism worsened, the situa-

tion of Christianity grew more perilous. It was a religion with no legal standing, and its members were without protection in the eyes of the law. When trouble arose, such as when Rome burned in A.D. 64, it was easy to make a scapegoat of the Christian community, and the subsequent persecution set a terrible precedent that was all too faithfully followed in succeeding years"—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 114.

SUN

I. THE JOURNEY FROM MALTA TO ROME (Acts 28:11-16).

MAP STUDY: On the map provided below, draw in the route of Paul's journey from Malta to Rome.



At Puteoli, Luke says, “we found brethren” (Acts 28:14). Although they arrived there only about 30 years after Jesus’ crucifixion, they found a group of Christians living in Puteoli near modern Naples. Verse 15 mentions that when Paul’s party approached Rome, additional “brethren” came out to meet them from that city. Most had never seen Paul before, but a few years earlier, when he was in Corinth, Paul communicated with them through the epistle known as Romans.

ILLUMINATION: “It was with a heavy heart that Paul went forward to his long-expected visit to the world’s metropolis. How different the circumstances from those he had anticipated! How was he, fettered and stigmatized, to proclaim the gospel? His hopes of winning many souls to the truth in Rome, seemed destined to disappointment.

“At last the travelers reach Appii Forum, forty miles from Rome. . . .

“Suddenly a cry of joy is heard, and a man springs from the passing throng and falls upon the prisoner’s neck, embracing him with tears and rejoicing, as a son would welcome a long-absent father. Again and again is the scene repeated as, with eyes made keen by loving expectation, many discern in the chained captive the one who at Corinth, at Philippi, at Ephesus, had spoken to them the words of life. . . .

In that worn, pain-stricken face, the disciples see reflected the image of Christ. They assure Paul that they have not forgotten him nor ceased to love him; that they are indebted to him for the joyful hope which animates their lives and gives them peace toward God.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 448, 449.

How did Paul respond to the warm greetings of his fellow Christians? Acts 28:15.

“The cloud of sadness that had rested upon his spirit was swept away. His Christian life had been a succession of trials, sufferings, and disappointments, but in that hour he felt abundantly repaid. With firmer step and joyful heart he continued on his way.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 449.

THINK IT THROUGH: Do those who carry heavy loads in God’s work today sometimes become discouraged by their trials? What can we do in a practical way to demonstrate our love and appreciation and to encourage them to continue to bear their responsibilities joyfully?

What special concession was made to Paul in regard to his imprisonment when he arrived in Rome? Acts 28:16.

Paul’s being placed under house arrest rather than in prison undoubtedly resulted from a favorable report of the centurion Julius and from the letter from Festus that stated Paul had done nothing worthy of death or imprisonment. (See Acts 25:25-27; 26:32.)



II. PAUL’S DEFENSE BEFORE THE JEWS IN ROME (Acts 28:17-29).

Paul desired to present the facts about himself and his work to the Jews in Rome before they received false reports from his detractors in Jerusalem. Three days after he arrived in Rome he called together the leaders of the Jewish community for this purpose.

Paul told the Jews that he was bound “for the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20). To what does “the hope of Israel” refer? Acts 26:6, 7.

Paul shared with all the Jews the expectation of the Messiah. But he, of course, believed that Jesus already had fulfilled that expectation.

What was the response of the Jewish leaders, and how did Paul respond to their expressed desire?

ILLUMINATION: Paul “related his own experience, and presented arguments from the Old Testament Scriptures with simplicity, sincerity, and power. Paul taught that religion is a practical, saving energy, a principle wholly from God, a personal experience of God’s renewing power upon the soul.

“He showed how Moses had pointed Israel forward to Christ as that Prophet whom they were to hear; how all the prophets had testified of Him as God’s great remedy for sin, the guiltless One who was to bear the sins of the guilty. He did not find fault with their observance of forms and ceremonies, but showed that while they maintained the ritual service with great exactness, they were rejecting Him who was the antitype of all that system. . . .

“As Paul spoke of what he knew, and testified of what he had seen, concerning Jesus of Nazareth as the hope of Israel, those who were honestly seeking for truth were convinced. Upon some minds, at least, his words made an impression that was never effaced. But others stubbornly refused to accept the plain testimony of the Scriptures.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 451, 452.

Those among the Jews who rejected Paul’s teaching must have stated that they would cling to the beliefs of their “fathers.”

SEARCH AND LEARN: Paul pointed out to the Jews that the “fathers” to whose belief they claimed to cling censured the kind of unbelief they were manifesting. Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9, 10. Notice how Jesus used that same text to point out the unbelief of the Jewish leaders in His day. (See Matthew 13:14, 15.)



III. PREACHING AND TEACHING FOR TWO YEARS (Acts 28:30, 31).

The Jerusalem Jews delayed their arrival in Rome due to their fear of another legal defeat. They hoped “by intrigue to influence the emperor in their favor.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 453. Doing so would take some time. But God’s hand was in the delay. Paul was allowed to teach freely at the house in which he stayed. He also wrote several epistles during this period in order to keep in touch with the churches he had developed. In that way he “exerted a wider and more lasting influence than if he had been free to travel among the churches.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 454.

Among those converted as a result of Paul’s ministry while he was under house arrest in Rome was Onesimus. (See the epistle to Philemon.)

In his letter to the Philippians what good report did Paul give as to the extent of his witness in Rome? Phil. 1:12, 13; 4:22.

IV. PAUL'S FOURTH MISSIONARY JOURNEY.

In spite of Nero's wickedness and lack of concern for justice, the Lord intervened on Paul's behalf at his trial before the wicked emperor. The apostle was declared guiltless. His chains were removed. He once again was a free man.

Where would Paul be expected to go as soon as he was freed? Phil. 2:24; Philemon 22.

Philemon lived in Colossae in Asia Minor, and Philippi was located in Macedonia. According to 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul visited Ephesus in Asia before going to Macedonia. If he was able to fulfill his desires, he must have visited Colossae while in the Ephesus area. The first letter to Timothy was written about a year later. When Paul went into Macedonia he asked Timothy to stay on at Ephesus as pastor (1 Tim. 1:3). Paul expressed a desire to visit Timothy at Ephesus in the near future (1 Tim. 3:14). After being imprisoned in Rome for the second time, Paul wrote a second letter to Timothy in which he mentions having left his cloak and books at Troas (2 Tim. 4:13). In verse 20 Paul mentions also being at Corinth and Miletum.

Some think that Paul was arrested at Troas just before his second imprisonment at Rome because he left the city in such a hurry that he left his cloak and books there. Troas was in Asia Minor near the ancient site of Troy. Corinth was located in Greece. Miletum was the Miletus in Asia Minor, where Paul stopped when on his way to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey. There he summoned the elders from Ephesus for a farewell meeting (Acts 20:15-38). In his letter to Titus, dated about A.D. 65, Paul speaks also of having been in Crete (Titus 1:5) and of his plan to spend the winter in Nicopolis, a Greek city (Titus 3:12).

"Clement of Rome (*The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 5) says that Paul preached in both East and West. Since the apostle had planned to go to Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28), it is possible that he now visited that country. The Muratorian Fragment (c. A.D. 190) states that he did visit Spain."—*SDA Bible Dictionary*, 1979 edition, p. 856.

REVIEW the information given above about the sites visited by Paul on his fourth missionary tour by listing in the blanks provided below the places that he visited:



V. PAUL'S SECOND IMPRISONMENT AND DEATH.

ILLUMINATION: "Since the beginning of the persecution under Nero the Christians had everywhere been a proscribed sect. After a time the unbelieving Jews conceived the idea of fastening upon Paul the crime of instigating

the burning of Rome. Not one of them thought for a moment that he was guilty; but they knew that such a charge, made with the faintest show of plausibility, would seal his doom. Through their efforts, Paul was again arrested, and hurried away to his final imprisonment."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 489.

Legend states that Paul was imprisoned in the Mamertine dungeon near the Roman Forum. Because of the immensity of the crime with which he had been charged and the climate toward Christians in Rome, there was no question of just being placed under house arrest this time. He was confined to a gloomy dungeon. The last epistle that we have from Paul, 2 Timothy, was written during this final imprisonment.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Study the following verses in 2 Timothy to learn what you can about Paul's second imprisonment:

- 4:6 _____
- 4:9 _____
- 4:16, 17 _____
(apparently he already had appeared at one trial)

During this period the few friends Paul had in Rome began to leave for various reasons. Indicate the reasons after their names listed below:

1. Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Tim. 1:15) _____
2. Demas (2 Tim. 4:10) _____
3. Crescens (4:10) _____
4. Titus (4:10) _____
5. Tychicus (4:12) _____

One faithful friend from Asia *had* come to minister to Paul in prison (see 2 Tim. 1:16, 17; 4:11). Onesiphorus "was not ashamed" of Paul's chains (2 Tim. 1:16).



What did Paul recall about Onesiphorus's assistance when Paul was in Ephesus? 2 Tim. 1:18.

Because Paul mentions the "household of Onesiphorus" in 2 Timothy 4:9, some commentators suggest that Onesiphorus had died by the time Paul wrote this epistle. To identify with a condemned criminal was to risk one's life at that time. It could be that Onesiphorus had preceded Paul in martyrdom as a result of his ministry to Paul. Apparently he had spared no effort in his attempt to make Paul's life as bearable as possible.

In 2 Timothy 4:13 Paul urged Timothy to come to him as soon as possible. If Timothy received this letter in time, we can be sure that he made every effort to do so.

What did Paul mean when he wrote Timothy that he was “ready to be offered” (2 Tim. 4:6)? 2 Tim. 4:7, 8.

Tradition indicates that Paul was beheaded on the Ostian Way in Rome by order of the Emperor Nero, who himself died shortly thereafter.

ILLUMINATION: “Well-nigh a score of centuries have passed since Paul the aged poured out his blood as a witness for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. No faithful hand recorded for the generations to come the last scenes in the life of this holy man; but Inspiration has preserved for us his dying testimony. Like a trumpet peal his voice has rung out through all the ages since, nerving with his own courage thousands of witnesses for Christ and wakening in thousands of sorrow-stricken hearts the echo of his own triumphant joy: ‘I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.’ 2 Timothy 4:6-8.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 513.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

1. “What the church needs in these days of peril is an army of workers who, like Paul, have educated themselves for usefulness, who have a deep experience in the things of God, and who are filled with earnestness and zeal. Sanctified, self-sacrificing men are needed; men who will not shun trial and responsibility; men who are brave and true; men in whose hearts Christ is formed ‘the hope of glory,’ and who with lips touched with holy fire will ‘preach the word.’ For want of such workers the cause of God languishes, and fatal errors, like a deadly poison, taint the morals and blight the hopes of a large part of the human race.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 507.

2. Read 2 Timothy through in order to catch a glimpse of Paul’s concerns, faith, and courage as he neared the day of execution.

SUMMARY: The apostle Paul’s final days demonstrate the courage, vigor, and hope of those who have committed themselves fully to God and His work. Paul’s greatest concern was for the converts that he had led to Christ and the churches that he had raised up. In spite of his great gifts, he was a man of faith, prayer, and humility.

APPLICATION

- Do I have the assurance of having fought a good fight and the conviction that a crown of righteousness awaits me?
- What can I do to reach out to the lonely and desolate in order to bring them the kind of encouragement that Onesiphorus brought Paul?

Seeking to Save the Lost

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Review of Luke and Acts.



MEMORY TEXT: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Through Jesus, God enters human history in order to complete His plan to seek and to save the lost. Trusting in that salvation, the members of the church that Christ brought into being are guided by the Spirit in carrying the gospel to the world.

OVERVIEW: Luke and Acts

1. The History of Salvation
2. Jesus' Role in God's Plan
3. Salvation and Deliverance

4. Devotion to God's cause
5. Led by the Spirit
6. Witnessing to the World

INTRODUCTION: God had a plan that was brought to its climax and fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Luke insists that the history of salvation flows in a continuity from the Old to the New Testament.

As we review Luke's writings we find many principles that governed the life of early Christians which speak to us today. These include:

- A life of devotion and uprightness produces the ideal conditions for the presence of the Spirit.
- Attending worship and sharing with other believers through testifying to faith in Christ is essential for the Christian.
- Prayer strengthens us when we face trial, places us in a position where God can move to aid us. It serves to unite the believers with one another and with God.
- The Spirit will guide all who are willing to submit to God's plan.
- Jesus Christ gave ethical principles for Christians that are based on a wider and fuller interpretation of the law.
- As in most of the New Testament, the ethic "love your enemies" dominates relationships.
- Witnessing not only represents the duty of the Christian but is the best expression of a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ.



I. THE HISTORY OF SALVATION.

1. Salvation Anchored in History (Luke 2:1; 3:1).

What theme characterizes the birth of Jesus and His ministry? Luke 1:68, 69; 7:16.

We do not see the armies of the Lord as Gehazi did; nor the flight and destruction of the Philistines as David did; the Jordan does not open for us. But we do see deliverance. The Prophet has arisen. God is showing His care for His people.

How will we know that God's presence continues among His people? Acts 13:4; Luke 3:22.

God assures those who repent and turn to Him that they have a place in His plan. "None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law, and bring him again into harmony with Heaven. Christ would take upon himself the guilt and shame of sin,—sin so offensive to a holy God that it must separate the Father and His Son. Christ would reach to the depths of misery to rescue the ruined race."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 63.

2. Prophecies fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 9:31; 22:16).

How should we regard the Old Testament and its prophecies? Luke 24:27, 44; Acts 28:23.

Luke underlines the historicity of Jesus by detailing his origins, by locating Him in time (Luke 2:1; 3:1), and by insisting on His humanity.

3. Historical Continuity (Acts 28:25-28).

Luke uses "now" and "today" more than the other gospel writers. For him salvation walked the trails of Judea in the footsteps of Jesus (Luke 9:56). God's action in Christ formed the great central intervention of the plan of redemption (Acts 4:10-12). But it did not stop at the ascension when Jesus left earth. It continues in the proclamation of the gospel and in the life of the church.

How should we regard our responsibility toward the present generation? Acts 17:30.

The passing of time fixes our consciousness on the Lord who has gone to a far country (Luke 19:12) and bids us to be faithful until He returns (verses 16-19).

II. JESUS' ROLE IN GOD'S PLAN.

1. Jesus the Fulfillment of God's Plan (Luke 9:31; 22:16).

What purpose will Jesus Christ yet fulfill? Luke 19:12, 15; 21:27; Acts 3:20, 21.

Once Christ has come He enters history and moves with it through time. No other name will appear to bring salvation (Acts 4:12). His presence at the

right hand of God assures individual salvation (Acts 7:55-59). It also assures the fulfillment of God's purpose to give the kingdom to His people (Luke 21:28; 22:28, 29).

2. The Divine Necessity (Luke 4:43; Acts 17:3).

SEARCH AND LEARN: Review the way that Jesus, during His life, accepted the divine purpose for Him. Luke 2:49; 9:22; 17:25; 24:7, 26, 44.

“Ever before Him He [Jesus] saw the rest of His mission. His earthly life, so full of toil and self-sacrifice, was cheered by the prospect that He would not have all this travail for nought. By giving His life for the life of men, He would win back the world to its loyalty to God.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 410.

3. Defeating the Great Foe (Luke 11:20; Acts 26:18).

The finger of God plucked the power of Satan from the lives of the possessed (Luke 11:20-22). Before the advance of the kingdom Satan was powerless (10:18). Yet Satan had some final ploys to make. When he took over Judas (Luke 22:3), things seemed to deteriorate rapidly for Jesus and the disciples.

What alternatives await all created beings? Luke 20:17, 18; Acts 4:11, 12.

In the same way that Jesus had to meet the temptations of Satan, so the church must meet its trials (Acts 12:1-3; 20:29-31). Victory for the church also lies in prayer and submission to God's will (20:36; 21:14).



III. SALVATION AND DELIVERANCE.

1. Salvation for All (Luke 2:14; Acts 2:39).

The angels declared the birth of a Saviour for all in the human race (Luke 2:14). The times of refreshing (Acts 3:19), like the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:19), mark every day as a day of grace for all. In a touch that shows where Luke's thinking lies, he adds to John the Baptist's commission (Luke 3:6), “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

What alone limits God's ability to save? (Luke 12:28, 29; 18:8).

The urgency in the preaching of the kingdom gathers momentum in view of the coming end. Because the faithful must seek first the kingdom of God, we live prepared for battle, or a journey (Luke 12:35).

2. To the Gutter and the Palace (Luke 4:18; 19:10).

Various groups, overlooked or rejected by the religious establishment, found acceptance with Jesus. They included:

- Women, to whom Jesus gave renewed significance. He set the pattern that produced Paul's declaration that in Christ "male and female do not exist" (Luke 7:11-13; 23:27).
- Children, for whom He showed concern and love (Luke 8:42; 9:38).
- The poor (Luke 4:18; 14:12, 13).
- Tax collectors (Luke 19:1-10; 15:1-3).
- The outcasts (Luke 14:21-23).

But the book of Acts shows that many among the priests and rulers, including the household of Caesar, were touched by the gospel.

What risks attend the accumulation of wealth and the attainment of positions of authority and power? Luke 12:16-20; 18:22-24; Acts 24:24-26.

3. The Status of the Saved (Luke 18:13; Acts 16:30, 31).

SEARCH AND LEARN: As you study the following key stories in Luke's writings, discover how God regards those who come to Him: Luke 15:22-24; Acts 8:36, 37; 10:36-38.

4. Centered in the Cross (Luke 22:37; Acts 17:3).

How did Luke present the cross as the epicenter from which the waves of salvation continuously roll? Luke 22:37; Acts 17:3.

Peter declared that Jesus the crucified now reigns as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36); that He will restore all things (3:18, 21); that life-giving power flows from the cross (4:10). Paul preached that the cross brought justification (Acts 13:38, 39); that the blood of Christ had ransomed His people (20:28); that the suffering of Christ would bring light to the Gentiles (26:23). The cross not only stands at the climax of Luke's narrative, but is the center of our assurance of salvation and of our witness.



IV. DEVOTION TO GOD'S CAUSE.

1. God Uses the Devout and Humble (Luke 1:6; Acts 10:1, 2).

What group of people seem to be most aware of their need of salvation? Luke 18:14; Acts 16:29, 30.

2. A Caring and Compassionate Church (Luke 10:33, 34; Acts 20:33-35).

In a world where all suffer the wounds of sin the Christian exemplifies the compassion of the Master (Luke 10:33, 34). Luke, along with other Gospel writers, records the radical love ethic of Jesus; "Love your enemies" (Luke 6:27). Against this ethic the barriers that had been formed between Jew and Gentile might be expected to crumble.

V. LED BY THE SPIRIT (Luke 1:6; Acts 10:1, 2).**1. The Guidance and Power of the Spirit (Luke 12:12; Acts 1:8).**

Luke's Gospel begins with a great flurry of activity in Jerusalem and Nazareth as the Spirit imprints His authority of divine action on events. Acts resounds with the rushing wind of the Spirit as it drives the ship of the faithful witness ever onward.

Luke did not present the Spirit as the Giver of Christian character (Gal. 5:22, 23). He left it to Paul to convey the inner struggle between flesh and Spirit (verses 17, 18). He did, however, capture the essence of the convicting, converting power of the Spirit (John 16:7-10), and of the Spirit who guides into truth (14:26). Above all else he knew the Spirit who testifies of Jesus through the believer (15:26).

What purpose does God have in giving the Spirit to every believer? Acts 2:32, 33; 4:31.

2. Prayer Teaches Obedience and Trust (Luke 22:40, 41; Acts 20:19-24).

How does prayer help us relate to the needs and situation of others? Luke 22:31, 32; Acts 12:4, 5.

"It is our Lord's will that we who have received access to these powers through prayer should go through this world transmitting heavenly power to every corner of a world which needs it sorely. Our lives should be, according to our Lord's plans, quiet, but steadily flowing, streams of blessing, which through our prayers and intercessions should reach our whole environment."—O. Hallesby, *Prayer* (London: W. S. Cowell Ltd., 1949), p. 51.

3. Living According to God's Law (Luke 10:27, 28; Acts 20:18, 19).

Luke presents a clear picture of the lifestyle expected of the follower of Jesus. The follower will:

- Be obedient to the commandments of God (Luke 1:6; 23:56).
- Accept the will of God (Luke 1:35; Acts 5:29).
- Keep the Sabbath (Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2).
- Be generous and merciful (Luke 6:36-38; Acts 20:35).
- Be consistent and forgiving (Luke 6:41, 42).
- Love God and neighbor (Luke 10:27).

How does God expect His church to relate lifestyle to witness? Acts 9:31; 11:23, 24.

4. Hearing God's Voice (Luke 24:32; Acts 26:19).

No one could accept Luke and then abandon the Old Testament. The Lord directed His disciples to the Old Testament (Luke 24:32, 44); there the

church went for direction (Acts 1:20); there the great preachers of Acts pointed those to whom they witnessed (Acts 3:19-26).



VI. WITNESSING TO THE WORLD.

1. Equipped for Witness (Luke 10:1, 2, 16; Acts 11:23, 24).

How has God prepared the way for success to attend our witnessing endeavors? Luke 10:18, 19; Rev. 12:9-11.

While the devil still brings woe to the world (Rev. 12:12), God restricts his activity in time and authority (Rev. 13:12). Therefore "even the devils are subject unto us through thy name" (Luke 10:17); therefore evil men must stand back from God's cause (Acts 13:10, 11); therefore those who persecute face judgment (Acts 12:23).

Where does our final authority to witness reside? Acts 2:32, 33; Luke 22:29.

"There is nothing that the Saviour desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and His character. There is nothing that the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Saviour's love. All heaven is waiting for men and women through whom God can reveal the power of Christianity."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 600.

2. Using Every Opportunity (Luke 13:1-5; Acts 26:28, 29).

In Jesus' discussion about faith (Luke 17:5—18:8) He tells us to work without expecting praise for our efforts. Doing so gives evidence of faith (17:10). He points to the grateful Samaritan who gave glory to God for what Jesus had done. Doing so also gives evidence of faith (17:18, 19).

What should be our constant concern in a world of uncertainty and risk? Luke 13:1-5.

VII. ONWARD TO THE WORLD.

In what spirit should we approach the limitations that health or circumstance may place on our ability to witness? Acts 28:20; Luke 23:33, 43.

With what prayer and hope should we go to the world to meet its need? Acts 28:26, 27.

Acts 28:31 contains Luke's last words about the ministry of Paul. We sense that this is what Luke wants to leave with us—the confident preaching and teaching that filled the early church and brought its success. If he has taught us that salvation is in Jesus Christ, Luke has also taught us that confident witnessing has God's support. We respond to the salvation offered. We witness before the world. That is our only appropriate response to the love that God has bestowed on us.



FOR FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

1. "There was only a handful of believers, against whom all the power of demons and evil men would be directed; yet the followers of Christ were not to fear. Built upon the Rock of their strength, they could not be overthrown."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 413. Read the entire chapter, pages 410-418.

2. "In this hope of a sure inheritance in the earth made new, the early Christians rejoiced, even in times of severe trial and affliction. . . . The apostle's words were written for the instruction of believers in every age, and they have a special significance for those who live at the time when the 'end of all things is at hand.' "—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 517, 518.

3. For a further view of the life of faith read the epistle to the Philippians, noting the many similarities between the lifestyle Christ urged and the way the early church lived.

SUMMARY: The life of faith takes its presence in the world seriously, seeking always to represent the lifestyle the Lord commanded and witnessing at every opportunity to the ascended Lord. It remains for the church of Christ today, under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit to complete the work begun so well so long ago.

APPLICATION

Luke presents Jesus Christ as Saviour of the world. The key questions I face in this story are:

- "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?"
- What must I do to be saved?
- What do I think of Jesus? Who I believe Him to be determines whether I look to Him alone for salvation.
- How does my acceptance of Jesus as my personal Saviour affect the way I live and witness?
- What have I learned about effective witnessing from my study of Acts? What can I do this next week to apply what I have learned?

Lessons for Fourth Quarter, 1987

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the Adult Lessons for the fourth quarter of 1987 will be helped by the following outline in studying the first two lessons. The title of this series is "Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives."

First Lesson:

"DOING GOD'S WILL IN DIFFICULT TIMES"

MEMORY TEXT: Isaiah 6:8.

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Selected texts, including portions of Ruth and Esther.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God looks for and uses people of all kinds who will take hold of the task He has in mind for them in the time and place where they live.

OUTLINE:

- I. How people have been and are being used by God.
- II. Living godly lives in the midst of chaos (Ruth).
- III. Living godly lives in exile (Esther).
- IV. Women in the Bible.
- V. Called to a task.

Second Lesson:

"TRAGEDY IN THE PROMISED LAND"

MEMORY TEXT: Ruth 1:16.

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ruth 1:1-18.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Even when struggling in the midst of tragedy and disaster, the lives of God's people demonstrate something that captivates those around them.

OUTLINE:

- I. Famine in Judah (Ruth 1:1-5).
- II. Decision to return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:6-10).
- III. Decisions of the daughters-in-law (Ruth 1:11-18).

Lessons in Braille:

The regular Adult Sabbath School Lessons are available free each month in Braille and 16 ⅔ rpm records to blind and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact the Christian Record Braille Foundation, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506.

The Bible Study Seminar You Can Attend at Home

After years of study and experimentation, Fernon Retzer and Leo Van Dolson have produced a Bible Study Seminar you can use in your own home. Proving itself successful all across North America, this superior Bible-study plan can work for you.

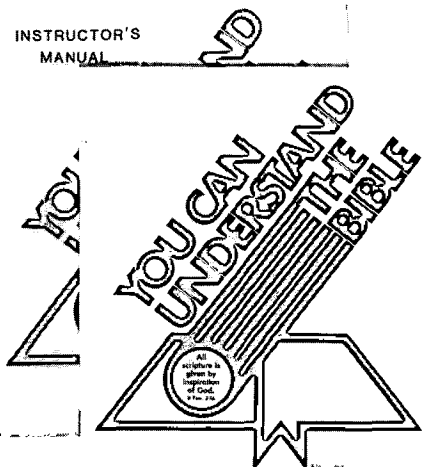
The key ingredients are two inexpensive books—**How to Get the Most out of Bible Study** and **You Can Understand the Bible**. When used together, these two valuable guides will provide you with the key to unlocking the Bible's storehouse. In addition, the other materials pictured here can help. The **Greatest of These**, containing thirty different biblical versions of 1 Corinthians 13, is just one.

This valuable Bible-study method is great for study groups and Sabbath School classes, as well as for your personal study.

Now that we are studying the various books of the Bible in Sabbath School, this seminar material is even more important.

This valuable information is also available on cassette tape. To secure your own Bible Study Seminar materials, see your ABC today or your conference Sabbath School director.

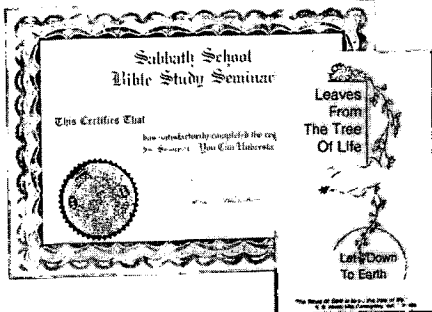
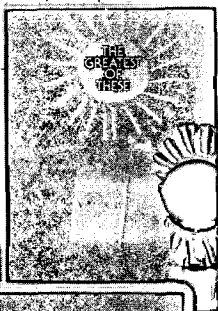
INSTRUCTOR'S
MANUAL



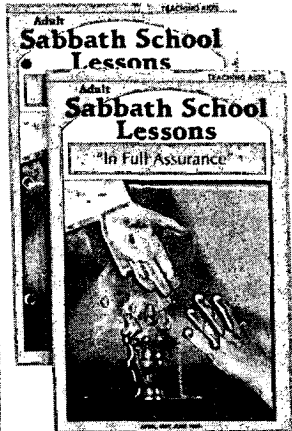
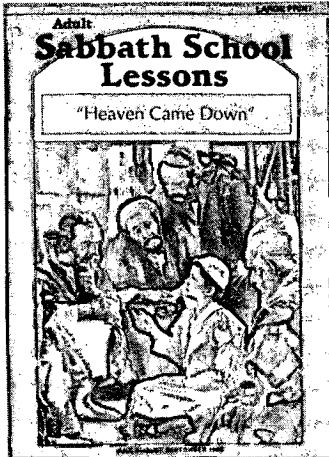
How to Get
the Most
out of

Bible
Study

Leo R. Van Dolson



A Quarterly for EVERY NEED



The General Conference Department of Church Ministries and the Pacific Press produce a wide variety of quarterlies. One is sure to meet your needs. You can subscribe to them for delivery to your own home.

The standard **Adult Sabbath School Lessons** is the quarterly most adults use in North America. Single copies—U.S. \$1.25 each. A

full year is just U.S. \$4.10.

Large Print Quarterly is produced for those who are visually impaired. Content is same as the standard adult quarterly. Single copies—U.S. \$2.50; One year—U.S. \$9.25.

Teacher's Quarterly contains special helps teachers and others find useful. Single copies—U.S. \$3.95; one year—U.S. \$14.95. Loose-leaf: single copies—U.S. \$5.00; one year—U.S. \$18.95.

Collegiate Quarterly is written with the needs and interests of college students and young adults in mind. Single copies U.S. \$2.00; one year—U.S. \$7.25.

Easy English Quarterly is specially prepared for those for whom English is a second language. Single copies—U.S. \$2.75; one year—U.S. \$9.95.

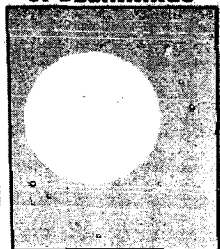
Quarterlies are also available in Samoan, Spanish, Czech, Ukranian, and Russian. See your ABC for prices.

To order, see your ABC or church personal ministries secretary. Prices subject to change without notice.

© 1987 Pacific Press Publishing Association

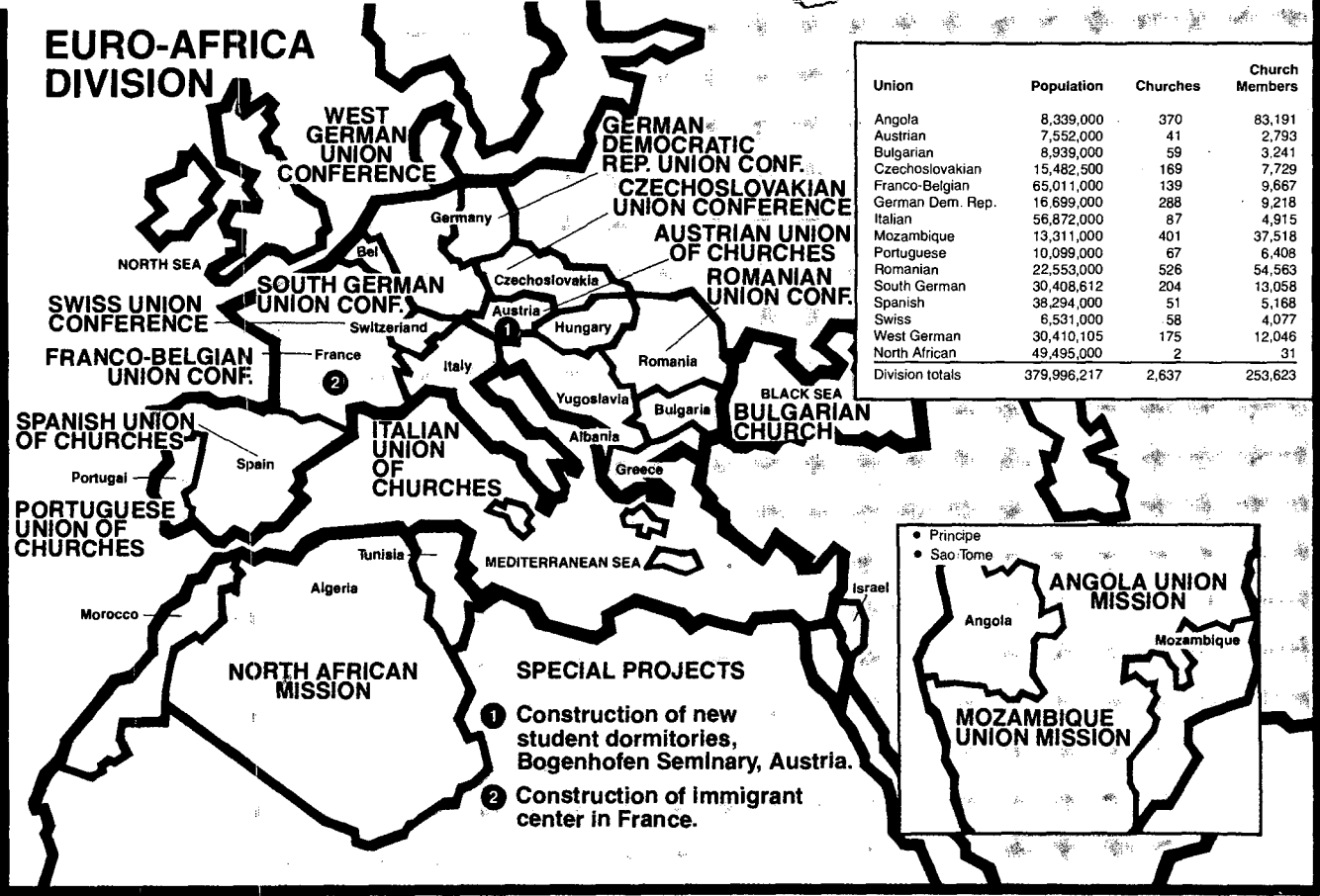
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS



EURO-AFRICA DIVISION

Union	Population	Churches	Church Members
Angola	8,339,000	370	83,191
Austrian	7,552,000	41	2,793
Bulgarian	8,939,000	59	3,241
Czechoslovakian	15,482,500	169	7,729
Franco-Belgian	65,011,000	139	9,667
German Dem. Rep.	16,699,000	288	9,218
Italian	56,872,000	87	4,915
Mozambique	13,311,000	401	37,518
Portuguese	10,099,000	67	6,408
Romanian	22,553,000	526	54,563
South German	30,408,612	204	13,058
Spanish	38,294,000	51	5,168
Swiss	6,531,000	58	4,077
West German	30,410,105	175	12,046
North African	49,495,000	2	31
Division totals	379,996,217	2,637	253,623



SPECIAL PROJECTS

- 1 Construction of new student dormitories, Bogenhofen Seminary, Austria.
- 2 Construction of immigrant center in France.

