

*All the
stories
of the* **Bible**

as crafted and told by John Walsh

Book 5

All the stories of the Bible in five books:

Beginnings

Stories 1-52

Building a Nation

Stories 53-113

Path Down to Captivity

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Work of the Holy Spirit

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Work of the Holy Spirit

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Warning to parents and teachers:

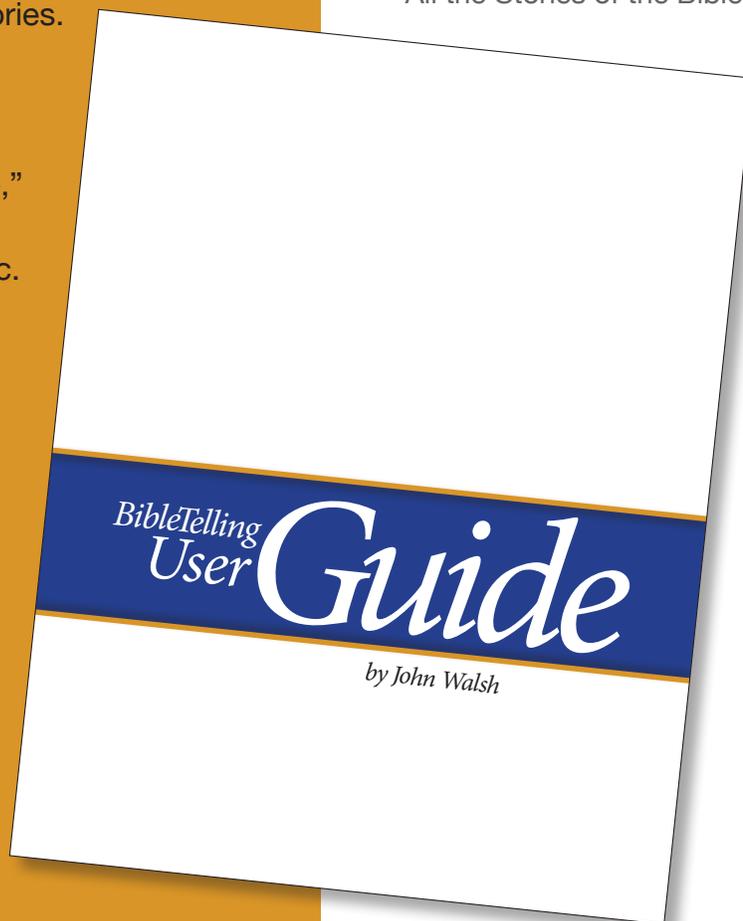
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The BibleTelling User Guide provides principles of learning and using Bible stories.

In addition, it contains ...

- **Alphabetical listing** of all the stories found throughout the Bible, including those hidden in other stories.
- **63 Groupings** - All the Bible stories grouped together under such titles as “Water stories,” “Women of the Bible,” “Lies of the Bible,” etc.
- **Overview Stories** - the whole Bible in 10 stories, 20 stories, 30 stories, and 40 stories.
- **73 Categories** - All the Bible stories grouped together under such titles as “Comfort,” “Blame,” “Deception,” “Determination,” “Forgiveness,” “Persistence,” etc.

The BibleTelling User Guide greatly increases the value of All the Stories of the Bible.



220 The Coming of the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:1 – 2:42

On the Day of Pentecost, the believers were praying in the upper room. Suddenly they heard a loud noise. It sounded like a violent storm coming out of heaven. The sound filled the room, and they saw what looked like fire. Suddenly it separated and settled on each believer. Instantly, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and started to speak in foreign languages.

People from the city heard about this. Among them were Jews from many countries who spoke different languages. They went to see what was happening. When they got there, they heard the apostles speaking in various languages, including the ones of everyone in the crowd.

Some of the people said, “This is impossible! These men can’t speak our language. They’re from Galilee. Yet we’re hearing them in our own tongue.”

Others said, “Oh, they’re just drunk.”

Peter stood up in front of them and said, “These men aren’t drunk. This is what the prophets of old talked about when they said God would pour out his Spirit upon common people.”

“You saw the miracles of Jesus. Still, you

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crucified him – nailed him to a cross and put him in the grave. But we’re witnesses that God raised him from the dead! He’s alive. He sits at the right hand of the Father. Now he has sent us his Holy Spirit. This is what you’re seeing.”

“Understand what I’m saying. You crucified Jesus, but God highly exalted him and made him Lord and Messiah!”

The people said, “What you’re saying is true, but what can we do?”

Peter said, “Repent, and we’ll baptize you in the name of Jesus. Once you’ve received forgiveness of your sins, God will fill you with the Holy Spirit.”

That day, the apostles baptized those who received the message. The number of believers grew to over 3,000 people. They met together often so they could learn from each other and from the apostles.

The apostles did many miracles and wonders, and the number of believers grew day by day. These believers dedicated themselves to prayer, sharing meals together, and spending time with each other.

221 A Crippled Man Healed

Acts 3:1 – 4:31

One afternoon, Peter and John went to the temple at the time of prayer. There they saw a man begging who had been crippled since he was born. Every day people carried him to a gate called Beautiful so he could beg money from those going into the temple

Peter stopped in front of the man and said, “Look at me.”

The man looked at him, expecting to get some money. Peter said, “I don’t have money to give you, but I have something better. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk.”

As Peter and John helped the man up, his feet and legs became strong. He stood by himself and then he walked. He even jumped for joy while praising God!

People saw the man walking, and recognized him as the one who was crippled and sat begging at the gate. They gathered around the three men.

Peter said, “This man was healed by the name of Jesus, the one you told Pilate to crucify. You killed Jesus, but God raised him from the dead. We’ve seen him and can tell you – he’s alive.

“Look at this man. He’s standing by the power of Jesus. Turn from your sin and accept Jesus as your Messiah. God will forgive your sins.”

The Jewish rulers found out that Peter and John were preaching to the people, so they sent guards who put the two disciples in prison. Still, many people became followers of Christ. The

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number of believers increased to over 5,000.

The next morning, the high priest sent for the two men, so they could stand before the council. The religious leaders asked, “Who gave you the authority to preach to the people?”

The Holy Spirit guided Peter as he answered. “This man was healed by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth – the one you killed on a cross. God raised him from the dead, and he’s the only way of salvation.”

The rulers were amazed at the confidence of Peter and John. Since the two men didn’t have a formal education, they knew their boldness came from being with Jesus.

The council couldn’t say anything about the miracle because the crippled man was standing in front of them. They could see he was healed.

They decided to threaten the disciples and demand that they stop teaching about Jesus. Peter and John didn’t hesitate to answer. “You’re asking us to disobey God so we can obey you. That’s impossible! We know what we’ve seen and heard.”

The leaders eventually released Peter and John. The two men went back to the fellowship of believers and told them what happened. Everyone rejoiced together. Suddenly the building started to shake, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. With this, they had new boldness to tell others about God’s message.

222 Ananias & Sapphira

Acts 4:32 – 5:16

The believers shared everything they owned. If someone had a need, others would sell their possessions and give to that need.

A godly man named Barnabas had some land and sold it for the needs of others. He brought the money and gave it to the apostles.

A married couple named Ananias and Sapphira also decided to sell some land and give the money to the apostles. It was to be used for the good of the church. But Ananias changed his mind after the land was sold. He and his wife decided to keep some of the money for themselves. The two of them agreed that they'd still give part of the money to the church but say they gave it all.

Ananias went to the gathering of believers without Sapphira. He gave his gift to Peter and said it was the full amount he had gotten when he sold the land. Peter looked at him and said, "Satan has filled your heart and caused you to lie to the Holy Spirit. You didn't have to sell your land; and once it was sold you didn't have to give all of the money to the church. Why did you decide to lie about this? You didn't lie to us. You lied to God."

As soon as Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. This caused great fear to spread

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across the entire congregation. Several young men picked him up, wrapped him in strips of cloth, carried him out, and buried him.

Three hours later, Sapphira came to the gathering. She hadn't heard about what happened to her husband. Peter said to her, "Did you and your husband sell the land for the amount of money you gave to the church?"

"Yes, that was the total selling price."

Peter looked at her, "Why did the two of you agree to test the Holy Spirit? Listen. Do you hear those footsteps? Those are the young men who just buried your husband. Now they'll take your dead body and bury it.

Immediately, she fell down and died. The young men came and found her lying dead on the ground. They picked her up and buried her next to her husband.

News of this spread throughout the region. Because of it, people were more careful when they thought about joining the band of believers. Still, their numbers increased greatly – of both men and women.

People from Jerusalem and the surrounding towns brought sick people and placed them by the side of the road. They were healed when Peter walked by and his shadow passed over them.

223 Apostles and Deacons

Acts 5:17 – 6:7

The message of Jesus spread throughout Jerusalem, which made the Jewish leaders angry. They sent guards, who arrested the apostles and put them in prison.

That night, an angel came and let them out without the guards seeing it. The angel said, “Go to the temple in the morning and preach to the people.” At sunrise, the apostles went to the temple.

Later in the morning, the high priest gathered the governing council. He then sent the captain of the guards to bring the apostles out of prison. When the captain got there, the prison cell was empty. He rushed back and said, “The guards are at their post and the doors are locked, but the men are not inside!”

At that moment, someone ran in and said, “The men you put in prison are now teaching in the temple!”

The captain of the guards took his men and went to the temple where they found the apostles teaching the people. He then realized he couldn’t use force against them because his men were afraid of the people. Still, the apostles went with him willingly.

The high priest said, “We told you not to teach in the name of Jesus. Yet you’ve filled Jerusalem with your doctrine. You’re even saying that we’re guilty of killing Jesus.”

Peter spoke up, “We must obey God rather than men. You killed Jesus by putting him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead. Now he sits at God’s right hand and gives repentance and forgiveness of sins.”

This made the religious leaders angry. They sent the apostles out of the room, and then

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discussed how they were going to kill them. A respected member of the council spoke up, “Be careful what you do with these men. My advice is to leave them alone. If they’re simply following human emotions, nothing will come of it. But if this movement is from God, you can’t stop it. In fact, you’ll be fighting against God.”

After some discussion, they agreed with this advice. Still, before letting the men go, they had the apostles beaten and said, “Never speak in the name of Jesus again.”

The apostles left the council rejoicing. They said, “God has allowed us to suffer for the name of Jesus!” They continued to preach Christ, and the number of believers grew even larger.

A problem developed at this time. The church made provision for the widows among them. Some of the widows were from Israel, and some were from Jewish communities in other countries. The ones from Israel received better care than the others.

The apostles said, “We must focus on preaching the Word of God and prayer. Still, this need must be met.”

They told the congregation to select seven men who would oversee this responsibility. They said, “Whoever you choose must be highly respected and filled with the Holy Spirit. They must be known for their wisdom.” Everyone liked this idea, so they selected seven men who were qualified. The group included Stephen and Philip.

The apostles prayed for these men and gave them the responsibility for this need. This caused the number of believers to grow faster. Even a large group of Jewish priests put their faith in Christ.

224 Stephen, the First Christian Martyr

Acts 6:8 – 7:60

God's power was on Stephen. Several Jewish groups tried to debate him, but found they were no match for his wisdom and power. They decided to spread lies about him and say he blasphemed God. These rumors spread throughout the city until guards went and took him to the governing council.

Men stood up and lied about him. They said, "He said that Jesus is going to tear down this Temple and change everything that Moses gave us."

They turned and looked at Stephen, when suddenly his face became like that of an angel. The high priest spoke up. "Are you guilty of these things?"

Stephen answered, "God said to Abraham, 'Leave your country and go to a place I will show you.' "

Stephen continued by giving a brief history of Israel. He told how God promised to give Abraham the land and make his descendants into a great nation. Abraham believed God even though he didn't have any children.

Eventually he had a son named Isaac who had a son named Jacob. From him came the twelve tribes of Israel. His descendants were made slaves in Egypt.

Stephen said, "God used Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses told the people that there would come a Great Prophet who'd be like him."

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Stephen told how King David wanted to build a Temple for God, but it was his son Solomon who actually built it. Finally he said, "You are a rebellious people with cold hearts! You resist the Holy Spirit just like your forefathers did. They persecuted all of the prophets, and now you're walking in their footsteps. You've betrayed and murdered the Righteous One."

The council flew into a rage. They cried out against him. Through it all, the Holy Spirit controlled Stephen. Suddenly he looked up and said, "The heavens are opening and I see Jesus standing at the right hand of God."

The crowd put their hands over their ears and screamed as loud as they could. They grabbed Stephen and took him out of the city and threw him on the ground. They gave their coats to a young man named Saul. They then took large stones and threw them at Stephen.

While the stones were hitting him, Stephen looked up and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he prayed, "Lord, forgive them for this sin." With that, he fell beneath the blows and died.

This started a great persecution of the church in Jerusalem. Saul led a mob that pulled men and women out of their homes and threw them into prison. Because of this, many believers left Jerusalem and went to surrounding areas. Still, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem.

225 The Ministry of Philip

Acts 8:4 – 8:40

When the persecution started in Jerusalem, believers were scattered throughout the region. Wherever they went, they told people about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Philip went to the city of Samaria and preached Christ. The Holy Spirit allowed him to perform miracles among the people. Unclean spirits were cast out – screaming. The paralyzed were healed as well as the lame. The people of the city were amazed at what they saw, so they listened carefully to his preaching. They were filled with joy at what they heard.

The people there had been following the witchcraft of a man named Simon. But when they heard the gospel of Christ, they received it with joy. Simon also believed, and was baptized with the others.

The apostles heard that the people of Samaria welcomed the gospel, so they sent Peter and John to meet with them. After they arrived, they prayed for the believers, asking God to give them the Holy Spirit. The two men then laid their hands on the people, and the people immediately received the Holy Spirit.

Simon watched this with amazement. He offered Peter and John money and said, “Give me this power, so I can lay my hands on people and they’ll receive the Holy Spirit.”

Peter said, “You’ll be destroyed along with your money. You’re still holding on to your old ways. Evil lives inside of you. Pray and ask

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God to get rid of it.”

Simon cried out, “Please, pray for me. I don’t want these things to happen.”

After Peter and John went back to Jerusalem, God sent an angel to Philip. “Go to the road that leads south from Jerusalem.”

When Philip got there he saw an important official from Ethiopia. He was the treasurer of their Queen. He had been in Jerusalem to worship.

The Spirit told Philip to get close to the man’s chariot. When he did, he found that the official was reading from one of the prophets who had written about Christ several hundred years before.

Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

The man said, “No, I need someone to explain it to me. Is the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” Philip got into the chariot and told him about Jesus and the forgiveness of sins.

As they traveled, the man said, “Look, there’s some water. May I be baptized right now?”

Philip said, “You may, if you believe that Jesus is the Messiah and accept him as your Lord.”

The Ethiopian paused and then said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

They stopped the chariot, went into the water, and Philip baptized him. As soon as the man came out of the water, he saw that Philip was gone. The Spirit had taken him away.

Philip found himself at another place, so he went from city to city preaching Christ.

226 The Conversion of Saul

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Acts 9:1-31

Saul was on a campaign to hunt down and kill those who followed Jesus. He was given authority from the high priest to go to Damascus and bring believers back to Jerusalem.

As he and his men approached Damascus, suddenly a bright light shown around them, and Saul fell to the ground. He heard a voice saying, "Saul! Saul! Why are you fighting against me?"

"Who are you Lord?"

"I'm Jesus, the one you're persecuting. It's hard to fight against my will for your life."

Those with Saul didn't know what was going on. They could hear the sound of a voice, but they couldn't see anyone.

Saul trembled. "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

"Go into the city and you'll be told what to do."

When Saul got up, he realized he was blind. Others led him into the city. He waited for three days, and refused to eat or drink anything.

The Lord spoke to a disciple in Damascus. "Ananias, go to a house on the street called Straight, and ask for Saul of Tarsus. Place your hands on him and he'll regain his sight."

Ananias was concerned. "Lord, everyone knows about this violent man. He's here to imprison anyone who calls on your name."

The Lord said, "He is a chosen servant of mine. He'll spread the Gospel to Jews, Gentiles, and kings. He'll suffer greatly for me."

Ananias found him and said, "Brother Saul, Jesus appeared to you on the road, and then he told me to come to you." Ananias placed his hands on Saul's head. "Regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit!"

Immediately Saul could see. With joy, he was baptized and then ate some food.

Saul spent several days with the believers in Damascus, and then started preaching that Jesus was the Son of God. People were amazed because they knew he had come there to kill followers of Jesus.

But now they listened to him and found he was very persuasive when he talked about Jesus. No one could argue with him. So they decided to kill him.

Their plan was to capture him when he tried to leave the city. The believers found out about this, and took him to the city wall. They put him in a large basket and let him down on the other side. From there, he returned to Jerusalem.

The believers in Jerusalem were afraid of him. They felt he was trying to entrap them. So Barnabas brought Saul to the apostles and told them what had happened to him. "The Lord appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. Since then he has been speaking in the name of Jesus with great courage."

The believers finally accepted Saul and he moved freely among them. He went into Jerusalem and told everyone about the Lord. Some started arguing with him, but again they could not compete with his power of persuasion. So, they plotted to kill him.

The believers in Christ found out about their scheme, so they sent him to Tarsus.

This started a time of peace for the believers in Israel. The Holy Spirit was with them. They grew in their faith and increased in numbers.

227 Healing of Dorcas

Acts 9:32-43

Peter traveled from place to place, preaching the Gospel of Christ and encouraging fellow believers. At one place, he found a paralyzed man who had been lying on his bed for eight years.

Peter said to him, "The Lord Jesus has healed you, so get up." Immediately the man was healed and got up. People in that area saw the man and heard what happened, and many of them put their faith in Christ.

There was a woman named Dorcas who lived nearby in the city of Joppa. As a disciple of Jesus, she loved people and did good works for them. She became sick and died.

Her friends prepared her body for burial, and placed it in an upstairs room. The disciples in Joppa heard that Peter was in the area, so they sent two

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men to him. They said, "Please come with us right away." Peter agreed and went with them.

When he arrived in Joppa, they took him to the house where they had laid the body of Dorcas. He went upstairs and found women weeping for her. When they saw him, they showed him the various robes and clothes that Dorcas had made while she was alive.

Peter sent them out of the room, and knelt down and prayed. Turning to the body, he said, "Dorcas, get up!"

With that, she opened her eyes and saw Peter. So she sat up. He helped her up from the bed, and then called for the other women. He presented Dorcas to them – alive.

The news of this spread throughout Joppa, and many put their faith in Jesus.

228 Cornelius

Acts 10:1 – 11:18

Cornelius was a military officer in the Roman army. He was a good man who worshiped God.

An angel appeared to him and said, “Cornelius, God has heard your prayers. Send men to Joppa, to the home of Simon the tanner who lives by the sea. There they’ll find a man called Peter and he’ll tell you what to do.” With that, the angel disappeared.

Immediately Cornelius sent men to Joppa. They arrived the next day around noon. Before they got there, Peter went up to the open roof to pray. He was waiting for the noon meal.

Suddenly he became extremely hungry and fell into a trance. He saw the heavens open and a large sheet come down. In it were all kinds of animals that Jews weren’t allowed to eat. A voice said, “Peter, get up. Kill one of these animals and eat it.”

“Lord, you know I’ve never eaten anything common or unclean.”

The voice said, “When God has made something clean, never call it common or unclean.” This happened a second time, and a third. Then the sheet went back into heaven.

Peter woke up but was confused about what this vision meant. At that moment, the men from Cornelius were at the gate. The Holy Spirit said, “I’ve sent these men to you. Don’t hesitate to go with them.”

Peter went down and greeted the men. They told him about Cornelius, and he agreed to go with them. In the morning he took several believers and they started on their trip.

They arrived the next day, and Cornelius ran to meet them. He fell down in front of Peter and started to worship him. Peter said, “Stand up! I’m just a man.”

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He went into Cornelius’ home and saw that he had invited others to be there so they could hear God’s message. Peter said to the group. “God revealed to me that he has opened the door and is now calling people from other nations to himself. Therefore, I’ll tell you the message that was given to Israel. It is that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.”

He then told them about Jesus and his miracles. He described how the Jewish leaders killed him, but God raised him from the dead. Peter said, “Everyone who puts their faith in Jesus will receive forgiveness of sins.”

As soon as he said those words, the Holy Spirit filled every person in the house. This shocked the Jewish believers when they saw that the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to Gentiles.

Peter turned to them and said, “Is there any reason why we shouldn’t baptize these people?” They all agreed, so the new believers were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

News of this quickly spread to believers throughout the nation. The leadership in Jerusalem asked Peter, “You stayed in the home of Gentiles and even ate meals with them?”

He explained exactly what happened. He told them about the vision on the housetop, the crowd at the house of Cornelius, and how the Holy Spirit filled the people. He concluded by saying, “God gave them the same gift he gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. How could I fight against God?”

The believers in Jerusalem had no argument when they heard this. They said, “God has given forgiveness of sins and eternal life to the Gentiles.”

229 Christians at Antioch

Acts 11:19-30

The killing of Stephen started a great persecution. Therefore, some believers went north to a city called Antioch. When they first got there, they preached only to Jews, but eventually they shared the message of Christ with Gentiles as well. God honored this and gave great power to their teaching. Many Gentiles put their faith in Jesus.

The church in Jerusalem heard about what happened and felt they needed to investigate, so they sent Barnabas. When he got there, he watched what the church was doing – and found that God was blessing them with abundant grace!

Barnabas was thrilled, so he encouraged the believers. He told them to always follow Jesus and remain true to what the Lord taught. The people responded to the teaching of Barnabas because they knew he was a good man, full of

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the Holy Spirit and faith.

This resulted in even more people coming to Christ – in large numbers. Barnabas soon realized he needed help. So he went to Tarsus and found Saul. The two of them returned to Antioch, and for a full year they worked together with the believers. They taught large crowds of people.

It was in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

The Lord revealed to the church in Antioch that there would be a great famine. When it came, it was especially bad in Judea.

The Christians in Antioch were concerned about their fellow believers in Jerusalem. They took a collection, and every family gave according to their ability. Then they asked Barnabas and Saul to take their offering to the church in Jerusalem

230 Jail Break

Acts 12

Barnabas and Saul arrived in Jerusalem about the time King Herod decided to persecute the Christians. He started by arresting James the brother of John. Eventually Herod had James killed. When he saw how much this pleased the Jews, he arrested Peter and had him put in prison. Sixteen soldiers guarded him. The church began praying for Peter, and didn't stop.

The night before he was to be executed, Peter was sleeping between two guards. His hands and feet were in chains. The other guards were standing next to various doors in the prison.

Suddenly, an angel appeared and filled the prison cell with light. Peter didn't wake up; so the angel poked him. "Wake up and get dressed." Peter looked up and saw the angel, but didn't believe this was really happening. He thought he was seeing a vision. Still, he got up, and his chains dropped to the floor.

The angel said, "Follow me." Peter followed him through several guard posts until they came to the iron gate that led out into the city. Peter watched as it opened by itself.

They went along a city street when suddenly the angel disappeared. Peter stood alone in the night air, and finally realized he wasn't dreaming.

He went to where believers were praying for him, and knocked on the gate. A servant

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girl came to answer. She was surprised to hear Peter's voice through the door. She ran back into the house and yelled, "Peter is standing at the door."

They didn't believe her, but she kept saying, "I know what I heard. Peter is at the door."

They said, "That's impossible! Peter is in prison. You probably heard his angel."

Peter continued knocking at the door, so they finally opened it. They were shocked when they saw him standing there, and they all started talking at the same time. Peter said, "Please, let me tell you what happened."

He then told them exactly how the Lord sent an angel to deliver him. They all gave praise to God for what he had done.

The next morning, the guards were horrified to find that Peter was missing! When Herod found out, he had all sixteen men executed.

Herod then went to a resort on the coast and delivered a speech to a crowd of people. After he was done, they shouted, "This is the voice of a god!" Herod was filled with pride. Suddenly, an angel struck him, and he was infested with worms and died.

The work of God continued to grow and spread. Barnabas and Saul left Jerusalem and headed back to Antioch, taking John Mark with them.

231 First Missionary Journey

Acts 13

The Holy Spirit said to the church at Antioch, "I've called Barnabas and Saul to a special work." So the leadership sent them out to serve the Lord.

They took John Mark with them, and sailed to the island of Cyprus. There they preached at Jewish synagogues as they moved across the island. Saul was also called Paul.

The governor of the island was known for his sound wisdom, and his willingness to learn. He called for Barnabas and Paul to come and tell him God's message. As they talked, a man who practiced witchcraft kept interrupting. He was trying to keep the governor from putting his faith in Christ.

Paul turned to the sorcerer and said, "You're an enemy of God. Stop talking against the Lord. Look! The Lord is about to make you blind."

Instantly the man became blind. Others had to lead him out of the room. The governor was shocked, and he listened even more carefully to Paul. Soon he put his faith in Christ.

After this, Paul and the others sailed to the mainland, where John Mark returned home to Jerusalem. The rest of them went to the synagogue because it was the Sabbath. The leader said to them, "Friends, speak to us if you have an encouraging message."

Paul stood and talked to them. He started by reminding them of the stories of Israel. He then

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said, "God promised to bring a Savior from the line of King David. Jesus fulfilled that promise. The rulers in Jerusalem knew these things. Still they killed Jesus by putting him on the cross. Then they buried him in a tomb, but God raised him from the dead!"

"We're here to tell you that Jesus is the Son of God, and he brings forgiveness of sins to those who believe in him. Be careful that you don't miss what God is doing for you."

Some of the Jews listened to Paul and received the grace of God. Others wanted him to come back the following Sabbath so they could talk about it some more.

The Jews returned the next week and found that almost the entire city was there to hear the message of God. They became jealous and spoke out against Paul and Barnabas.

Paul said, "It was right for us to bring God's message to you first. But you didn't accept it. You're not worthy of eternal life. Now we'll turn to the Gentiles because they'll listen."

The Gentiles were glad when they heard this, and many received the message. The Word of God spread throughout the region, which made the Jews furious. They finally convinced the town leaders to persecute Paul and Barnabas.

Eventually, the men had to leave that area. Still, the disciples in the city were filled with the Holy Spirit, and joy was in their hearts.

232 From Worship to Stoning

Acts 14

Paul and Barnabas went to a city called Iconium and preached the message of Christ at the Jewish synagogue. The reactions were extreme. A great number of Jews and Gentiles put their faith in Jesus. But others were offended and eventually stirred up the population against the Christians. Soon the entire city was in an uproar.

City officials decided that the only way to solve the problem was to kill Paul and Barnabas. The apostles found out about this and were able to escape.

They went to a town called Lystra, and Paul preached the gospel of Christ. A man was sitting nearby who had been crippled since birth. He listened carefully to everything that was being said. Paul looked at the man and realized that God had put faith in his heart. So he said to him, "Stand up!" Immediately the man got up and started walking.

The people saw this and were amazed. They started yelling, "The gods have come to visit us!" People crowded around to see the gods who looked like men. Soon a pagan priest ran up with some animals. He and the people started sacrificing to Paul and Barnabas.

The apostles were horrified and ran out among the people, "What are you doing? We are men just like you. We're here to bring you good

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news. God wants you to leave such foolishness and turn to him. He created all things, and he's the one who provides for your daily needs." Still the people wanted to sacrifice animals to them.

During this commotion, Jews arrived from the other cities where Paul and Barnabas had been. It didn't take them long to turn the crowd into an angry mob. They picked up large rocks to kill Paul. Surrounding him, they threw the stones until he fell beneath the blows. This continued until they thought he was dead. His body was dragged out of the city and thrown onto a trash heap.

The believers of Christ gathered around the body of Paul to mourn his death. Suddenly he stood up – and walked back into the city!

The next day he and Barnabas went to another city, where many people put their faith in Christ. At this point, they revisited the various places they had been. They encouraged the believers and appointed elders for the churches. All of these towns were in a region called Galatia.

Finally they sailed back to Antioch to visit the church that had sent them out. When they arrived, the people gathered to hear all that had happened on their trip. Paul and Barnabas told what God had done, and how he opened doors so Gentiles could put their faith in Christ.

233 Keeping Jewish Laws

Acts 15:1-35

Jewish teachers from Jerusalem went to Antioch. They started teaching members of the church that a person had to obey Jewish law in order to be saved. Paul and Barnabas were shocked at this teaching and tried to correct it. This only started an argument.

Finally, the church leaders felt they needed to get guidance from the apostles. So they sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, along with several others.

When they arrived at the church in Jerusalem, the two men gave a report of how eagerly the Gentiles received the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Pharisees among the membership responded by saying, "It's wonderful that they've put their faith in Christ. But now they must be circumcised and be taught to obey the laws of Moses."

This caused a lot of discussion. Finally, the church leaders realized that this issue had to be resolved if the work of God was to prosper. They decided to meet together and not leave until they knew God's will on this matter.

At one point, Peter spoke to the group. He said, "I was the first one to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. God forgave their sins and gave them the Holy Spirit. The way he treated them was no different than how he has treated us. I don't believe God would be pleased if we required them to do something that we Jews have not been able

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to do. Listen to what I say. It's only by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we can be saved from our sins, both Jews and Gentiles."

Paul and Barnabas then told what God had done among the Gentiles. They described the miracles and the wonders that were done.

Finally, James (the brother of Jesus) stood up and spoke to the others. He said, "We must remember that years ago the Scriptures told us about this. It clearly states that God will call Gentiles by his name. Here's my advice. It wouldn't be right to put all of our rules on the Gentiles. Instead, let's give them three simple commandments:

- Don't eat meat that has been offered to idols.
- Don't be immoral.
- Don't eat blood or anything that has been strangled."

The church agreed on this idea. They put it in a letter and sent it to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They also sent a couple of men so there would be no doubt that the letter was from them. One of the men was Silas.

When they arrived at Antioch, they gave the letter to the church leaders, who read it to the congregation. The church received the letter with joy. Everyone was encouraged when they heard of their freedom in Christ.

234 Letter to the Galatians

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Teachers from Jerusalem went to the church in Antioch and taught that Gentiles had to obey the Laws of Moses in order to be totally forgiven from their sins. After the Christians in Antioch rejected this doctrine, those same teachers went to Galatia – to the churches Paul and Barnabas had started during their first missionary journey.

Paul found out that the Christians in Galatia were accepting this teaching, so he wrote a letter to them explaining their freedom in Christ. He said:

I'm shocked that you turned away from the grace of God. These false teachers told you that you have to keep Jewish Law in order to be completely saved – and you believed them! How can you be so foolish as to accept this “other gospel?”

I gave you the pure gospel of Christ. So even if an angel from heaven comes and tells you something different – that angel is cursed! Yes, you heard me right. Let me be perfectly clear. Anyone who preaches this heresy is cursed.

Believe me, I understand what they're teaching. I loved Jewish tradition – so much that I tried to destroy the churches of God. But Christ saved me and called me to preach the gospel to Gentiles. He personally instructed me for three years in Arabia.

Now listen. Those same false teachers came to Antioch and tried to enslave our believers. I didn't tolerate it for one moment – absolutely not! The church finally sent Barnabas and me to Jerusalem to bring this issue before the apostles. They saw that God called me to the Gentiles in the same way Peter was called to the Jews.

But later, I had to confront Peter on this very issue. He came to Antioch and ate freely with Gentiles. But then some Jews came from Jerusalem. He immediately separated himself from his Gentile brothers. Other Jews joined him in this. Even Barnabas was pulled into this hypocrisy. I told Peter in front of everyone that this wasn't right!

Here's the principle he was ignoring: In Christ, there are no Jews or Gentiles. There are no slaves

or free, male or female. We all died with Christ when he was crucified. We rose from the dead with him, so now Christ lives in us. Salvation comes by the death of Christ, and it has nothing to do with keeping the Law.

Do you understand this? How are you so easily deceived? Did you receive the Spirit of God because you obeyed the Law? Did God work miracles among you because you were so good? Absolutely not! It was because of your faith in Christ. Don't be so silly as to think that by keeping the Law you can add one little thing to what God has done!

God didn't even give Abraham righteousness because he kept the Law. No. He was born 430 years before it was written. He was righteous because of his faith in God. The Law was given later to show that people are sinners, and they are condemned. It reveals our need to accept Christ.

God said to Abraham, “All the nations will be blessed through you.” Think of it. The promises given to Abraham are now given to you because of Christ. Are you going to turn your back on that?

These false teachers want to take away these blessings, and they want to take away the freedom you enjoy in Christ. Don't let them do it! This freedom gives you the ability to serve others.

Instead of worrying about the Law, focus on being led by the Spirit of God. He'll keep you from things like immorality, going after false gods, being consumed with yourself, taking advantage of others, and losing control of your good senses.

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The Spirit of God gives you the gift of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. The Law can't do that. The Spirit of God controls your thoughts and desires. He gives you the power

- to gently restore those who have done wrong
- to help others when they need you
- to accomplish great things for God
- to give to those who invest their lives in you.

Don't submit to the Law. Instead, allow the Spirit of God to control your life. Listen, you can't fool God. You'll reap the results of what you do.

Destruction awaits those who are controlled by fleshly desires. Life is given to those who let the Spirit of God use them to help others.

God knows my heart, and he knows I'm not writing to you so I can brag to others. That is what those false teachers are doing. No, I don't brag about anything except the cross of Jesus Christ. I was crucified with him, so this world is dead to me. I carry the marks of this death in my body.

Pay attention to what I say, and the grace of Jesus Christ be with you.

235 Singing in Jail

Acts 16

Paul said to Barnabas, "It's time we visit Galatia and see how the churches are doing." Barnabas agreed, but wanted to take John Mark along. Paul refused, pointing out that Mark deserted them on the last trip. They couldn't agree upon this, so they decided to go different directions. Paul chose Silas to go with him.

While they were visiting Galatia, they found a young man named Timothy. He was highly respected by all of the believers, so Paul encouraged him to join their ministry.

One night, Paul dreamed he saw a man saying, "Come. Cross over the sea and help us." Paul awoke and knew this was from God.

Once they sailed across the sea, they went to a city called Philippi. They spoke to a group of women who had gone to the river for prayer. One of them was Lydia, a woman who sold expensive purple cloth. She listened to Paul preach, and then she and her family put their trust in Christ. After they were baptized, they convinced Paul to use their house as the home base for his ministry.

In that same city, there was a demon-possessed slave girl who made money for her owners by predicting the future. She started following Paul and Silas through the streets of Philippi. Suddenly she yelled out, "These men are here to tell us about salvation."

She did this for several days. Finally Paul turned and said to the spirit within her, "Leave that girl! By the name of Jesus Christ, come out of her." Immediately the spirit left her.

Her owners were furious! They knew the slave girl was no longer profitable to them. So they gathered a mob who took Paul and Silas to the city officials. They said, "These Jews came to Philippi and started teaching the citizens of Rome about their God. It's not right!"

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The city officials agreed and had the two men beaten publicly. They were then taken to jail, where the jailer put them in chains.

Around midnight, Paul and Silas started praying, singing, and giving praise to God. Suddenly an earthquake shook the foundations of the jail. The doors flew open and the chains fell off the prisoners.

The jailer woke up and saw that the doors were open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he pulled out his sword to kill himself. Paul shouted, "Wait! Don't do that! We're all here."

The jailer grabbed a torch and rushed into the cell. He fell down and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

"Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you'll be saved – you and your family." The jailer took them to his home and Paul explained the message of Christ. The entire family believed and was baptized. The jailer then washed the wounds of the men and served them a meal.

The next morning the city officials sent guards to the jailer. They said, "You may release those men and let them go their way."

Paul sent a message back to the city officials. "We're not leaving! We're Roman citizens, and you had us beaten publicly and thrown into jail without a trial. Now you want us leave quietly. We're not going. If you want us to leave, you'll have to come and personally release us."

The city officials were shocked when they heard that these men were Roman citizens. They rushed to the jail and quickly apologized. They personally brought them out of the jail and asked them to please leave the city.

Paul and Silas didn't leave right away. They went back to the home of Lydia and encouraged the believers in Christ. Then they left.

236 Riots and Laughter

Acts 17

Paul and Silas and their group traveled to Thessalonica. They spent three weeks reasoning with the Jews, explaining how Messiah needed to come and suffer and then rise from the dead. They said, "Jesus is this Promised One."

Some of the Jews accepted Christ, as well as a large number of Greeks. This upset the other Jews, and they decided to destroy the movement. They became so angry they organized a mob against them.

Soon the entire city was in an uproar! They couldn't find Paul, so they took several other believers and pulled them out into the street. They led them to the city officials and said; "A group of men are causing trouble throughout the entire world. They're not loyal to Caesar but say they have another king, a man named Jesus. Now these troublemakers have come to our city, and these men have welcomed them into their homes."

The officials were cautious and said they would look into the matter. They made the believers pay a large bail before releasing them. That night, the Christians sent Paul and Silas to Berea.

The Jews at Berea welcomed the message of Christ and searched the Scriptures to see if it was true. Therefore, many Jews and Greeks received Christ. News of this got back to the people at Thessalonica. So the Jews there went to Berea to continue their fight against the

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movement. The attacks became so severe that the Christians sent Paul to Athens by boat. The plan was for Silas and Timothy to stay at Berea and join him later.

When Paul arrived at Athens, he was shocked to see all the idols. Finally he went to the market place and told people about Jesus. They were fascinated with this talk of a man being raised from the dead. So they took Paul to a place called Mars Hill and let him talk to the crowd.

He said, "Men of Athens! I can see you're extremely religious. I even found an idol called 'To the Unknown God.' Let me tell you about the God you don't know.

"He is the Lord of Heaven and has made everything on earth. He doesn't live in things made by people. In the beginning God created one man, and all the nations of the earth have come from him. Everything you have comes from God. He is the reason you live.

"God has been patient with you in the past, but now you're to repent. He'll judge you by Jesus, the one who rose from the dead."

Some of the men laughed when they heard that Jesus rose from the dead. Others wanted to hear more some other time. A few people believed and put their trust in Christ.

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth to wait for Silas and Timothy.

237 First Letter to the Thessalonians

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Paul started a church in Thessalonica, but wasn't able to spend much time there. Persecution became severe and the Christians insisted on taking him out of the area. So he left Silas and Timothy to help these young Christians. He waited for them in Corinth.

He was concerned for this young church because of the persecution they were experiencing. Finally, Silas and Timothy brought wonderful news of how the people were remaining true to Christ even with all the suffering. Paul immediately wrote this letter to encourage them. He said:

Silas, Timothy, and I thank God for you constantly. We pray for you night and day. We remember how you accepted Christ in the storm of conflict. We didn't preach with flattering words, but you knew what we said was anointed by the Holy Spirit. You proved our worth and accepted our message. Now everyone talks about how you turned from idols to serve the living God, and how you patiently wait for the return of Christ.

You graciously received us, just like you received the gospel. We watched over you, as a nursing mother with her child. We took jobs to pay our own way, to make it easier for you. Our love for you was like that of a devoted father, helping you to learn how to walk with God.

Now the gospel is working inside you. People hate you because they hate the gospel. I wanted to be there during this time of trial, but Satan stood in my way. Hear what I say – You're my hope; You're my joy; You're my crown of boasting before the Lord!

When I realized that I couldn't be with you, I left Timothy and came here. I told him to help you as you faced this persecution. For a long time I didn't get news on how you were doing. Finally I couldn't stand it any longer. I sent word to Timothy and asked about you.

He personally came and told me the good news of your faith and love in Christ. He told me that you want to see me as much as I want to

see you. Praise God! You're standing firm in your faith. Oh how I long to be with you and teach you more about walking with the Lord.

Now listen. Continue to live a life that pleases God. Stay away from immorality. Don't be like those who are enslaved to uncontrolled passions. That is a lifestyle that hurts everyone involved. It also offends the Spirit of God who lives inside you. Don't forget, God severely judges people who live with such filth.

Instead, let your love be godly. But why am I telling you this? God has taught you how to love one another. I just ask that you do it even more.

Timothy told me that you're concerned about those who have died recently. Don't worry about them. Remember, Jesus also died, but God raised him from the dead! He'll do the same with those who have put their trust in him.

When Jesus comes back to earth, he will first raise those who have died in him. Then the rest of us will meet him in the air. Don't be discouraged like those without our hope. Instead, comfort each other with these words.

Of course we don't have a schedule as to when this is going to happen. Still, we are to prepare ourselves as if it will happen today.

When it does, those who live in sin will be caught off guard. They're like people who lock their doors at night and think they're safe. Suddenly a thief breaks into their home!

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The coming of our Lord Jesus will be like the labor pains of a woman about to give birth. People will suddenly find themselves standing before God to be judged. But Jesus Christ died so we can live with him forever. Encourage one another with this truth.

Here is how you are to function as a church until the Lord comes:

- Honor those who meet your spiritual needs.
- Get along with one another.
- Don't put up with laziness.
- Be patient with those who are discouraged.
- Help the weak.
- Don't seek revenge when people wrong you.

- Always do that which is good.

Here are the three parts of living a spiritual life:

- First, rejoice, pray, and give thanks. This is God's will for you.
- Next, listen to God's Spirit when he speaks to you through others, but make sure it's from God.
- And finally, hold on to that which is good and stay away from evil.

My dear friends, we're a family, so pray for me and keep your fellowship sweet. Share this letter with everyone in the church. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

238 Second Letter to the Thessalonians

Work of the Holy Spirit

The Thessalonians loved Paul's first letter and read it over and over. They talked about the Day of the Lord so much that soon they thought it had already started. Some became extremely concerned about what this meant, while others quit their jobs because they felt the Lord was setting up his kingdom. Soon those who quit their jobs had to be supported by those who still had work. Word got back to Paul, so he wrote this second letter. He said:

Silas, Timothy, and I constantly thank God for you. We thank God because you're growing in your faith, and because of your great love toward each other. We talk about you to all the churches. We brag about your faith, and your extraordinary patience in the face of severe persecution.

God has honored you by selecting you to suffer for him. Still, the day will come when God will judge those who are causing you so much pain. He'll give you rest, and they'll suffer forever. Christ will come again with his angels, and with flaming fire he'll take revenge on those who don't obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They'll be punished and removed forever from God's presence and from his glory.

We pray constantly that God will continue to find you worthy of this calling – that he'll continue to show the world his goodness and power through your faith. Then the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in you.

Now I must talk to you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. I understand you've become concerned – thinking that the Day of the Lord has already started. Let me make this clear. It isn't true, and don't let anyone tell you differently.

Before that Day starts, these things have to happen first. A wicked man will rise in power, and he'll organize the world against the God of Heaven. Oh, his forces are already at work in the world, but the Holy Spirit is holding him back. The day will come when the Spirit will step aside and allow this man to oppose everything that is holy. He'll sit in God's Temple and claim he's God. He'll work all kinds of miracles and impress people with many evil deeds. He'll deceive the people who refuse to believe the truth. God will make sure they believe him.

After that, Christ will come and destroy him with no effort at all. Remember I told you all of this when I was with you. But also remember that God loves you! He set you aside as someone special, because you belong to him; and he has given you salvation by his Spirit. We're just thankful that he allowed us a part in presenting the gospel to you. Stand firm in what you've been taught.

So what should you do while you wait for his coming? Well first of all, pray for us. Pray that we can get this gospel out to as many people as possible. Pray that we'll be able to work without fear of wicked people. But of course, the Lord has always given us strength during times of trial, just as he has done for you.

The other thing you should do is stay away from a brother who refuses to work. Remember how hard we worked when we were with you? We didn't loaf around and eat other people's food. No, we worked – and we worked hard – night and day. We weren't a financial burden on any of you.

Of course it would've been proper if we had accepted support from you. But we didn't because we wanted to be an example of diligence and hard work.

Here's the rule we taught you, "If a man doesn't work, he doesn't eat!" We've heard that there are those among you who not only refuse to work, but also interfere with the work of others. Now listen to what I say, and this is also from the Lord. Quietly do your own work, eat your own food, and don't get tired of doing good. Avoid anyone who doesn't follow this rule.

Well, I'm asking the Lord of peace to stay close to you and give you his peace. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

239 Mob in Corinth

Acts 18

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he met a Jewish man named Aquila and his wife Priscilla. They were also tent makers, the same as Paul, so they decided to work together. Each week Paul went to the synagogue and talked to the Jews. He explained to them that Jesus was the Messiah.

Silas and Timothy finally rejoined him. It was soon after they arrived that the Jews rejected Paul's message. They even blasphemed the name of Christ. With that, Paul said, "My conscience is clear. I told you the good news that Messiah had come. I explained how we have salvation through him. You've rejected it. Therefore, your blood is on your own heads. I'll give this message to the Gentiles."

A few of the Jews believed in Christ, including the head of the synagogue. At the same time, a great number of Gentiles put their faith in Jesus.

The Lord encouraged Paul in a dream. He said, "Don't be afraid. Keep talking about me. No one will hurt you here because I have many people in this city." So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching and preaching God's Word.

One day, the Jews selected a new leader, who organized an attack against Paul. A mob grabbed him and took him to the judge saying, "This man is making our people worship God in ways that

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are the opposite of our law."

Before Paul could defend himself, the judge yelled at the Jews. "How dare you come to me with this. I don't care about your law! I spend my day punishing criminals, not arguing over words and names. Don't waste my time!" He then drove them out of the court.

A mob grabbed the leader of the synagogue and beat him in front of everyone. The judge didn't even look up.

When Paul thought his work in Corinth was done, he decided to go back to Antioch. Aquila and Priscilla went with him as far as Ephesus. Paul preached at the synagogue there, and the people wanted him to stay longer and teach them. But he refused, saying, "If God wills, I'll come back." He then left and went to Jerusalem and on to Antioch.

After Paul left Ephesus, a man named Apollos came to the synagogue. He was a powerful speaker and talked openly about Jesus. Unfortunately, he only knew what John the Baptist had taught.

Aquila and Priscilla took him into their home and explained the things of God more accurately. After that, Apollos became a great preacher for God and was able to take the Scriptures and clearly show that Jesus was the Messiah.

240 Riot at Ephesus

Acts 19

Paul left Antioch and went to Ephesus. When he got there, he found twelve believers. He asked them, "Have you received the Holy Spirit yet?"

They were confused and answered, "We haven't heard of this Holy Spirit."

Paul said, "Where were you baptized?"

They said, "We were baptized by John."

"Ah, John came to prepare the way for Jesus. He baptized people who were willing to repent and look for the Messiah. But now Jesus has come."

As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of Jesus. Afterwards they received the Holy Spirit and started to praise God in various languages.

Paul stayed in Ephesus for several years. At first he went to the synagogue and preached Christ, but eventually the believers had to find a different meeting place.

God did wonderful things through Paul. People from that entire region heard God's Word. The sick were healed and demons were cast out. People even touched Paul's skin with pieces of cloth and took them to those who were sick, and they were healed.

Some young men saw Paul cast out a demon, so they decided to try it. They said to a demon-possessed man, "Come out of him in the name of Jesus – the one that Paul preaches about."

The spirit said, "I know about Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" The demon-possessed man jumped on them and beat them. He ripped off their clothes, and they ran from the house bruised and naked.

People were afraid when they heard about this. Suddenly the name of Jesus was held in high regard. Many repented of their sins and called on the name of the Lord. They collected

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their books on witchcraft and burned them in front of everyone.

A silversmith called a meeting of those who made expensive shrines to an idol called Diana. He said, "Paul is turning people away from the worship of Diana, the one everyone adores. He's saying that a god made by hands isn't really a god. This is an insult to Diana. Besides, we're losing money."

The people became more and more angry until they started shouting, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" They ran out, screaming this in the street. Soon it spread throughout the city, and confusion was everywhere. A mob grabbed some Christians and took them to the amphitheater. The entire city went there to see what was happening.

The crowd kept shouting. Some said one thing while the others said something different. The situation became totally chaotic! Most of the people didn't even know why they were there. This went on for two hours.

Paul wanted to go to the amphitheater and defend the cause of Christ, but fellow believers refused to let him go. Even city officials sent word to him saying, "Don't go to the amphitheater!"

Finally one of the officials stood before the crowd and said, "People of Ephesus! No one can deny that the image of Diana fell from heaven and landed here. Therefore, calm down. The men you have brought here have done nothing wrong to Diana. They haven't robbed her temples or blasphemed her name."

"If the silversmiths have a problem with anyone, let them take it to the courts. For now, go home before you're charged with conducting a riot for no reason." With that, the people went home.

241 First Letter to the Corinthians (part 1)

Work of the Holy Spirit

Paul was in Ephesus when he heard about the problems in the church at Corinth.

He immediately wrote this letter. He said:

I praise God for you constantly. It's obvious to all that God has enriched you with spiritual gifts so you can serve him until Christ comes again.

I'll get right to the point. I understand there are divisions among you. I've heard that some say, "I follow Paul," or "I hold to the teachings of Apollos," or "My Christianity comes from Peter." Still others say, "I don't follow anyone except Christ."

Why are you wasting your time with such bickering? When I was with you, I totally focused on giving you the simple gospel. I didn't allow myself to be distracted from the cross of Christ. I didn't care that others thought preaching about the cross was ridiculous. I knew it was the power of God.

This fighting comes from your pride. Don't you realize God uses foolish things to show his wisdom? Remember I came to you in weakness. I didn't display myself as a great person with flowing words. No, I stood among you trembling with fear. I totally relied on the Spirit of God to do his work in your lives. And he did! Your faith was born in his power. It didn't come with human reasoning. Apollos and I didn't teach you God's wisdom. The Spirit of God taught those things to you.

I know how to teach the wisdom of God to those who are mature in their walk with the Lord. But I fed you with milk, because you were babies in the faith. Obviously, you still can't be fed like mature Christians. You fight among yourselves. You're jealous of each other. You get in little clicks saying, "I'm of Paul." "I prefer Apollos." You're acting like you don't even know Christ.

Who are Paul and Apollos anyway? They're slaves of Christ! They were told to work with

you. God said, "Paul, go plant the seeds of faith. Apollos, water the plants. Now leave them alone. I'll make them grow." We're just slaves doing our assigned jobs. God is the one who planned it all.

Take a closer look at those of us who are called apostles. We're like the prisoners of war, being paraded through the streets until they're finally killed. We're fools for Christ, weak and hated. We're homeless, and our constant companion is hunger. We have to work hard just to stay alive.

We have to bless those who curse us. We have to be patient with those who abuse us. When people slander us, we have to say nice things about them. We're the "garbage" of the world! Still, I'm your spiritual father and you're to imitate me.

I'm planning to come and visit you. When I arrive, do I have to correct you as children? No, I think you want me to come in a spirit of meekness. Therefore, I'm sending Timothy to remind you of the ways of Christ.

There are a few issues that have to be taken care of right away. First, I've heard that there is a man in the church who is sleeping with his stepmother? I can't believe you're allowing this disgusting sin. Remove that man from your fellowship - immediately! Sin is like yeast. Given time it'll take over the entire batch of dough.

I've also been told you're taking one another to court to stand before non-Christian judges. Aren't there godly people in the church that can pass judgment on these things? Listen, the day will come when you will judge angels. You'll also judge the people of this world. Surely you can take care of these small matters between brothers. If there's

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no one in the church to judge between you, simply endure the injustice! Allow yourself to be cheated!

There is also the issue of immorality. The simple fact is this. Your body was not made for sexual impurity. God made people for himself and – as a Christian – your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. When he paid for you, the Spirit of God took possession of your body. You're no longer your own. You're to glorify God in all things.

Sexual needs are to be fulfilled within marriage. God has given me the ability to stay single, but not everyone has this gift. Therefore they should get married rather than live with burning frustration.

Once a couple is married, they need to be conscious of each other's needs.

I know some of you are married to someone who doesn't know our Lord. Stay with that person with the hope of winning them to Christ. If they leave you ... well, there is nothing you can do about that.

Accept the situation in life that God has given you. Of course it's all right to improve yourself when you can, but don't be burdened down with trying to fight against the place where God has put you. He'll perfect your ministry right where you are.

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242 First Letter to the Corinthians (part 2)

Work of the Holy Spirit

Paul started this letter by scolding the church for dividing themselves into groups that judge others. He then dealt with several sins that had found root within the assembly. He went on to say:

You asked about several things, so I'll answer each of them. The first deals with eating meat that has been offered to an idol. Of course we know that an idol isn't really a god. It's just a piece of wood or stone. Still, eating this type of meat may offend someone who has just come out of idolatry. We should never sin against a fellow Christian. Therefore, I've determined not to do anything that causes a brother to stumble in his faith.

Here is another rule to live by. Do whatever is lawful to win others to Christ. You've seen my example. I've set aside many privileges, and have become all things to all people so I could win some. It's like a runner who does whatever it takes to win a race. This requires self-control in every area of life. He doesn't do anything that slows him down – and all of this for an earthly prize! My reward is eternal. Therefore, I do whatever it takes to win.

God will make sure you're not tempted in any way that's beyond your ability to resist. You'll always find a way of escape if you look for it.

All of this has to do with eating meat served to idols. Focus on helping others and establishing their faith. When someone invites you over for a meal, eat it without asking questions. But if they say it was offered to idols, leave it alone. What you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for God's glory – and don't offend others.

I've heard some disturbing news. Some of you are using the Lord's Supper as an occasion to eat your own supper. Certain members are having big meals while other are sitting there hungry. How can you embarrass your fellow

believers this way?

Remember, the bread and the cup represent the body and blood of our Lord. Don't be guilty of abusing these symbols. Disrespect for our Lord's body is the reason why some of you are sick, and yes, some have died. Therefore, examine yourselves when you come together around the Lord's Table. Show reverence, and show consideration for one another.

You asked about spiritual gifts. Remember this. The Spirit of God deals with Christians differently. He gives each of us gifts for the purpose of serving others. This is like the human body. Each part works for the good of the whole. It's the same with the body of Christ. One part doesn't say to another, "I don't need you." No, no! We all need each other's gifts. The gifts are different, but they all come from the same Spirit.

Still, our gifts are useless without love. It's love that makes our gifts work for the benefit of others. Love makes you patient and kind instead of focusing on yourself. It prompts you to act properly with others and not be quick tempered or selfish.

Love embraces truth, but doesn't keep track of what others have done wrong. It's always supportive and believes the best about others. Remember, our gifts are wonderful, but they're only temporary tools. Love will never pass away.

Before I finish this letter, I want to make the gospel clear to you. Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose from the dead. The apostles and others were witnesses of his resurrection. Finally he appeared to me, the most unworthy of all the apostles because I persecuted the church of

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Work of the Holy Spirit

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God. Yet, God's grace works in me.

The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our faith. If he's not alive, then those who die no longer exist. If Christ didn't rise from the dead, there's no hope in the world, and all we have is this life.

But the good news is this: Christ did rise from the dead. And because he did, we will too. Christ will rule over this world and abolish death itself. The last trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise with their glorified bodies. Then the bodies of those who are still alive will be changed. This takes the sting out of dying, and death is no longer victorious. Don't you see? God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I'll end this letter by reminding you that the Christians in Jerusalem need our financial help because of the great famine. Each of you should set some money aside to help them. Give according to how God has prospered you. Collect offerings, and then I will send some of you to Jerusalem with your gifts.

Stand firm in your faith and be strong. Do everything with love.

Oh, Aquila and Priscilla told me to send you their greetings.

I'm asking God to give you the grace of our Lord Jesus. And my friends, I want you to know that I love you.

243 Second Letter to the Corinthians (part 1)

Work of the Holy Spirit

The church at Corinth didn't respond well to Paul's first letter, so he sailed across the sea and met with them. That didn't go well either. He then sent them a very harsh letter – one that's not included in the Bible. Titus returned with encouraging news on how they took it to heart and repented of their sins. Paul then sent this letter. He said:

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

As you know, I planned to come to you first before visiting the churches in Macedonia. I changed my mind because I wanted to spare you another painful visit. I felt that when I did finally come, I wanted it to be a source of joy and not tears. So instead of coming, I wrote that last letter, not to hurt you, but to show my great love for you.

That man who was behind all of this trouble has hurt you as well as me. I praise God he has repented. Brothers, this isn't the time to overwhelm him with guilt. Decide the proper punishment, and then forgive him. Show him you love him and don't let Satan get the advantage in this situation.

After I wrote that harsh letter, I needed to know how you responded. I sent the letter with Titus, and told him to come back and report on your reaction. The plan was for us to meet in Troas. I went there, but he hadn't arrived yet. The Lord opened doors for sharing the Gospel in Troas, but I was totally focused on you. I left and took a ship over to Macedonia, hoping to find him there.

With you on my mind, this trip was lonely and I was overcome with concern for you. In my despair, God revealed several truths to me.

First, I realized that our life on earth is like a Roman victory march. People burn incense along the road, and the smell reminds the soldiers of their victory. But that same smell is repulsive to

the captives because it reminds them of their execution once they get to Rome.

We're the ones burning along the road as Christ marches along triumphantly. This world follows behind him. To the victors in Christ, we're the smell of triumph. The world finds us repulsive because of their coming judgment.

Next I thought about how people in this world are so proud of their letters of recommendation. My thoughts were on you, and I realized that you're the letter of Christ, produced by us, written by the Spirit, and read by everyone. Because of it, I have confidence to continue on. It's not my work. It's the Spirit of God that brings life.

Compare this to the letters of stone that were given to Moses. Temporarily, his face shone like the sun, so he put a veil over his face. Because he did that, the people didn't notice when the shine faded. That veil is still there! It covers their hearts whenever the Law is read, so they can't understand it.

When a person turns to Christ, this veil is removed. The Spirit of God brings freedom, and we reflect the glory of the Lord.

As I thought on the veil and the light of the gospel, I was moved with urgency. God's mercy shines through us! It is important that we press on. We need to put aside anything that would hold us back. Our message should be plain to see.

Oh, but the god of this world has put a veil over the eyes of those who won't believe. They aren't rejecting us, because Jesus is the Light of the world, not us. They're rejecting him.

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Work of the Holy Spirit

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As I travelled to Macedonia, all these thoughts were going through my mind. I felt weak and unable to accomplish anything. But then I realized that it's God who has given us this ministry. He uses weak people to accomplish eternal work. We can easily be pushed around and crushed, but that doesn't change a thing. It's exactly what happened to Jesus. As it was with him, so it is with us. Our trials and our death will bring life to others.

I didn't know about your situation. But I realized that our encouragement doesn't come from what happens here on earth. It comes from God! Because of that, we don't give up!

Besides, what happens to us here can't compare to what God has waiting for us in heaven. He gave us his Spirit, but he's just a downpayment of what lies ahead. While we're

in this body, we're not at our heavenly home. But once we leave our body, we're finally with the Lord.

It doesn't matter if we're here or there. Our purpose is the same. Therefore, let's work together to prepare people for the day when they'll stand before God. Christ died for us, so let's live for him.

Think of the ministry that has been given to us. Everyone who comes to Christ becomes a new creation. Their old life flows away and a new life appears. God is allowing us to be a part of this! We're working together with Christ.

This is why God wants us to be free from anything that would hold us back. That's why we should be careful not to get tied together with a non-believer. That's why we keep ourselves pure, so we can work together and get the job done.

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244 Second Letter to the Corinthians (part 2)

Work of the Holy Spirit

This second half of II Corinthians is the most personal of all of Paul's letters. Its purpose is to restore the relationship between him and the church before his upcoming visit. He continued by saying:

When I got to Macedonia, I was constantly thinking about you. I still didn't know how you responded to my letter. But then I found Titus, and his report made my heart leap for joy! He told me how you loved me and wanted to do right. He said my letter caused you grief, but a godly grief. It led you to repent and continue your walk with God. My rejoicing has never been so full.

Another source of my joy is seeing how the churches here in Macedonia are giving to help those who are suffering in Jerusalem. They organized together so they could meet that need, even though they themselves are poor. The people have given according to their ability to give, and yes, beyond their ability.

I asked Titus to share this need with you because I knew you'd want to follow the example of the Christians here. But it's also the example that the Lord Jesus gave us. He left the riches in heaven to become poor, so we could be rich.

Titus told me you immediately responded and wanted to give to this need. Praise God!

Now listen. The principles of giving are simple. First, every farmer knows – you don't harvest much if you don't plant a lot of seeds. Your giving is like planting seeds. If you're generous, you'll gain a generous harvest.

Next, each person should decide what he wants to give and then give it. God loves it when people give with gladness in their hearts.

Finally, when a seed is planted, it produces many seeds. So it is with giving. God multiplies your gift. Here is how it multiplies. First, the receiver is thankful for the gift. Second, you are blessed for giving. Next, they pray for you and

then you pray for them. And finally, they are prompted to be generous with others when they are able. And it goes on and on.

Now, concerning my letters. I know some are saying, "Paul is bold when he writes letters, but he is nothing when he's face to face."

Don't believe it. I'm the same person. I may be weak on the outside, but my weapons are powerful through God. He works through me to tear down anything that stands against him. Don't make me be that way when we see each other.

Would it help if I bragged about myself? You know I don't like to do that, but I'll do it if it helps you be true to Christ. You let others brag about themselves, and they don't even love you. I've totally given myself for you, so maybe you'll put up with just a little bragging.

I'm a son of Abraham in every way. I serve Christ more enthusiastically than anyone. Because of my walk with Christ, my body has suffered every abuse that man can give. My travels for God have exposed me to every disaster a man can endure. Danger has been my constant companion. I've given up all comforts of life for Christ. On top of all that, I'm constantly burdened about the wellbeing of all the churches.

I can't keep this up. Let me say it this way. I know a man who was taken to the third heaven. I don't know if he was dead or alive. All I know is, while he was in paradise, he saw and heard things that can't be talked about.

I have to stop this foolishness. I'm really only proud of one thing. God has given me a thorn in the flesh because of all the special revelations he has given to me. I prayed three times, asking

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Work of the Holy Spirit

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him to remove it. Finally he said, “My grace is all you need, because my power will be seen in your weakness.”

Now that is where I’ll brag – in my weakness! God gave it to me to demonstrate his power. Therefore when I’m weak, I’m strong.

Well, I’m a fool for bragging so much. Actually it is you who should be bragging on me. While others debate whether or not I’m an apostle, it shouldn’t be a debate for you.

Oh, my dear brothers. One fear clouds all my joy. I’m afraid we’ll all be disappointed when

I come to you. I dread the fact that I may find nothing at all has changed. I’m warning you. If that’s what I find, you’ll see the power of God working through me, and you won’t like it.

Our time together would be much better if you’re strong and I’m weak. That’s why I’m writing this to you now.

Finally brothers, be of good cheer and make sure you maintain spiritual health. Give everyone a hug for me. May the grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

245 Letter to the Romans (part 1)

Work of the Holy Spirit

Paul traveled to Corinth and spent three months there. During this time, he sent this letter to the Christians at Rome. He said:

I hear about your faith everywhere I go. I praise God for you all the time. I want to come and invest in your spiritual walk. God made me obligated to share his message with Gentiles everywhere. Therefore I share the Gospel with those who are cultured and with those who are barbarians. It doesn't matter if they are smart or simple minded.

I'm proud of the Gospel because it's the power of God to those who believe, no matter who they are. People can only get to God by faith. Without it, they must face his judgment.

So why is that? It's because people are wicked! God reveals himself to them in many ways. Everything around them talks about God. But they've closed their minds.

There are two types of people in this world. One type worships what God has made. They think this makes them wise, but they become fools in the process. By excluding God, they sink into moral perversion. Their sins destroy their minds. They carry death with them everywhere they go. They become good at doing evil, and they enjoy seeing it in others.

There is another type of people in this world – those who create their own righteousness. They brag about their good works and think they're experts in what's good and bad. They judge others for the evil they commit, while doing the same type of sins behind the scenes. They think that judging others will help them avoid God's judgment.

All of us find ourselves in one of these two groups, and God's anger is hot toward both of them. Both groups are sinners. They argue about

who is better, but the truth is that the whole world is totally given over to sin. There's not one person who is righteous, not even one. We all stand guilty before God's judgment.

That's why God sent his son, Jesus Christ. He provides his goodness to those who put their faith in him. It doesn't matter who you are. Everyone is a sinner in need of redemption.

The Jews are the most confused about this. They claim that Abraham is their father. Yet if you look closer, he's really the father of faith. He didn't have a relationship with God based on his own goodness. No, he simply believed God, and God was pleased.

The Jews hold David up as their great king. But he delighted in God's goodness, not his own. Both men were righteous because they believed God.

In the same way, we're made good only by faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him, we have peace with God and access to his grace. This is how we can be happy even in our trials. We know God is using them for our good.

Now here is my point. Christ did this for us when we were wicked! This shows how much God loves us. Christ died for us when we were disgusting sinners. With that in mind, how much will he do for us now that we're pure in his sight?

Think of it this way. We all came from one man, Adam. We're all sinners because of him. Death and judgment are on the head of everyone who has ever lived – because of him.

Now there is another man – Jesus. Because of him, we can be made righteous. Because of him, we can have grace and eternal life.

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I can hear someone saying, “So, if our good works have nothing to do with our being pure before God, then we can sin as much as we want.” Absolutely not!

Baptism is a picture of this truth. Going under the water shows how we die to sin and are buried – just like Jesus died for our sins and was buried. When he rose from the dead, he left sin behind. Our coming out of the water is a picture of his resurrection, but it is also a picture of us leaving sin behind. We’re to live a new way of life.

We stay away from sin because it enslaves people. When you give in to it, you become a slave to it. In the same way, when you submit yourself to the grace of God, you become his slave.

Either way, you’re not free to do what you

want. So you have to choose. Which one will you submit to? Sin brings death, but God gives you eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Someone is bound to ask, “Wasn’t the Law of God given as a way to make ourselves righteous?” You must be kidding! It’s impossible to obey the Law. It was given to reveal our sinfulness, so we’d know that we’re hopeless and in need of help.

When I look to the Law for help, I suddenly have a problem. I want to be good but don’t know how. I don’t want to do evil but find that I’m doing it all the time. I’m a slave and have no choice. I cry out, “How can I get free?”

Praise God! We’re free through Jesus Christ who died for us. We’re no longer condemned, and we have the power to resist sin.

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246 Letter to the Romans (part 2)

Work of the Holy Spirit

Paul continued his letter to the Christians at Rome by saying:

Salvation in Christ gives us several benefits. First of all, we're adopted into a new family. God is our Father. His Spirit lives within us, and we inherit everything that belongs to Jesus.

As a member of the heavenly family, we have peace about what happens to us in this life. We might suffer here, but that's nothing compared to the glory that is waiting for us in heaven.

The second benefit is what the Spirit of God is doing in our lives. He is making us ready for heaven. He helps us pray. He changes our thinking. He makes sure all of our trials are good for us. He shapes us to be more like Jesus.

The third benefit is that God is now our Father! That means we're important to him! He won't let anything happen to us that he doesn't think is good for us. Nothing can separate us from his love.

Even with all these benefits, I still have one great heartache. I wish the Jews weren't missing out on what God is doing with us. They're my earthly family, and I'd give anything for them to have salvation. I'd give up my own salvation, if they could have it.

Still, I understand that their rejection of Christ doesn't change God's promises to Abraham. I must always keep in mind that God's promises aren't to those who happen to be born into a particular family. God has always selected a people for himself from among the crowd.

The Jews can blame no one but themselves, because God has made his plan simple. People are saved if Jesus is their Lord and they believe that God raised him from the dead. Anyone can be saved if they call upon the name of the Lord.

Don't you see? The fact that Israel is rejecting their Messiah is your opportunity. You can now be brought into God's family! It's like cutting a branch off from a tree and grafting in a wild branch. Israel has been cut off temporarily, so that the Gentiles can know God.

But don't get too proud! If a natural branch can be cut off, how much easier it would be to cut off the grafted-in branch. The time will come when the Day of the Gentiles will be over. At that point, God will turn the tables, and Israel will accept salvation.

Take advantage of God's mercy while you can. Give your bodies to him as a living sacrifice. Put aside sin and live a life pleasing to him. Change the way you think and act.

Now, here is a list of things you are to do while you live for God on earth.

- Work in concert with your fellow church members. Everyone has their special gift from God. Together you make up one body.
- Have a high standard of living, and focus on what God wants you to do.
- Submit to civil authorities. Just because you have a heavenly home doesn't mean you aren't responsible to earthly government officials. When you resist them, you're resisting God.
- You're not to owe people money. Instead, you owe them your love. So pay it with interest.
- Always live like your time of service is about over.
- Don't be distracted by fleshly desires and lust. Instead, start acting like Jesus would act.

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Listen, God deals with each of us differently. So, honor each other's walk with the Lord. One person is obeying God by setting aside a particular day, or not eating certain foods. Someone else obeys God by treating everything the same. What does that matter to you? The Lord has an individual relationship with each believer.

Having said that, you should also be conscious of the fact that some people are still weak in their walk with God. You're at liberty to follow your own convictions about things, but you're not at liberty to trip up a fellow Christian. Your job is to build them up – not tear them down by the things you do. Those who are strong in the faith have a responsibility to watch over those

who are weaker.

Well, here are my plans. I am going to Jerusalem to deliver the offering that was taken by the churches here. When I'm done, I plan to stop by Rome on my way to Spain. I have wanted to meet you for so long!

Greet all my friends in the Gospel. They have faithfully worked with me throughout the years.

Oh, one more thing. Watch out for those who make a big deal out of little things. Avoid them. Their smooth talking can hurt weaker believers.

Everywhere I go, people tell me about your obedience to Christ. Everyone here wants to send greetings to you.

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

247 Going to Jerusalem

Acts 20:1 – 21:17

Paul stayed three months in Corinth. Afterwards he went back to Troas, where he spent a week before starting his trip to Jerusalem.

The night before Paul left Troas, he preached to the church on the third floor of a house. He preached for hours – well into the night. A young man sat on a windowsill and soon became very sleepy. Eventually he went to sleep and slid out of the window, falling to the ground!

People rushed down, only to find him dead. Paul took the body and hugged it tightly. He finally looked up and said, “The young man is alive.”

Everyone rejoiced and together went back up the stairs. They continued their fellowship until dawn when Paul left on his trip to Jerusalem. They took the young man to his home, still rejoicing that he was alive.

Paul sailed to a town near Ephesus, and the elders of the Ephesian church went there to meet with him.

He told them, “My life has been an open book to you. Nothing was hid. We suffered persecution together, but through it all I was able to explain the Gospel to everyone in this region. Now I am leaving you and going to Jerusalem, and you’ll never see me again.

“The Spirit of God has made it clear that I will suffer for the Lord in Jerusalem. I’ll accept this because I want to fulfill God’s calling on my life.”

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Paul encouraged them to live for the Lord and be true to him. Afterwards, they all knelt down and prayed together. The entire group cried and embraced Paul. They grieved over his words, “You will never see me again.”

As he continued on his way to Jerusalem, the ship stopped at the city of Tyre so it could unload cargo. This gave Paul a chance to stay with a group of believers for the few days. They said to him, “The Spirit of God told us that you will suffer great trials in Jerusalem.”

When it was time to leave, the entire church walked with Paul out of the city and down to the shore. They knelt on the beach and prayed together. He then got on board the ship and left.

The ship docked at Caesarea, the nearest port to Jerusalem. Paul stayed in the home of Philip, one of the original seven deacons. While he was there, a prophet took Paul’s belt and tied his own hands and feet. He said, “The Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him to the Gentiles.”

Everyone was concerned and begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. He said, “Please stop. Your crying is starting to make me cry! I’m ready to be put in chains for the Lord. I’m ready to die for him.”

After a few days, Paul went to Jerusalem. The Christians there received him with joy.

248 Riot in Jerusalem

Acts 21:15 – 22:30

Paul met with the elders of the church in Jerusalem and reported on how Gentiles were turning to Christ. Everyone glorified God when they heard this.

But then the elders shared their concerns with Paul. “Jewish Christians think that you’re teaching Jews to abandon the Law of Moses. We need to stop these rumors. Four men have taken a vow to God. They want to fulfill its requirements at the Temple, but they don’t have the money to pay for it. Join them in their vow, and pay their fee. This will demonstrate that you haven’t abandoned the laws of God”

Paul agreed. So he took the vow and went to the temple with the men. The ritual took seven days.

On the last day, some Jews from Ephesus saw Paul in the market place with a Gentile Christian from their city. Later they saw him in the temple and assumed the Gentile was with him. They yelled, “Help! Here’s the man who has turned the entire world against us. Now he’s bringing a Gentile into our temple!”

Soon, the crowd became an angry mob. They grabbed Paul and took him out of the temple and started to beat him. Roman soldiers ran into the crowd to stop the beating. Their commander put Paul in chains and told his men to take him away.

The crowd shouted, “Kill him!” and started moving toward the soldiers. Seeing this, the soldiers picked up Paul and carried him. When they got to the door of the barracks, Paul said to the commander, “May I speak to the crowd?” The commander was surprised, but finally agreed to let him speak.

Paul stood on the step and raised his hand. Everyone grew quiet. He said, “I was given a strict Jewish education. I proved my dedication to our religion by persecuting believers in Jesus.

Work of the Holy Spirit

I put both men and women in jail and even had some of them killed.

“One day I went to Damascus to bring more prisoners back to Jerusalem. Suddenly, a bright light surrounded me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say, ‘Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting me?’

“I said, ‘Who are you Lord?’ The voice said, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth – the one you are persecuting.’ He then told me to go into Damascus and I would be told what to do.

“Once I was in the city, a believer in Christ came, and I called on the name of the Lord and was baptized.

“I came back to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple. The Lord spoke to me again. He said, ‘I’m sending you to far off places and there you’ll preach to the Gentiles.’ ”

As soon as Paul said the word “Gentiles,” the crowd once again went wild. They started yelling and throwing dust in the air. They threw their coats on the ground and shouted, “Kill him! Wipe him off the face of the earth!”

Quickly, the commander took Paul into the barracks. He ordered soldiers to beat Paul until he had answered all of their questions. As the soldiers prepared to do this, Paul said to one of them, “Is it legal to beat a Roman citizen without a trial?”

The soldier immediately told the commander about this. He went to Paul and asked. “Are you a Roman citizen?”

“Yes, I was born a citizen.”

Those who were getting ready to beat Paul immediately moved away from him. The commander himself became concerned for his own life because he had put a Roman citizen in chains – and almost beat him – without a fair trial.

249 Plot to Kill

Acts 22:30 – Acts 23:35

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The commander wanted to know exactly what had caused the riot near the temple in Jerusalem. So he took Paul before the Jewish council. Paul said, “Brothers, I stand before God with a clear conscience.” Hearing this, the high priest ordered someone to slap him.

Paul turned to him, “You whitewashed wall! God will slap you. You had someone hit me in direct violation of God’s laws.”

One of the men said, “How dare you speak to God’s high priest that way.”

Immediately Paul apologized. “I didn’t realize he was the high priest. The Scripture says, ‘Don’t speak against the ruler of the people.’ ”

He then noticed that the council was made up of two opposing groups. The Sadducees didn’t believe that anyone could rise from the dead. They also didn’t believe in angels or spirits. The Pharisees believed in all of these things.

Paul said, “I’m a Pharisee and I’m being judged because I believe in the resurrection from the dead.” Immediately, the two groups started to argue, until they were shouting at one another.

One of the men grabbed Paul in anger. Others tried to pull him away. Soldiers had to rescue him to keep him from being torn apart. They took him back to the barracks.

That night the Lord stood by Paul. “Don’t be discouraged. You were my spokesman here in Jerusalem, and you’ll also speak for me in Rome.”

The next morning, 40 men met together and made a vow. They said, “We’ll not eat or drink until we’ve killed Paul.” They then told the

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religious leaders, “Tell the commander you want to examine Paul again. When he gets near, we’ll kill him.”

Paul’s nephew heard about this plan, so he rushed to the barracks and told his uncle. After hearing this, Paul called for one of the soldiers. “Take this young man to the commander. He has a message for him.”

So the soldier took Paul’s nephew to the commander and said to him, “The prisoner wants you to hear what this young man has to say.”

The commander took the young man aside, “What do you want to tell me?”

The boy told the commander exactly what he’d heard. The commander said, “Go, but don’t tell anyone else about this.”

That night, he assembled a group of guards that included 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 men with spears. He sent Paul with them that very night. They took him to Caesarea to be under the protection of Felix the governor.

The commander wrote a letter to send along with him. “The Jews tried to kill this man, but I rescued him because he’s a Roman citizen. I had him stand before their ruling council, but found they’re upset with him because of some religious matters – definitely nothing worthy of death or prison. Now I’m told there is a plot to ambush and kill him. Therefore I’m sending him to you. I’ll also send his accusers so you can hear their case.”

When Paul arrived in Caesarea, he was put in Herod’s palace to wait until his accusers arrived.

250 Felix, Festus, & Agrippa

Work of the Holy Spirit

Acts 24 – 26

The high priest went to Caesarea along with some elders and a lawyer. They presented their case against Paul before Felix the governor. They said, “This man is a disease to the Jewish people. He causes riots everywhere he goes. Now he has come here and has desecrated our temple.”

Paul defended himself. He said, “I did nothing to deserve what was done to me. It’s true I follow Jesus of Nazareth, but I didn’t gather a crowd and preach to them. I simply went to the temple to fulfill a vow. Suddenly – and for no reason – a mob grabbed me and tried to kill me. They’re the ones who should be here defending their actions! Not me. These men standing before you have nothing against me. They even agree with me on the basic issue – that God can raise someone from the dead.”

Felix listened to both sides, but didn’t pass judgment. He thought Paul might pay him something to let him go free. Still, the governor gave Paul the privilege of seeing his friends. Felix met with him several times to talk about faith in Christ. Once he trembled and said, “I’m not ready right now. I’ll make this decision when it is more convenient.”

Two years later, Festus became governor, replacing Felix. He wanted to make the Jewish leaders happy, so he said to Paul, “Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried for these charges?”

Paul said, “I’m willing to die if I am truly worthy of death. But you know that I’m innocent of these charges. Therefore, if you’re about to send me to Jerusalem, I appeal to Caesar.”

Festus said, “So, you have appealed to Caesar. In that case, to Caesar you will go.”

A few days later, King Agrippa and his sister visited the new governor. Festus told them about Paul and the trial. Agrippa said he would like to hear him. So the next day, a large crowd gathered, and Paul was brought before the governor and the king.

When Paul entered the room, he saw his opportunity. He said, “I’m pleased to stand before you, King Agrippa, because you’re an expert in Jewish customs.

“I’m not a stranger to the Jews who live in Israel. They’ve known me since I was a child. They know that I am a Pharisee and have been very strict concerning the Law. There was a time when I persecuted those following Jesus the Nazarene.

“I was on the way to Damascus when I was struck to the ground by a bright light. I then heard a voice saying, ‘Saul, why are you persecuting me?’

“I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The voice said, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. Get up. You’re now my servant. I’m sending you to be a witness for me – to the Jews and to the Gentiles.’

“King Agrippa, I’ve been true to that calling. I proclaim Jesus as Messiah wherever I go. I tell people to repent and turn to God.

“So why do the Jews want to kill me? They know our Scriptures teach that Christ would suffer, die, and rise from the dead. The good news is that he now brings light to all people including the Gentiles.”

Festus yelled out, “Paul, you’re talking like a fool. All of your education has made you crazy!”

Paul said, “I’m not crazy. I speak the truth, and the king knows these things. King Agrippa, do you believe the Scriptures? I know you believe.”

The king said to Paul, “Do you think you can talk to me for a few minutes and I’ll become a Christian?”

Paul said, “Whether I can or can’t, it’s my desire that all of you listening to me today would be like me, except for these chains.”

Later, King Agrippa and the governor agreed that Paul shouldn’t be in prison. They said, “We’d set him free if he hadn’t appealed to Caesar. But he did appeal to Caesar, so that is where we’ll send him.”

251 Storm at Sea

Acts 27

Arrangements were made for Paul to travel to Rome on cargo ships. He was put in the custody of a Roman officer named Julius. He was kind to Paul and allowed his friends to visit him whenever they were in port.

Travel was slow because of storms. After many stops and changing boats several times, they eventually arrived at Fair Haven on the island of Crete. It was close to winter so they had to stop.

Still, the captain wanted to sail a few miles up the coast to a better port. The weather had cleared and there was now a gentle breeze.

Paul said to Julius, "Tell the captain to stay here! If he doesn't, he'll lose the ship and its cargo and some people may die." The Roman officer thought about what Paul said but decided to allow the captain to move on to the other port.

They left Fair Haven and started sailing along the coast. Suddenly a fierce wind pushed the ship out into deeper water. The crew struggled to fight the wind, but the storm grew more intense. Finally the captain stopped fighting the wind and allowed it to drive the ship along.

After several days in the storm, the crew threw the cargo overboard. A couple of days later they threw the ship's gear overboard. In time, everyone knew they were going to die. They hadn't seen the sun or stars for days and they hadn't eaten anything.

Paul stood before the men. He said, "I told you not to leave the harbor. You didn't listen, but now I have good news for you. An angel appeared to me last night with a message from God. He said, 'Don't be afraid! You'll stand before Caesar. No one on this ship will die.' What God says is true.

Work of the Holy Spirit

We'll all live, but the ship will be destroyed."

They were in the storm for a total of fourteen days. About midnight on the last day, the sailors realized they were approaching land. They quickly let down an anchor to keep from running into the rocks.

Some of them started to let down the lifeboat so they could get off the ship. Paul shouted, "You will all die if these men leave the ship!" Immediately soldiers cut the lines and let the lifeboat fall into the water. Everyone prayed that morning would come soon.

Paul talked to the crew just before daylight. He said, "You haven't eaten for fourteen days. Eat something because you'll need your strength to go to shore today." He then picked up some bread, gave thanks to God, and started eating. Everyone on the ship ate some food.

When it was light, they could see land through the storm. The captain spotted a bay with a beach. He decided to run the ship toward the beach as far as it would go. They pulled up the anchor and hoisted a sail. The fierce wind drove them toward the beach until the ship struck a sandbar. It jammed in the sand, and then started breaking up because of the waves.

The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners so they wouldn't escape. Julius stopped them because he wanted to save Paul's life. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard and get to shore. Everyone else had to find planks from the ship and use them to float ashore. Soon everyone was in the water, and they all reached land safely.

To be continued in the next story

252 Shipwreck & Rome

Acts 28

Continued from the last story

After fourteen days in a fierce storm, Paul's ship struck a sandbar just off from the island of Malta. Everyone got to shore and the local people came out and started helping them. They built a fire because of the rain and cold.

Paul helped by gathering wood. As he was putting some on the fire, a poisonous snake came out of his armload of wood and bit him on the hand. Paul dropped the wood but the snake hung from his hand. The local people said, "Ah, he is a terrible murderer! He escaped dying at sea, but now the gods are bringing justice to him."

Paul shook the snake into the fire, and everyone waited for him to swell up and drop over dead. After some time, they finally realized he wasn't going to die. Then they said, "He's a god!"

The governor of the island opened up his home and made provisions for those who were shipwrecked. Paul learned that the governor's father was sick in bed. He went and placed his hand on the man's head. Instantly he was healed. News of this spread throughout the island, and people started bringing others to Paul so he could heal them.

They stayed on Malta until the winter months were over. Julius then booked passage for them on a cargo ship that was going to Rome. As

Work of the Holy Spirit

they prepared to leave, the people of the island brought them everything they needed for the trip.

When they arrived in Rome, Paul was taken to a house where he stayed until his trial before Caesar. There was always a soldier next to him, but he was free to have friends come and visit. The Christians in Rome graciously received him and encouraged him.

He sent a letter to the Jewish leaders in the city. He told them about what had happened in Jerusalem and why he was in Rome. He invited them to come and visit him. They met and talked about God's Kingdom and Jesus. Their discussion lasted all day, until late in the afternoon. Some of them believed the message but others didn't.

As they were about to leave, Paul said, "The prophet was right when he said that 'you would listen but not hear, you would look but not see.' Your stubbornness has closed your ears and covered your eyes. You can be sure of this – the Gentiles will see and hear, and God will forgive their sins."

Paul stayed in the house for two years waiting for the trial. During that time he received many guests and preached Christ to them all. No one tried to stop him.

Onesimus was a slave who ran away from his master Philemon. He went to Rome and eventually met Paul who led him to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Onesimus stayed with the apostle and helped him in the ministry. Eventually they knew it was time for the “runaway slave” to return to his master. Paul was a personal friend with Philemon, so he wrote a letter to help the two men reconcile their relationship.

He said ...

Philemon – my dear friend – greetings to you, your family, and the church that meets in your home. I pray for you on a regular basis. I thank God for the love you have for the Lord Jesus Christ and for fellow believers. Those who meet you are encouraged in their faith.

Dear brother, you know me. I don't normally hesitate in telling you what is right and wrong. I'm usually quick in reminding you of your duties in Christ. But I'm not going to do that this time. Instead, I am going to beg.

Picture this in your mind. I'm an old man who is in prison for the cause of Jesus Christ. In my weakness, God sent me a helper, Onesimus – a man who caused you pain and grief. But God sent him to me and I was able to introduce him to Jesus. He yielded his life to Christ and then became invaluable as a helper to me.

In a way, it was like you sent him here to help me because you couldn't come yourself. I don't know how I can carry on without him; but he and I both know he should go back to you. He was helping me in your stead, but we didn't have your permission.

Listen, he was a worthless slave when he ran away from you. Now he's coming back as a valuable brother in Christ, a co-worker in the ministry and a dear friend of mine. Receive him back in love.

Oh, concerning those things he stole from you – put those on my account. Here, I will pick up the quill and write this in my own handwriting. “I, Paul, will repay it.” I won't remind you of the fact you actually owe me your very life.

Please receive him as if you were receiving me. You'll bring joy to my life when I hear how you've accepted Onesimus back into your life and home.

But what am I talking about? I know you'll do this and even more.

By the way, prepare your guest room for me. I know you've been praying that I'd be set free and come back to visit you. I think the Lord is going to answer your prayers.

Greet all my good friends who are there. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Paul.

God showed the Apostle John amazing things about our future. He was told to write it down so people could read it. Today it's called the Book of Revelation. Near the end, John said...

I suddenly realized that everything was new. I looked into the sky and the old heaven no longer existed. There was a new heaven! I looked around and the old earth was gone. There was a new earth, and it didn't have oceans!

I looked up and I saw the Holy City coming from God out of heaven. It was the New Jerusalem, and it was beautiful! It was like a bride all dressed up for her husband.

Then I heard a voice. It said, "Look, God is going to live with people! He'll be their God, and they'll be his people. He'll wipe away their tears of sorrow. He'll do away with death, grieving, sorrow, and pain. Everything will be different."

Then God said to me. "What you're seeing is true. Everything will be new. I am the A and the Z, the beginning and the end. I give 'Springs of Living Water' to the thirsty. I'm a father of the redeemed. They are my children, and they have found my victory.

"But those who didn't believe are cowards and vile. They're full of murder, immorality, and lies. They worship devils and false gods. When all of this is done, I'll send them to the Lake of Fire. That is the Second Death!"

Then an angel came to me and said, "Come

and I'll give you a closer look."

He took my spirit to a high mountain, so I could see the Holy City as it came out of heaven. The New Jerusalem was dressed in God's glory, and shone like precious jewels.

Its wall had twelve gates – three on each of the four sides. The gates had the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the foundations of the walls had the names of the twelve apostles. All of it was made of precious stones.

The angel measured the city. And I found out that it was 1500 miles in each direction, like a massive cube. The walls were made of jasper, and the city itself was pure gold. The gates were made of pearl. The main street was made of pure transparent gold.

There was no temple because God and the Lamb were the temple. Those in the city didn't need the sun or moon because the glory of God was the light and the Lamb was the lamp.

The gates were always open because it was always day there. All the nations were welcome to come at any time. But vile and unclean people were not allowed in. Only those whose names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life were welcomed into the city.

John continued describing what he saw in the New Jerusalem.

He then concluded the book. He said...

As I was looking at the New Jerusalem, the angel showed me the River of Living Water. It was crystal clear and flowed out from the throne of God and the Lamb. It flowed down the middle of the main street.

The Tree of Life was on both sides of the street. It had twelve kinds of fruit and produced a crop each month. All the nations went to the tree and found precious healing in its leaves. It was then I realized that never again would anything be cursed.

Servants of God went to his throne and worshiped him. They were allowed to look up and see his face. His name was on their foreheads.

There was no night in the city. So people didn't need sunlight or lamps. The Lord God provided light for them. They ruled forever as if they were kings.

I was looking at all of this when the angel turned to me. He said, "What you're seeing will happen. The Lord gave me this message for you. He said, 'People are to get ready! Because when this happens, it will happen fast. They'll be blessed if they focus on what you have written.' "

At that point, I fell down and worshiped the angel. He was shocked. "Don't do that! I'm just a servant like you. You're to worship God."

He then said, "Listen carefully. What you've written is extremely important. Make sure people read it. Don't worry about their response. Leave

that to God."

Suddenly, I heard Jesus talking to me. He said, "I'm coming, and when I do, it will be fast! I'll give rewards for what each person has done. I am the A and the Z, the first and the last, the beginning of everything – and the end of it all.

"I'll bless those who are prepared for my coming. I'll invite them to the Tree of Life. They can walk right through the gates of the city and come in.

"The wicked aren't welcome. They'll have to stay outside.

"I sent this angel to you. I told him to show you these things. Remember, I'm the Root and the Branch of David. I am the Bright and Morning Star."

Suddenly I heard, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' " Then it was echoed back. "Come!"

Again, I heard, "If you're thirsty, 'Come! Come and drink Living Water.' "

Oh, my dear friends. Be careful what you do with this book. God will judge you accordingly. Don't make up what's not here. Don't pick and choose what you want to believe. It's all true!

As I wrote this, I suddenly heard Jesus saying, "Something else is true. I'm coming back – and soon."

I said, "Yes Lord. Come!!!"