

## ACTS of the APOSTLES: The Early Church

- ◆ Jesus sends God's Holy Spirit
- ◆ Early Christian converts
- ◆ Thousands join the church
- ◆ Miracles of healing
- ◆ Persecution and church growth
- ◆ Miraculous escapes from prison

THIS BOOK teaches about the early days of the Christian church nearly 2000 years ago. The Good News that Jesus is the Son of God quickly spread to many countries of the world. The followers of Jesus preached the Good News with great power. The power of God's Holy Spirit worked through the followers of Jesus. Wonderful things happened.

*MANNA PUBLICATIONS supply Bible commentaries written by Fred Morris. For many years Fred, and his wife Lorna, travelled round the world teaching and preaching. When they returned home they wrote these notes for printing and selling wherever there was a need for basic Christian teaching.*

THIS REVISED edition is written in easy-to-read Worldwide English which will add understanding and also speed up translation into other languages. It gives basic teaching for all readers plus additional notes for Bible students, teachers and pastors.

*THESE BOOKS are to use on your own or to study in a group. They will teach you God's truth. They will help you to know God's Son, Jesus Christ. They will help you to talk about your faith in God. They will stop you from going the wrong way in life. They will help to lead you closer to Christ. They provide food for life.*

WE PRAY that you may have a new peace and purpose in life as you read the Bible and use these commentaries.

# Manna Publications

"The secret of God's Kingdom has been given to you" (Mark 4:11)

# ACTS of the APOSTLES

## The early Church

A Bible Commentary in easy-to-read Worldwide English for personal or group study  
**by Fred Morris**



## ACTS Part One: Chapters 1 to 12

## To the reader or leader

These Bible commentaries explain the truth about God's Word in a way which is easy to read and understand. You can use these books to study the Bible on your own or with others in a group. In a group study, each person should have his or her own book and a Bible if possible.

There is a lot of information in this book. Please study it slowly and thoughtfully. Ask God to help you apply the things you learn into your own life and situation.



Where you see this sign, it means you or your group leader should always read the Bible passage first before reading the words in this book.



**Talk about.** Where you see this sign, it gives questions that can be used in a group study. They also help the reader to understand the Bible verses.



**Multiple choice questions.** Where you see this sign there are questions with three possible answers; some are right answers, some are wrong answers. These questions help you think carefully about what you are reading. The answers to these questions are given at the back of the book. Use the questions as a personal test.



Where you see this sign inside ruled boxes, the information is mainly for Bible students, teachers and preachers.

- **Additional Bible readings** are there to give you important information. God will use them to speak to you. This is why you should check all readings now or later and use them for study at home. Some readings are from the Old Testament (OT), which we call 'the holy writings'. That is the part of the Bible written before Jesus Christ lived on this earth.

These Bible commentaries give God's truth as a foundation for all believers. The people leading the study should add applications and experiences from their own Christian life and culture.

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## ANSWERS

1. b	2. a & c	3. a & c	4. b & c	5. c
6. a & c	7. c	8. c	9. a	10. b
11. c	12. c	13. a	14. a, b & c	15. a
16. a & c	17. a & c	18. a	19. a	20. a
21. a & c	22. a & c	23. c	24. b	

### For further study we recommend:

*'The Applied New Testament Commentary'* by Thomas Hale, published by Chariot Victor Publishing, U.S.A. (1-5647-6675-6) and Kingsway Publications, U.K. (0-85476-508-5)  
*'Unlocking the Bible: Omnibus'* by David Pawson, published by HarperCollins, U.K. (0-00-716666-4)

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**What does Acts chapter 8 teach you about:**

- how God can use trouble so that the Good News spreads to other places (verses 1–8,25–26,40)?
- how sin can make us a prisoner (9–24)?
- how the Holy Spirit can use us to bring his salvation to people from far off places (27–39)?

**What does Acts chapter 9 teach you about:**

- how Saul persecuted the Christians (verses 1–2)?
- how Saul became a Christian (3–19)?
- how Saul's preaching of the Good News of Jesus was full of power (20–22)?
- why Saul was persecuted by the Jews in Damascus and in Jerusalem (23–29)?
- how Saul took the Good News to Tarsus in Turkey (30)?
- how the church in the Middle East grew strong (31)?
- the work of God that Peter did among the Jews (32–43)?

**What does Acts chapter 10 teach you about:**

- how God hears and answers prayer of a foreigner (verses 1–8)?
- how God showed Peter that he must accept non-Jews (9–23)?
- what message Peter preached to those who were not Jews (24–43)?
- the Holy Spirit coming, as He did on the day of Pentecost (44–48)?

**What does Acts chapter 11 teach you about:**

- what other believers said when Peter went to people who were not Jews (verses 1–18)?
- how the church grew strong in Antioch (19–26)?
- how the churches began to help and support each other (27–30)?

**What does Acts chapter 12 teach you about:**

- how king Herod tried to destroy the work of God (verses 1–4)?
- how God answered prayers and saved Peter from prison (5–19)?
- how God destroyed Herod (19–23)?
- how the church went on growing (24)?
- how God made Saul, Barnabas and Mark ready to be His messengers (25)?

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## INTRODUCTION

The book of the ACTS OF THE APOSTLES was written by Luke. Luke wanted his friend Theophilus to know about Jesus. That report is the 'The Gospel of Luke' and it is the third book of the part of the Bible that we call the New Testament. Later, Dr Luke wrote the book of Acts for Theophilus.

The book of Acts begins with the last few days of Jesus on earth. The beginning of the Church of Jesus Christ soon follows. First, Luke tells us how Jesus went back to His Father in Heaven (His Ascension). Read about it in Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51 as well as Acts 1:9.



### Who was Luke?

Luke was a doctor. He was Paul's friend and went with Paul on some of his missionary journeys to tell others about Jesus. Paul called Luke his 'dear friend Luke, the doctor' (Colossians 4:14). Paul was a Jew. Luke's family were Greeks, so he was not a Jew.

Luke found out about some of the things that Jesus did from reading Matthew and Mark's gospels. He also talked to people who met Jesus and His followers.

He first wrote his own gospel in AD 54 for his friend Theophilus. Luke was a doctor. He checked every story very carefully. Then in AD 62 Luke wrote the book of Acts, the story of the beginning of the Christian Church. Luke was well educated. He wrote some of the best Greek books ever written.

## WHAT JESUS SAID BEFORE GOING TO HEAVEN

After Jesus rose from death, the eleven disciples went back to Galilee. Jesus and the angel told them to do this.

The following are the last teachings of Jesus.

1. He told them, 'All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me' (Matthew 28:18).
2. His followers must go to all countries and make more followers of Jesus (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8).
3. His followers should baptise believers in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).
4. His followers must teach the things that He taught (Matthew 28:20).
5. He will be with His people at all times (Matthew 28:20).
6. People who believe in Jesus will be saved, but those who do not believe in Jesus will be punished (Mark 16:16).
7. Those with faith who preach the Gospel (Good News) of Jesus Christ can expect to see signs and wonders from God (Mark 16:17–18).
8. Everything written about Him in the holy writings of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms must come true (Luke 24:44).
9. His followers will tell people about Him and teach them to turn away from their sins and be forgiven (Luke 24:47).
10. People from every nation will hear about the name of Jesus (Luke 24:47).

11. His followers must begin this work in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47).
12. The disciples should wait until God sent them His power from Heaven (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4).

After saying these things, Jesus went up to heaven to be with His Father, God. We call this the ascension of Jesus. Then the followers of Jesus went back to Jerusalem to wait for God's Holy Spirit to come down upon them.

Peter the chief follower of Jesus, later wrote these words: 'Christ died for [your] sins. He died to bring you to God. His body was put to death. But the Holy Spirit brought Him back to life. Jesus Christ has saved you by rising from the dead. He has gone into heaven. He is at God's right hand. Angels, authorities and powers are under His control' (1 Peter 3:18,21,22).

Ask God to help you to understand and to believe these things.



### Evidence of the resurrection of Jesus

After rising from death, Jesus appeared at least 12 times to His followers:

1. Mary meets Jesus (Mark 16:9; John 20:14–17).
2. The two Mary's see Jesus (Matthew 28:1,8–10).
3. Jesus speaks to Peter (Luke 24:34).
4. Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13–32).
5. Jesus appears to the waiting disciples (Luke 24:36–49).
6. Jesus appears especially for Thomas (John 20:26–29).
7. Jesus appears to seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee (John 21).
8. Jesus teaches the eleven disciples on a mountain (Matthew 28:16).
9. Jesus meets His followers for a meal (Acts 1:4).
10. Jesus appears to 500 followers (1 Corinthians 15:6).
11. Jesus appears to James, His half-brother (1 Corinthians 15:7).
12. Jesus appears for the last time at His ascension to heaven (Luke 24:50–51).



### Acts 1:1–26

#### THE CHURCH BEFORE THE SPIRIT CAME

After rising from death, Jesus met his followers at least 12 times in 40 days (Acts 1:3). He taught them many things, especially things about the Kingdom of God.

Before Jesus left His disciples and went back to Heaven, He promised to send the Holy Spirit to be with them. 'I will not leave you as children without parents,' He told them, 'I will come to you' (John 14:18).

He also said, 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised. You have heard Me talk about it ... in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 1:4,5).

Jesus said that his disciples must go into all countries and teach what He had taught them (Mark 16:15). They would be messengers bringing Good News. They would be given power to do this (1:8).

- how important it is to teach people from the holy writings (14–31)?
- how important it is to tell people about Jesus (32–36)?
- what happens when people preach the Good News of Jesus Christ (37,41)?
- how people are saved from their sins (38–40)?
- how the coming of the Holy Spirit changes us and our fellowship with other believers (42–47)?

#### ***What does Acts chapter 3 teach you about:***

- how God gives the power to perform miracles in the name of Jesus (verses 1–8)?
- what happens to other people when someone is healed in the name of Jesus (9–11)?
- what opportunity this gives to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ (12–26)?

#### ***What does Acts chapter 4 teach you about:***

- the people who are against God's truth (verses 1–7)?
- how does the Holy Spirit make us bold to preach the Good News (8–13)?
- how important it is to 'speak in the name of Jesus' (14–22)?
- how important it is to pray and praise when we are persecuted (23–30)?
- how the Holy Spirit works among believers (4,31–37)?

#### ***What does Acts chapter 5 teach you about:***

- the importance of not lying to God and not offending the Holy Spirit (verses 1–11)?
- how we should worship, witness and work, as the early church did (12–16)?
- how to deal with envy and fear and persecution (17–28)?
- how we can be bold and know blessings, as the apostles did (29–42)?

#### ***What does Acts chapter 6 teach you about:***

- what the leaders did when they had a problem because the church was growing so quickly (verses 1–6)?
- what happens when the church is happy and growing (7)?
- how and why important men spoke evil against God's truth (8–14)?
- what people saw when Stephen was falsely accused (15)?

#### ***What does Acts chapter 7 teach you about:***

- God's plan for the Jews which Stephen told them (verses 1–50)?
- the words that Stephen spoke against the Jewish leaders (51–53)?
- what made the Jewish leaders angry enough to kill Stephen (54–58)?
- what was special about Stephen when they stoned him (59–60)?

- b) said Cornelius could not be baptised because he was not a Jew.  
 c) told Cornelius that he could not stay in his house.
21. The Bible says —  
 a) many believers left Jerusalem because of the persecution  
 b) there was a famine in Antioch.  
 c) Barnabus visited Saul at Tarsus.
22. Herod —  
 a) killed James and arrested Peter.  
 b) let Peter out of prison.  
 c) was killed by an angel.
23. At Mary's house —  
 a) an angel knocked on the door.  
 b) the servant girl, did not recognise Peter.  
 c) many people were praying for Peter.
- 24 Herod died because —  
 a) of a quarrel with the people of Tyre and Sidon.  
 b) he did not give praise to God.  
 c) worms were eating him.

### PERSONAL PROGRESS CHECK (Self Assessment)

We could be as Saul and Cornelius and the Ethiopian were at first – we can believe in God but still not understand what the Bible says about Jesus. God's truth about Jesus and the Holy Spirit will change you and set you free from your old life. It is therefore important for you to understand what God has taught you from studying Acts chapters 1 to 12.

#### **What does Acts chapter 1 teach you about:**

- Jesus raised from death (verses 1–3)?
- the last command of Jesus (4)?
- the Holy Spirit promised as a gift for all believers (5–8)?
- Jesus ascending into heaven (9–10)?
- the promise of Christ's return (11)?
- the life of believers before the Holy Spirit was given (12–15,21–26)?
- the death of Judas (16–20)?

#### **What does Acts chapter 2 teach you about:**

- how the Holy Spirit first came (verses 1–3)?
- the gift He gives of speaking in different languages (4–11)?
- how people behave when the Holy Spirit is at work (12–13)?

## THE ELEVEN DISCIPLES WERE CALLED APOSTLES

The apostles met in an upstairs room in Jerusalem and prayed, together with over a 100 followers of Jesus (1:12–15). Jesus told them to do this (1:4). They must first wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1:5). They must wait in Jerusalem for the power to tell others the Good News of Jesus (1:8).

When Jesus was 'taken up into heaven' (1:9) two angels told the followers of Jesus: 'He will come back in the same way as you saw Him go' (1:11). This is why Christians believe that Jesus will come back again one day.

For a few days the followers of Jesus stayed in the house to pray and talk and wait for the Holy Spirit to come. They planned what to do to be ready. And chose someone to take the place of Judas as an apostle, 'to join us in telling others that Jesus rose from the dead' (1:22). They did not yet have the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. But they were united in love and purpose and action. This included the family of Jesus (1:14).



### Before God sent the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:12–26 tells us how the followers of Jesus met together **before** Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to them:

- The believers, both men and women, met together often (1:14).
- They met together in unity to pray (1:14, 24).
- Peter was a leader among them (1:15). See Matthew 16:17–19.
- They listened to the words of the holy writings (1:20).
- They had a meeting to choose an apostle to take Judas' place (1:21–26).
- They prayed to God to help them to choose (1:24).

Their meetings at that time did not have the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Questions:** Is the Holy Spirit working in your church meetings? Are you trying to do all the right things but without God's power and guidance? Should you be asking God to guide you through His Spirit? Do you believe that God's Spirit is at work when people meet together to pray?



### Talk about:

1. How many people saw Jesus after He rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:5–7)?
2. What did Jesus teach about before He went back to heaven (Acts 1:3)? Why?
3. What was the command Jesus gave His disciples (Acts 1:4)?
4. What did the angels tell the disciples (1:11)? What does this mean?
5. Which people met in Jerusalem to pray (1:12–15)?
6. Why is it important for believers to be united (1:14)? What happens when believers pray together in unity?

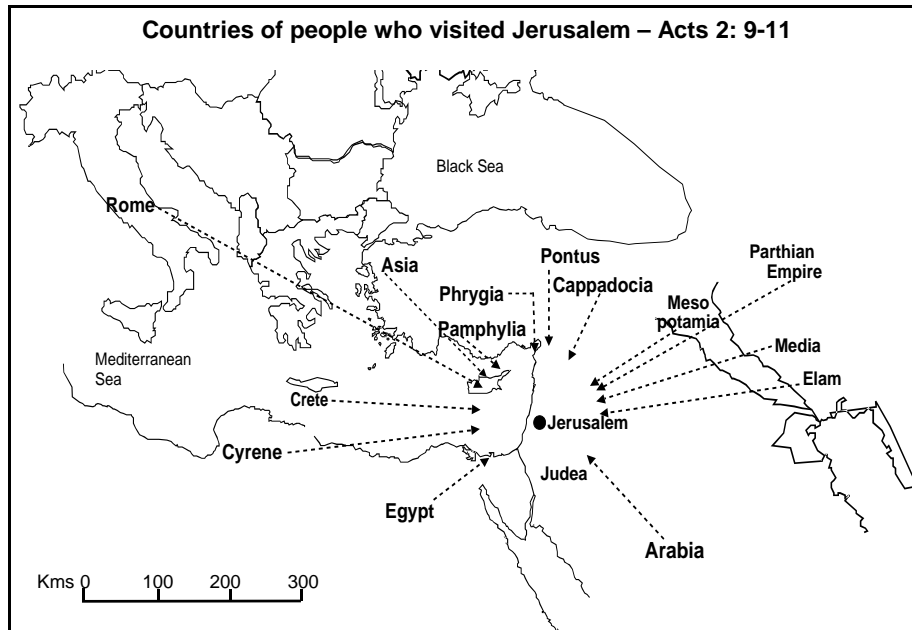


## Acts 2:1–13

### JESUS SENDS HIS HOLY SPIRIT

Ten days after the ascension of Jesus into heaven, early in the morning, the 120 believers were waiting and praying. A strange thing happened. They heard a noise and saw what looked like flames of fire. The flames rested on the head of each man and woman. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages that they had never learned (2:4). There was much happiness and excitement.

It was the Feast of Pentecost when the Jews came together to thank God for the harvest. Many Jews came to Jerusalem from other countries (Acts 2:9–11) to worship God. Thousands of people filled the streets of the city.



These people heard Christ's followers praising God in different languages. Each person heard the 'wonders of God' in their own language (2:8-11). They were amazed (2:12). The Holy Spirit gave the disciples power to speak boldly. They remembered that Jesus told them, 'In a few days you will be baptised by the Holy Spirit' (1:5). Now it was happening.



### Talk about:

1. Who is the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17)?
2. Why did Jesus send God's Holy Spirit (Luke 12:11–12; Acts 1:8; 1 John 2:20)?

We all can have a part to play in God's plan to save the world. In every age or generation more are born who have never heard the Good News about Jesus Christ. Jesus taught that each new generation must be 'born again' (John 3:3). Therefore in every age Christians must carry on the work of telling the world about Jesus Christ. If we have put our faith in Jesus Christ and have been born again, God wants us to tell others the Good News. We can be led and guided by the Holy Spirit, just as Paul was in the first days of the early church. Read Acts Part 2 (chapters 13 to 28) which tells how the Christian faith spread throughout the world. This happened over a period of 40 years before the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in AD70

This is a work of the Holy Spirit. This is why you should study the Acts of the Apostles. Then you will understand more about how God wants you to live today in the power of His Spirit.

Today, 2 billion people in the world call themselves 'Christian'. Every year there are over 50 million new believers. They need to be 'born again' by learning and believing and applying the teachings of Jesus. And they need to be taught about the life and writings of believers in the early church. They need to be told what is truth and what is error. We therefore encourage you to read your Bible daily. Manna Bible commentaries will help you to understand the Bible and help you to teach others God's truth.



### MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

#### Based on Chapters 9 to 12

Please choose the correct answers, a, b or c. There could be one, two or three answers that are correct for each question.

**Answers are given at the end of this book**

17. Saul, who was later called Paul —
  - a) was chosen by God to work with people who were not Jews.
  - b) was told not to speak to the people of Israel.
  - c) could see again after Ananias prayed for him.
18. Saul —
  - a) went from Damascus to Jerusalem.
  - b) was afraid to preach in Damascus.
  - c) was afraid to speak in Jerusalem.
19. Peter —
  - a) and Cornelius both had visions.
  - b) was hungry and wanted to eat what he saw in the vision.
  - c) knew straight away the meaning of his vision.
20. Peter —
  - a) knew that Cornelius and his friends were Christians when they received the Holy Spirit.



## Talk about:

1. What happened to Peter when he was in a prison (12:6–10)?
2. How can prayer help people who are trapped in a prison?
3. How can prayer help people who are trapped by poverty and sickness and fear?
4. Why did the angel of the Lord strike Herod (12:23)?

## CONCLUSION

The Acts of the Apostles has often been called 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit'. Luke wrote it so that people would know about the great works of God through the power of the Spirit at work through the apostles.

In the early days of the Christian church, the believers shared the Good News of Jesus Christ through the countries of the Middle East. Then Philip told the Good News to the Ethiopian who took the Good News to Africa. History books tell us that Mark took the Good News to Egypt and Thomas took the Good News to India so that it spread there. Saul took the Good News to Europe.

In the early days of the church the Christians were persecuted at times but they were bold, loving and caring. They did not fight when there was trouble. Many moved away. Wherever they went, they witnessed for the risen Lord Jesus through the power of His Spirit.

They met Jews who believed in the true God but who did not know that Jesus was the Son of God. Many of the Jews converted to Christianity. It was at this time that the believers were first called Christians. God's Holy Spirit worked in their lives. They were saved through belief in Jesus.

We have read about the three most well known people who were converted at this time:

- The man from Ethiopia who believed in God and wanted to understand more about the Messiah spoken about in the Jewish holy writings (our Old Testament).
- Saul who believed in God but couldn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah.
- Cornelius who believed in God and worshipped Him but hadn't heard about Jesus.

God loved these men, and so the Holy Spirit led Philip, Ananias and Peter to them. When they heard and understood the message about Jesus, they believed in Him and were saved.

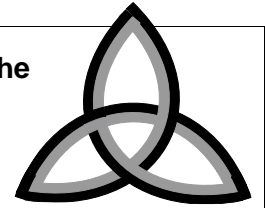
In the same way, God wants us to tell others about Jesus Christ. Do you know anyone who believes in God, but does not know how to be saved? Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you, so that you can tell them about Jesus Christ.

In our next Bible commentary (Acts, Part 2) you will learn how the Holy Spirit led Saul, later known as Paul, to people in other countries who did not know the true God. They believed in false gods and idols. But through the teaching of Paul and the power of the Holy Spirit, many of them became Christians. They were saved from their sins through faith in Jesus, repentance of sins and forgiveness by God's grace and mercy.

3. Did the Holy Spirit come to every believer (2:3,4)?
4. What difference did the Holy Spirit make to the followers of Jesus (2:3–4)?
5. What difference did the Holy Spirit make to the crowds (2:6–7; 11–13)?
6. What difference does the Holy Spirit make in your life?



## The HOLY SPIRIT is the third person of the TRINITY



The Bible does not use the word 'Trinity' but it does tell us of the three persons that are one God. (See Matthew 3:16–17; 4:1; 28:19; Acts 2: 38–39; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:3, 13; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Revelation 4:1–3; 5:6–10).

A three-in-one God is a mystery that many people do not understand. Pray for wisdom to understand the teaching of the Trinity and to help others to understand.

This is a picture of a symbol the early Christians in Western Europe used, over 1900 years ago, to help them to understand the Trinity. It is called the Celtic Rope or Knot. It is in three parts but each part is joined with the other two parts: all three parts are one, just as God the Father, God the Son (Jesus) and God the Holy Spirit are one.

The Holy Spirit was with God the Father at the beginning of the world (Genesis 1:2). Jesus was also with the Father at the beginning of the world (John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 8:12).

God's Holy Spirit was sent by Jesus to help His followers to live holy lives (Luke 24:49; John 14:16–17; Acts 1:4–5; Romans 8:9). God gave this promise in the holy writings 600 years before it happened (Ezekiel 36:27; 39:29). John the Baptist said it would happen (Matthew 3:11).

God promised to give His Spirit to all believers who ask (Luke 11:13; Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit is at work all the time.

The Holy Spirit helps people to see their sins. He points people to Jesus Christ to help and forgive.

The power of the Holy Spirit gives great signs and wonders (Acts 2:2–4; 4:31; 8:6–8).



## Acts 2:14–47

### PETER SPEAKS TO THE PEOPLE

Peter stood up and spoke to the crowd of people in the street. The Holy Spirit gave him the power to do this. These people knew the holy writings of our Old Testament, so Peter used the words of the prophet Joel (2:16; Joel 2:28–32). He told the people that God had, that morning, kept this promise He had made through Joel. He had sent His Spirit.

Peter told them these things:

- Jesus was a man with whom God was pleased (2:22)

- It was God's plan that Jesus should die (2:23)
- We are told of it in the holy writings (2:25)
- God raised Jesus from death (2:32)
- Jesus is now with God the Father (2:33)
- It is Jesus who has sent down the Holy Spirit (2:33).

Then Peter told them: 'This Jesus whom you crucified, God had made both Lord and Christ' (2:36). Peter told them that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah, who came to save the world from sin. They thought they had finished with Jesus by nailing Him to a cross, but they were wrong! Many felt ashamed (2:37). They wanted to know what to do to be saved from their sinful ways.

## THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION: SET FREE FROM OUR SINS

Many people believed what Peter said. They believed that Jesus died because of their sins. They believed that this was God's plan. They believed that Jesus was the Christ, God's Messiah (2:36). Then Peter told the people what they must do next to be saved from their sins (2:38). 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus... for the forgiveness of your sins. And you, too, will receive the Holy Spirit.'

Peter said, 'This is for all people, everywhere, whom God calls' (2:39). Salvation is not just for the Jews and their families. It is for all people everywhere who know that the Spirit of God is calling them. About 3000 people were saved that day (2:41). This happened after God came down with power and with fire (2:2-3). God's Spirit was given to ordinary men and women who believed in Jesus.



### Baptism

Jesus told His followers that there were two kinds of baptisms. 'John baptised with water. But ... you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit' (Mark 1:8; Acts 1:5). Peter tells this to the people in Acts 2:38.

*Baptism in water.* The New Testament first speaks of this baptism when John the Baptist came to make the way for Jesus (Mark 1:4). He told the people; 'Turn away from your sins and be baptised, so that God will forgive you.' Jesus told His followers to baptise believers in water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:29). They did what Jesus asked (Acts 2:41). Going under the water is a picture to show we have turned from our sin and God has forgiven us. We 'die' to sin and are 'buried'. Then through the power of Christ's resurrection we 'rise up' into a new life.

*Baptism of the Spirit.* This first happened in Acts 2:2-3 at the Feast of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came down – like bright tongues of fire – onto the believers who were praying. After this, Peter told new believers that they too would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (8:15-17).

On this same day when the Holy Spirit came down, the apostles baptised the new believers in water (2:41); about 3,000 of them. Each believer was baptised in water and baptised in the Spirit.



### A miracle in China

Brother Yun was in Zhenqhou Prison in China. No one had ever escaped from this prison. Yun could not escape because his legs were broken by the prison guards. He writes: "It was now more than six weeks since my legs were smashed. Even putting a little weight on them caused great pain. But God told me in three different ways that I must try to escape. When the Lord tells us to do something there is no time for discussion or reasoning. When we are sure God has told us to act we must obey. We are not wiser than Him ..."

Somehow brother Yun was able to walk out of his prison room and walk towards the locked iron gate in the hallway. "My mind was focused on obeying God. At the exact moment I reached the gate, another servant of the Lord, Brother Musheng, was returning to his cell and the gate opened for him. I walked through the gate" (It was only later that Yun realized that God had healed his legs as he obeyed.)

An armed guard was sitting at the desk by the second iron gate. The Holy Spirit whispered to Yun "Go now, the God of Peter is your God." Yun says "The Lord seemed to blind that guard. He was staring at me yet it seemed he did not see me." Yun walked down the stairs and across the courtyard. He knew he could be shot in the back at any moment. When he arrived at the main iron gate leading to the city he found it was open. He walked past several armed guards and through the gate. Immediately, a small yellow taxi drew up and he got in and was driven off. He says "I was unsure if the whole thing had really happened or if I was dreaming."

When he reached the home of a Christian friend the lady was so excited she forgot at first to open the door. Later he was told "The church has been fasting and praying for you for more than a week. Yesterday the Holy Spirit told my mother, "I will release Yun and the first place he will stop will be your home. He will stay for a short time and will pray with you."

After this Yun was taken to a secret place to hide.

("The Heavenly Man" by Paul Hattaway, published by Monarch Books, London.)

At once the chains fell off Peter's hands and he followed the angel. They walked past the guards and went out through the iron gate into the city. Peter didn't know what was happening until the angel left him. Then he knew it was not a dream. He went to Mary's house where all the Christians were praying for him (12:12). At first they could not believe that it was Peter and that their prayers had been answered (12:15).

'Tell James and the Christian brothers about this,' Peter said, then he left them.

Herod killed the prison guards because Peter had escaped. Then he went to Cae-sa-re-a on a state visit. There he sat on his special seat and spoke to a large crowd of people.

'This is the voice of a god, not a man,' the crowd shouted. Then an angel of the Lord struck Herod down because he did not give any praise to God, the Almighty (12:22-23). Herod died in AD 44, but the message of God spread to more and more places (12:24).

## HOW THE EARLY CHRISTIANS SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

By this time other believers had travelled right through the Roman Empire. At first, they preached the Good News of Jesus Christ to Jews (11:19). Then some of them preached to non-Jews (11:20). Believers from Cyprus and Cyrene (Libya) came to live in Antioch in Syria. Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman empire. It was here that the believers were called Christians for the first time. God was with them and many people believed and became Christians (11:21).

When the church leaders in Jerusalem heard of this they sent Barnabas to Antioch to encourage the new Christians. Then he went to Tarsus to bring Saul back to Antioch to help him (11:25–26). Teaching is important for new believers because they need to change their old ways. They do this by listening to good teachers and learning the things that please God from the Bible and by following the teachings of Jesus.

Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem, also came to Antioch. The Holy Spirit spoke through him that there would be very little food in the Roman Empire. This happened in the time of Emperor Claudius (41–54 AD). They wanted to help the people in need, so the Christians gave money to Barnabas and Saul to take as a gift to the church leaders in Jerusalem. (11:29–30).



### Talk about:

1. Why did the Jewish Christian leaders find fault with Peter (11:2)?
2. Are you ready to speak about God to people of different colour, culture or race?
3. If God treats everyone the same, what should we do? (10:34) Does this mean 'All people are equal'?
4. How did Peter bring back peace and unity in the church (11:17)?
5. What was God doing through the believers in Antioch (11:20,29)?
6. Why is Bible reading and teaching so important in the church?
7. What does the witness and work of the church include?



### Acts 12:1–25

## AN ANGEL HELPS PETER TO ESCAPE FROM PRISON

The Romans put Herod Agrippa in charge of Judea. He was a grandson of Herod the Great, the bad and wicked king who killed the baby boys in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus (Matt 2:16).

Herod Agrippa put some of the Christians in jail and then killed James (12:2). The Jewish leaders were pleased about this, so Herod took Peter and put him in prison. He wanted to bring Peter to a trial after the Jewish Passover (12:4).

But God was in control. Herod could not do anything to Peter unless God allowed it. Now God showed that His power was greater than that of this wicked king (1 John 4:4).

In prison Peter was chained to two soldiers. At night, when Peter was asleep, suddenly, a light shone in his cell and an angel woke him and said, 'Quick, get up! Put on your clothes and follow me' (12:8).



### Talk about this:

1. What did the people feel and say (2:37)?
2. Why did they feel this way (John 16:8)?
3. What two things did Peter say that they must do (2:38)?
4. What two things did Peter say that God will do (2:38)?
5. Who is the gift of God's salvation for (Acts 2:39)?

## THE CHURCH AFTER THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME

In Acts 2:42–47 we read how the new followers of Jesus met together *after* Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to them:

- The believers met each day in the Temple area in Jerusalem (2:46).
- They prayed together (2:42).
- They all met together and enjoyed friendship of other believers (2:42,44).
- The apostles were their leaders and cared for them (2:42–43).
- The believers listened and studied what the leaders taught them (2:42).
- They shared what they had with each other or sold their things to help other believers (2:44–45).
- They 'broke bread' together in believer's homes – remembering the death of the Lord Jesus in the same way He asked them to do at His Last Supper (2:42,46; Luke 22:19).
- They knew God was near to them (2:43).
- The apostles did many miracles in the name of Jesus (2:43).
- They met in public places and in homes (2:46).
- They were happy and humble, (2:46) loving each other as well as loving God.
- They praised God (2:47).
- Other people thought well of them (2:47).
- Every day more people believed in Jesus and met with them (2:47).



### Talk about:

1. What difference did the coming of the Holy Spirit make to these people? (Compare Acts chapters 1 and 2)
2. How can we have church meetings like the ones in Acts 2:42–47?
3. How did the new believers live (2:42,44-47)?
4. What happened to the new believers (2:43,47)?
5. Do people who are not Christians see that the Holy Spirit makes a difference in your life and in your church?



## Acts 3:1–26

### PETER AND JOHN AT THE TEMPLE

These people who believed in Jesus Christ had no church buildings, so they met in houses or at the Temple to worship God (2:46).

One day Peter and John went to the Temple. A lame man sat at the Temple gate asking for money. Because he was a lame beggar, he was not allowed to go into the Temple.

He held out his hand to Peter. 'I do not have silver or gold (money),' Peter told him, 'but I will give you what I have.' Then he said, 'In the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk!' (3:6). Peter held out his hand to help him stand.

At once the lame man was healed. He got up and followed Peter and John into the Temple. He was walking and jumping and praising God! He was healed! He was free to go into the Temple! He could stop begging! Everyone heard him and soon people came running to see what had happened. They were amazed that he was walking.

'Men of Israel, why does this surprise you?' Peter asked. 'This man was made strong by faith in the name of Jesus' (3:16).

Peter reminded the people that they crucified Jesus. 'You handed Jesus over to be killed ... You spoke against Jesus ... You asked for a murderer to be set free instead ... You killed the One who gives life. But God raised Him from death' (3:13–15). And it was faith in Jesus that healed this man' (3:16). Jesus has the power to do this because He is the Son of God.

Again, Peter quotes from the holy writings. All their prophets had told how the Christ (Messiah) would suffer and die (3:18,24). Under the Law given to Moses, sinful people should die, 'For the wages of sin is death ...' (Romans 6:23). But Jesus came and died in our place. He promised life, not death! Jesus Christ could only save men from sin by dying in their place.



### Disabled people worshipping God

The Jewish rulers did not allow disabled people to go into the Temple at Jerusalem. A disabled priest could not make a sacrifice (Leviticus 21:17–24). But Jesus told them that the Temple would soon be destroyed (Mark 13:2). A time would soon come when people would not worship God on that special mountain in Jerusalem (John 4:21). People would worship God 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24). This is why all people are now free to worship God anywhere and at any time; people like you and me; sinners who know God has forgiven them through Christ. Disabled people are welcome. The lame beggar in Acts 3:8 was full of joy that he could walk into the Temple to worship God. He was no longer kept outside. The church of Jesus Christ welcomes all people. No one is shut outside. 'I will make the disabled my faithful people' (Micah 4:7). Does your church make it easy for disabled people to worship God? Remember that God does not look on them as disabled. If we bring the disabled to our meetings, some may be healed and some may be saved, through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the midst of God's people. God will do this in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ.

man called Peter. He is staying with Simon the leather worker' (10:6–7). Cornelius obeyed and sent men to Joppa.

Peter, too, saw a vision from God. While he was praying, he became hungry. Then he saw what looked like a large cloth coming down from Heaven. It had all kinds of unclean creatures in it – birds and animals – which the Jews were not allowed to touch or eat.

There was no angel but a voice said, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'

'I never eat anything unclean,' Peter replied (10:14). The voice then said, 'Do not say anything is not clean that God has made clean' (10:15).

The voice from Heaven came three times.

While Peter was thinking about this, Cornelius's servants came to Simon's house and asked for Peter. Then the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter: 'Don't be afraid to go with them, for I have sent them' (10:20).

The next day, Peter went with them to Cae-sa-re-a. The Jewish law said they should not go into a non-Jewish house, but God had showed him that 'God can make anything clean' (10:15,28). No one is too hard for God to save! He saved Saul. He wanted to save Cornelius.

Jews treated non-Jews as 'unclean', but God wanted them to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. Peter told Cornelius: 'Now I know that God has no favourites but wants people from every nation.' (10:34–35).

When Cornelius and his family heard the Good News of Jesus Christ, they believed. The Holy Spirit came on all of them and they praised God in many languages (10:45–46). Then Peter baptised them 'in the name of Jesus Christ'. The Holy Spirit came on them as on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).



### Talk about:

1. Why did God save Cornelius (10:2–4,34)?
2. Is the work of the Holy Spirit in 10:44–46 the same as in 2:4?
3. Can God save anyone He chooses?



## Acts 11:1–30

### PETER GOES BACK TO JERUSALEM

The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were not happy with Peter. 'You went into the house of people who are not Jews and ate with them,' they said (11:3). Peter broke the Jewish law!

Peter told the church leaders about his vision and what happened in Joppa. He told them what John the Baptist said before Jesus began to preach: 'He (Jesus) will baptise you with the Holy Spirit' (Mark 1:8).

Peter told the church leaders that the Holy Spirit came down on the non-Jews 'just as He had come down on us at the beginning' (11:15), even before he had baptised them. Then they all praised God together (11:18).

This was Jesus' promise to all who believe His Good News (John 14:15–18).

Saul later went to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples there, but they were afraid of him. Then Barnabas, one of the church leaders, brought him to the apostles. Barnabas told them what had happened to Saul on the road to Damascus.

From that day, Saul 'spoke boldly in the name of the Lord'. He spoke without fear, and again the Jews tried to kill him. Some of the believers took him to the sea port of Cae-sa-re-a and sent him by boat to his home in Tarsus (9:30). Tarsus was in Asia Minor (Turkey).

At this time God made the church in the Middle East strong and brave. The believers had a period of peace and many people became Christians (9:31).



### Talk about:

1. How did God change Saul (9:6–16)?
2. What teaching should the church give new believers (9:15–20)?
3. Why did the Jews want to kill Saul (9:23,29)?
4. How did Barnabas help Saul?
5. What happened to the Christian believers (9:31)?
6. What happened to Saul (9:30)?
7. Why is it important that we understand the Bible?

## THE JEWS SEE THE POWER OF JESUS

Peter did not stay all the time in Jerusalem. One day he went to Lydda in the north-west of Israel. In this town Peter met Aeneas who had been sick for many years. Peter healed him in the name of Jesus. Then all the Jews who lived in that town believed that Jesus was the Son of God (9:35).

Many people who lived nearby also believed. Dorcas lived in Joppa. She became sick and died. The believers sent for Peter urgently. Peter remembered how Jesus raised three people from death (Matthew 9:25; Luke 7:11–17; John 11:1-44). Peter came to Dorcas. He sent the crowds away and knelt down and prayed. The lady came back to life. After this, many more people in Joppa believed in the Lord Jesus.

Peter stayed in Joppa to teach the Jews about Jesus. While he was there, God showed Peter that he must teach non-Jews as well.



### Acts 10:1–48

## PETER VISITS SOMEONE WHO IS NOT A JEW

The Romans ruled over Israel. Roman soldiers from Italy lived in the towns and held the forts. The Roman army was made into groups of 100 soldiers. The captain was called a 'centurion' (Luke 7:2). A 'regiment' was a larger group, probably of 1000 men; each regiment had a name.

Cornelius was an officer in the Italian Regiment. He and his family were not Jews but they believed in God and prayed to Him, They did not know about Jesus.

One day, when Cornelius was praying, he saw an angel of God. 'What is it, Lord?' he asked. God gave him a message: 'Send men to Joppa to bring back a



## The message of Peter

Peter was an apostle of Jesus Christ. 'Apostle' means 'messenger'. The message of Peter in Acts chapters 2 and 3 was the Good News (or Gospel) of Jesus Christ:

- Jesus died and rose from death (2:23–24; 3:13–15).
- The holy writings said that this would happen (2:25–35; 3:18).
- Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Messiah (2:36; 3:20).
- God forgives the sins of those who believe (2:38).
- They will receive the Holy Spirit (2:38).

Why did the people gladly listen to Peter's message? It was because they saw the power of the Holy Spirit at work. People were excited. The Holy Spirit began to work in their lives. The followers of Jesus spoke words of God in different languages. God healed people through faith in the name of Jesus. The crowds were amazed at these signs and wonders. They believed and were saved from their sins. They repented – they confessed their sins – they said that they were sorry doing wrong things. The Holy Spirit helped them to say this. They wanted to come back to God and God forgave them because Jesus died for them. Then they were baptized and joined the other believers. They received the fullness of Holy Spirit. They were filled with joy. More people joined the church every day (Acts 2:47; 4:4).

We should ask God to give us His Holy Spirit in our lives so that we have power in our worship, preaching and witness. We need the Holy Spirit, not just to give us joy and to show us what is right. We need the Holy Spirit to bring God's salvation, healing and righteousness in our nation.

*Question:* What message of Good News do you tell your friends? What has God done for you through the death of Jesus (Titus 3:3–5)?

## JESUS DIED TO SAVE THE WORLD

Peter uses this healing to tell people the Good News of Jesus Christ. 'Turn away from your sins. Turn to God. Then your sins will be wiped away' (3:19). 'God raised up Jesus...to bless you by turning each of you from your wrong ways' (3:26).

Nearly 2000 years before this happened, God made a promise to Abraham 'I will make you into a great nation [Israel] ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (Genesis 12:2–3). Now Peter saw this promise coming true. People from all over the world were in Jerusalem to worship God (see map on page 6). They heard the Good News of Jesus Christ, His Son. People from all over the world were saved and blessed. And this has happened every day since the first day of Pentecost. God's saving power does this. We call it Pentecostal power because the power of the Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost. If we preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, the power of God's word will change people's lives. God is merciful. He will forgive the sins of people through the sacrifice of Jesus.

The message is for us too. Jesus died to save us. We too can tell others the Good News of Jesus Christ and see the power of God change lives! We too can be witnesses for Jesus wherever we live 'from one end of the earth to the other' (1:8).



## THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS TRY TO STOP THE GOOD NEWS

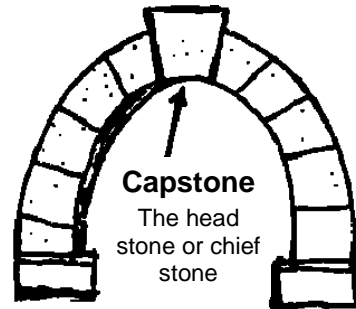
Peter and John taught the crowds at the Temple. They told them that Jesus rose up from death. This upset the Jewish leaders. The Sadducees were priests who did not believe in life after death. They came with the Temple guard and arrested Peter and John.

They put the apostles in jail. At this time there were about 5000 men who believed (4:4) and many women as well. This happened because one person was healed. His testimony enabled Peter to preach to the crowds. As a result, many believed the Good News about Jesus.

Next day they brought Peter and John to court. They asked two important questions about the healing of the lame man. They asked, 'What power is this?' and 'Whose name did you use?' (4:7). These questions helped Peter to tell them about Jesus. He boldly answered, 'God raised Jesus from death. And it is through the name of Jesus that this man was healed' (4:10).

Peter then gave the same message that he preached before. He was bold because of the power of the Holy Spirit within him (4:8). He told them:

- Jesus died because of the sins of the people (4:10)
- Jesus rose from death (4:10)
- The holy writings said that this would happen (4:11).



God made Jesus to be the Head, or 'chief stone', in His church (Psalm 118:22,23) And God called Peter to build His Church (Matt 16:18). These leaders should be working with Peter to teach people that Jesus is King. Instead, they refused to believe their Messiah and killed Him. And now they refused to believe what Peter told them.

Peter warned the court, 'You can't be saved by anyone else. There is no other name ... by which we must be saved' (4:12).

The Sadducees asked: 'What makes these ordinary men so bold? How did this miracle happen? What are we going to do with these men?' (4:16). Then they told Peter and John, 'Don't speak in this name of Jesus again' (4:18). But Peter and John said that they must go on speaking about Jesus (4:20).



### Talk about:

1. Why were Peter and John arrested? (4:2)?
2. What did the Sadducees tell them not to do (4:18)?
3. What power was at work in the healing and preaching (3:6,16,26; 4:2,4)?

'Who are you, Lord?' he asked.

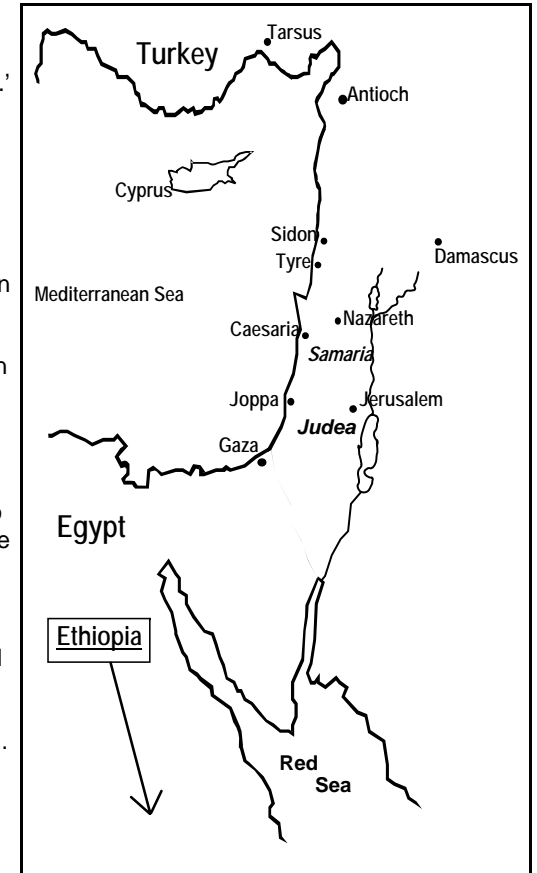
The voice spoke again: 'I am Jesus. I am the one you are hurting.' His friends ran to him and picked him up. Saul could not see, so they led him into the city of Damascus. For three days Saul was blind. He did not eat, but waited for God to show him what to do.

A believer called Ananias lived in another part of the city. God spoke to him and said, 'Ananias, go to the house of Judas... and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul...' (9:11).

Ananias knew that Saul killed Christians in Jerusalem and he was afraid. Then God told him, 'Do not be afraid. I have chosen this man to work for Me. He will go to the people of Israel and to people who are not Jews, and to their kings to tell them about me' (9:15).

Ananias found Saul, just as God had said, and prayed for him: 'Brother Saul,' he said, 'the Lord Jesus, whom you saw on the road... has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'

At once, Saul could see! He believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and was baptised. Then he ate food.



## SAUL BEGINS A NEW LIFE

Saul knew God but did not believe that the holy writings were talking about Jesus, the Messiah. Then he met Jesus. This meeting was a miracle from God. From that moment, Saul believed that Jesus was the Son of God. Saul was saved through the grace of God and through personal faith in the Lord Jesus. His faith in the Law of Moses was not enough to save him.

Saul went to the Jewish synagogue and spoke to the people there. He was a changed man. He told them that 'Jesus is the Son of God' (9:20). His teaching became more and more powerful (9:22). The people said, 'He is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy' (Galatians 1:23).

The Jews in Damascus could not argue against Saul's strong words, so they made a plan to kill him. They watched the city gates to catch him. The Christians heard this, so one night they let Saul down from a window in the city wall and he escaped (9:25). Saul tells his own story in Galatians 1:11–24, 2:1.

14. Stephen —
  - a) said that the prophets were always persecuted.
  - b) saw Jesus standing beside God.
  - c) asked forgiveness for those who were stoning him.
15. Peter told Simon the Sorcerer to pray because he —
  - a) wanted to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit.
  - b) wanted to believe in Jesus.
  - c) wanted to lay hands on people for them to receive the Holy Spirit.
16. The Ethiopian official –
  - a) did not understand who Isaiah had written about.
  - b) was unable to read the writings of Isaiah.
  - c) wanted Phillip to help him understand the holy writings.



### Acts 9:1–43

## SAUL MEETS JESUS

By this time Christian believers had travelled as far as Damascus in Syria. Saul, one of the Jewish leaders, asked for letters which gave him power to put the believers in prison (9:2). They were all afraid of Saul.

Saul set out to go to Damascus to find the Christians and put them in chains. No one could stop him. It would take a miracle from God to stop him and to change him. On the road to Damascus, a bright light blinded him, and he heard a voice from heaven say, 'Saul, why are you fighting against Me?' He fell down on the road.



### Acts 9:15–27 The big change that Jesus makes

Study what happened to Saul when he became a Christian:

- Jesus called him to tell others the Good News (9:15).
- God warned that he would suffer because he belonged to Jesus (v.16).
- God filled him with the Holy Spirit (v.17).
- He got up and the believers baptised him (v.18).
- He stayed for several days with other believers (v.19).
- Very quickly he began preaching (witnessing) (v.20,27; Galatians 1:17-24).

The other things about Saul's conversion:

1. He believed in God but was going the wrong way in life (9:2).
2. The voice of Jesus told him to wait until he was told what to do (v.6).
3. For three days he did not eat or drink (v.9).
4. He prayed to God (v.11).
5. God told him His plan for his life (v.15–16).
6. A disciple gave Saul a message from Jesus (v.17).

"He is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy" (Galatians 1:23).

"Meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus changed Saul for ever. God saved him from going the wrong way in life. God saves all people from going the wrong way if they believe in Jesus."

4. Did Peter and John obey God or the Sadducees (4:19)?
5. Why did the court try to stop this teaching about Jesus?

## THE CHURCH AT PRAYER AND AT WORK

Then Peter and John went back to the believers. They prayed and praised God together. In their prayer they spoke of the 'Anointed One,' who is Christ, the Messiah. He was sent by God.

Hundreds of years before this, King David wrote of Christ's coming. He said rulers and nations would be angry because of Jesus (4:25–26; Psalms 2:1–2)

God always knows what will happen. He showed King David what to write. We need not be afraid! God knows all things.

When Peter and John were in trouble, the church prayed. Were they sad? Were they worried? Were they afraid? No!

- They praised God in their prayers (4:24).
- They read the holy writings (4:25–26).
- They remembered how Jesus was persecuted and punished (4:27).
- They believed that God was working out His plans (4:28).
- They asked God to make them very bold (4:29).
- They asked for more miracles in the name of Jesus (4:30).

All this time, the Christians were meeting in homes. They were all caring for each other and sharing what they had. They all agreed together. The Holy Spirit began to work in their lives (4:32). Some sold their land and brought the money to the apostles (4:36–37). This was so they could help the believers who were poor (4:35). 'Freely you have received,' Jesus said, 'so give freely' (Matthew 10:8).



### Talk about:

1. What encouraged the believers to pray to God (4:23–24)?
2. What did they read together, aloud (4:25-28)?
3. Why did they ask God to make them bold (4:29)?
4. What was special about using the name of Jesus (4:30)?
5. What happened when they prayed (4:31)?
6. Describe in your own words the life of these early Christians (4:32–37).



### Acts 4:24–31 Praying to God in times of trouble

God blessed the early church. It grew very strong. But there was trouble for the believers (4:16–18). The Jewish rulers told the apostles not to teach in the name of Jesus. They treated them badly (persecuted them). Study these 6 ways in which the believers prayed when these troubles began:

- *They praised God, the Creator* (4:24) and put their trust in Him. They spoke words of faith and knowledge to show that they believed in God: He made the world and everything in it.

- *They read from the holy writings* (4:25–26). God said, (in Psalm 2) that rulers and leaders would make trouble for Jesus and His followers.
- *They knew the holy writings had come true* (4:27–28). Things had happened because God planned them. They were certain that God was in control. The same things had happened to Jesus.
- *They told God about their worries* (4:29). They believed that God already knew about their danger. They reminded Him of their problems but did not blame Him for them.
- *They asked God to help them to do the work that Jesus called them to do* (4:29) and they believed God answers prayer. They knew they were praying for what God wanted. They were praying 'in His will'.
- *They asked God to do even more miracles as they preached* (4:29–30) They trusted in the power of the name of Jesus. They knew the religious leaders and rulers would be angry, but they knew they must preach boldly. It was a work of God and he had called them to do it.

**Questions:** When you have troubles, how do you pray? Do you tell God only about your troubles, or do you do what these disciples did?

Believers are treated badly (persecuted) in many countries today. Jesus said, 'If they persecute Me, they will persecute you' (John 15:18). We should not be surprised if we are persecuted. We must be bold. We must pray for those who are persecuted so that they will not give up.



## MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

### Based on Acts chapters 1 to 4

Please choose the correct answers, a, b or c. There could be one, two or three answers that are correct for each question.

**Answers are given at the end**

1. When Jesus came and ate with the apostles He told them to —
  - a) go out and be baptised in the Holy Spirit.
  - b) stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit.
  - c) go out and baptise others in the Holy Spirit.
2. Peter said —
  - a) that someone should take the place of Judas.
  - b) that Matthias and Barsabbas should be apostles.
  - c) Judas shared in the work of Jesus.
3. The disciples at Pentecost met together in one place and —
  - a) they all spoke in languages that they knew.
  - b) they drank a lot of wine.
  - c) they spoke in languages that they did not know.
4. After Pentecost, the believers —
  - a) stayed in their own houses.
  - b) were joined by many more people.
  - c) Shared everything they owned.

he believed that Jesus was the Son of God. He asked Philip to baptise him. After Philip baptised him, the Holy Spirit took Philip away. The officer went on his way back to Ethiopia. He had an important job there in the Queen's palace (8:27,39).

Some believe that he was the first Christian in East Africa. He went back to his home country 'full of joy' (8:39) to tell others the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian came to faith through reading the words of God and receiving help to understand it.



## Talk about:

1. What happened when the believers were persecuted (8:1-8)?
2. What stopped Simon the magician from being a true believer (8:19-23)?
3. Do you tell the Good News of Jesus wherever you travel (8:25)?
4. What can people do to be saved (8:26-40)? What does God do to save them? What can we do to help save them?
5. Do you share with others the truth of God from His words in the Bible?



## MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

### Based on Chapters 5 to 8

Please choose the correct answers, a, b or c. There could be one, two or three answers that are correct for each question.

**Answers are given at the end**

9. The wife of Ananias died because —
  - a) she had lied to the Holy Spirit.
  - b) her husband had died.
  - c) she kept some of the money from the sale.
10. The apostles were whipped because —
  - a) they escaped from prison.
  - b) they were teaching the people about Jesus.
  - c) Gamaliel said that they were fighting against God.
11. Stephen and six others were chosen to —
  - a) pray and minister with the apostles.
  - b) serve the Jewish widows.
  - c) take care of the food distribution.
12. The persecution of Stephen began because he —
  - a) spoke against God.
  - b) had a face like an angel.
  - c) had argued with the Jews about Jesus.
13. Stephen talked about Abraham and Moses —
  - a) to show the Jews that they did not obey the Law.
  - b) to show that he knew the history of the Jewish people.
  - c) to upset the Jewish leaders.

He wanted to pay money so that he could do miracles too (8:18). But Simon's thoughts were evil.

'Do you think you can buy God's gift with money?' Peter asked. Simon had not truly repented and he did not have true faith. Peter told him that both he and his money would perish.

God does not want anyone to be punished. He wants all men to repent and to turn to Jesus (8:21–23; 2 Peter 3:9). Simon asked Peter to pray for him. His old ways still controlled his life.

If your old life still controls you, it is a good thing to ask the church leaders to pray for you. You must repent (James 5:16-20).

Note that Peter and John continue their preaching as they journey back to Jerusalem (8:25).



### Acts 8:26–40

## THE GOOD NEWS FOR ETHIOPIA

An angel came to Philip and said to him, 'Go south ... down to Gaza' (8:26). Philip left the wonderful meetings in Samaria. He walked south towards Gaza along the road to Egypt and Ethiopia. A chariot came along the road pulled by horses. Philip saw an officer from Ethiopia sitting in it. He served in the royal palace of the Queen of Ethiopia. The man was reading a long scroll containing the holy writings.

'Go to the chariot and stay near it,' God's Spirit told Philip. When Philip ran up to the chariot, he heard the man. He was reading aloud from the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 53:7–8).

'Do you understand what you are reading?' he asked.

'How can I?' the man answered. 'I need someone to explain it to me.'

Without the Spirit of God helping us, we cannot fully understand the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:14), so God gives us His Spirit to teach us His truth (John 16:13–14). When you read the Bible, always ask God to help you to understand His truth. Ask Him to give you joy when reading His book (8:39). Ask Him to bring others to help you to understand and share in the joy.

God sent Philip to help this man. He told him that Isaiah wrote about the Good News of Jesus even though he lived 700 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

As soon as the officer understood this,



### The Good News comes to Africa (Acts 8:26–40)

Notice how the servant officer of Queen Candace was saved by God:

1. He already believed in God and wanted to worship Him in Jerusalem (8:27).
2. He read the holy writings (our Old Testament) and wanted to understand them (8:28,31).
3. The Holy Spirit sent someone to explain the prophecies of Isaiah concerning Jesus (8:32,34).
4. The man believed the Good News about Jesus and was baptised (8:35–38).

**Question:** Are there people you know who already believe God and need help to understand the Bible? Pray that the Holy Spirit will send someone to help them to believe that Jesus is their Saviour. This will bring much joy (8:39) and eternal life.

5. Peter and John —

- a) gave the beggar some money.
- b) walked on the other side past the beggar.
- c) helped the beggar to stand up.

6. Peter told the people that —

- a) the prophets spoke about those days.
- b) Jesus would forever remain in heaven.
- c) Moses spoke about Jesus.

7. Peter and John —

- a) said they would do what the Jewish leaders told them to do.
- b) were educated and clever men.
- c) could not stop speaking about what they had seen and heard.

8. The believers —

- a) were very poor.
- b) gave away all their money.
- c) shared all they had.



### Acts 5:1–42

## GOD PUNISHES SIN

God loves sinners, but hates our sin. That is why He sent Jesus to die for sinners. He wants us to live lives that please Him.

An-a-ni-as and his wife Sapph-i-ra sold some land. They took some of the money to Peter, but they lied to him. This is called 'deception' which is a sin. They told him it was all the money they got for their land when it was only part of the money. Peter did not say that keeping some of the money was wrong – but telling a lie about it was wrong. They could do what they wished with the money, but they should not lie to God. (5:4).

'Satan made you tell this lie,' Peter said (5:3). 'You have not lied to men but to God.' When Peter said this, Ananias fell dead at his feet.

Three hours later his wife came in and told the same lie. 'How could you agree to test the Spirit of God?' Peter asked her. And she, too, fell down dead. This made all the people fear God. (5:11).

## GOD SENDS HIS ANGEL

Every day more and more people believed in the Lord Jesus. The believers met together in a large courtyard or space on the east side of the Temple in Jerusalem (5:12). Many people came from near and far to hear their teaching and to see miracles of healing in the name of Jesus. This made some of the Jewish leaders (Sadducees) very angry and jealous so they put the apostles in prison (5:18). In the night, God sent an angel to them. He opened the doors of the jail and brought them out (5:19).

The angel told them, 'Go and stand in the Temple courts and tell the people the



## **Satan tries to deceive us (Acts 5:1-11)**

Ananias and Sapphira lied to God and to His people and tried to deceive the apostles (5:1,2,8). This act was punished severely because dishonesty, lies and greed are so ungodly. They stop the Holy Spirit from working. Then there can be no blessing from God.

Deceiving people is like cheating people. We call this 'deception'. It makes something that is wrong look right. The devil wants people to lie because he hates the truth. Jesus called the devil 'the father of lies' (John 8:44). The Bible says, 'Give no opportunity to Satan' (Ephesians 4:27).

Clever people can make bank notes or coins that are forgeries (false). This money looks all right but has no true value. Often people will stand at the border of a country selling money at a good rate. But the money is sometimes false money.

Perhaps a second-hand car sells at a high price. The owner says it is a good car but sometimes it is not. Selling something that has little value for a large sum of money is deception. Telling lies is not right. If we have told lies, we should repent and ask God to forgive us.

Church leaders and business people should not use their position to get money from other people. They should pray to God for wisdom in receiving and using the money honestly.

Sometimes business people try to take more money in a dishonest way – through bribes or extra (hidden) charges. Sometimes contracts (agreements) are signed which are unfair and cause workers to get into debt. God cannot bless churches, businesses or countries where there is deception and corruption.

Peter told Ananias that it was Satan who made him lie. There was no need for them to lie.

full message of this new life.' They obeyed and went back to the Temple to teach people (5:21).

The Good News of Jesus gives new life to us all – we have all done wrong – we are all sinners (John 17:3; Romans 3:23). When people hear the message of God, and faith grows in their hearts, they confess their sins and turn back to God. They believe the Good News and God forgives them by His grace and mercy (Romans 10:10; Ephesians 2:8–9). They are 'born again'. They become 'a new creation' in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). A new person! We are forgiven because of the sacrifice of Jesus. He died in our place.

Next morning the Jewish leaders met together in the courtyard. They sent officers to bring their prisoners from the jail, but they came back to say, 'We found the prison locked and guarded, but there was no one inside' (5:23). The apostles were outside preaching in the name of Jesus as the angel had told them to do (5:23,28).

The apostles spoke boldly to the court. They had a very strong faith in Jesus. They understood very clearly the truth about Jesus and about God's plan for the Jews (5:30–32).

The court wanted to kill the apostles. But one of the chief leaders, Ga-ma-li-el said, 'Leave these men alone! Let them go... If this is from God, you will not be able

talked about Jesus everywhere they went (8:4). This persecution helped to spread the Good News to other places.

Believers are treated badly (persecuted) in many countries today. Jesus said, 'If they persecute Me, they will persecute you' (John 15:18). We should not be surprised if we are persecuted. We must be bold. We must pray for those who are persecuted so that they will not give up.

## **WHAT HAPPENED IN SAMARIA**

The Good News of Jesus Christ began to spread from Jerusalem to other countries. Jesus said, 'You will be my messengers in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and ... from one end of the earth to the other' (Acts 1:8). In Acts chapter 8 we read how the Good News reached Judea (8:1), Samaria (8:1,5,25), Ethiopia (8:27) and other parts of Judea (8:40).

Philip was a leader in the Jerusalem church. Jews did not like Samaritans, but Philip went to Samaria and preached about Christ, the Messiah, in their city. God was with him and he did many miracles in the name of Jesus (8:7–8).

A man named Simon the Magician lived in that city. He showed the people evil magic. They called him 'the great power'. But now people began to believe in the name of Jesus (8:12). Simon said he believed in the name of Jesus, so Philip baptised him with others who were sorry for their sins. The repented and were saved.

The apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to see what happened in Samaria. The apostles prayed for the new Christians and put their hands on them 'and they received the Holy Spirit' (8:15–17). Miracles followed and Simon saw what happened. He wanted this power for himself.



## **Simon the witchdoctor (Acts 8)**

Simon Magus was a witchdoctor (magician or sorcerer) who lived in Samaria, near Jerusalem. He had power over the people who lived there. Simon saw that when the apostles put their hands on people the Holy Spirit came on them. He saw this was a greater power and he tried to buy this power from the apostles. Peter told him this was very wrong. Simon was filled with fear. We are not told that he repented of his greed for power or that he made his heart right with God.

Simon did not truly worship God. He worshipped things or idols instead. Behind every idol or wrong belief is an evil spirit. Witchdoctors amaze people because they use the power of evil spirits (Acts 8:9–11). But this power is not of God. The power comes from ancient spirits of the tribes or from spirits living in trees or mountains or buildings. People who use Satan's power destroy faith in God. They also use fear to make people do what they want. Those who do these things cut themselves off from God. And they cut other people off from God. People who put their trust in spirits or signs or fortune telling cannot truly trust God.

We know that Simon was afraid when Peter rebuked him. He wanted Peter to pray for him. We know that if he truly repented then God would help to stop his interest in magic and spirits. But it is difficult for those who trust in spirits to repent.

Remember that those who put their trust in God have nothing to fear from evil

Stephen reminded the Jewish leaders what God had done:

1. It was God who called Abraham to live in the land where the Jews were now living (7:2–4).
2. It was God who promised Abraham that his family would live in the land (7:5).
3. God also told him that for 400 years his family would live in a foreign land (Egypt) and would be slaves, but afterwards would come back to this land (7:6–7).
4. It was God who spoke to Moses at the burning bush. God used Moses to lead the Jews back to the promised land (7:30–35).
5. It was God who told Moses about the Prophet who would come (the Messiah) (7:37).

Stephen told them that their fathers did not obey God (7:51) nor listen to Moses or the prophets of God from long ago (7:52).

## STEPHEN IS KILLED

Stephen told the Jews that they were like their fathers, long ago, who killed the prophets. The prophets spoke about the coming Messiah – God’s own special messenger. Then Stephen told them that they murdered the Messiah (7:52). He meant Jesus Christ, God’s Son the Messiah.

Stephen’s words made the Jewish leaders very angry. They shouted at him and dragged him out of the city to throw stones to kill him. While they threw the stones, Stephen prayed for them (7:60).

A Jewish leader called Saul watched. He agreed that Stephen should die (8:1). Saul was a clever Jewish leader. He knew the holy writings but did not know that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Philip said, ‘We have found the One that Moses wrote about in the Law. The prophets also wrote about Him. He is Jesus of Nazareth’ (John 1:45). Many of the Jews believed in Jesus.



### Talk about:

1. Who was the Prophet to come (7:37)?
2. Who killed the prophets a long time ago (7:52)?
3. Who killed the Prophet that Moses spoke about (7:52)?
4. Who did not obey God’s Law (7:53; 8:1)?



### Acts 8:1–25

## THE CHURCH SUFFERS THEN SPREADS TO OTHER PLACES

While Jesus was with His disciples He told them ‘You will be handed over to be badly treated and put to death ...’ (Matt 24:9). We call this ‘persecution’. After Stephen’s death, this persecution began in Jerusalem. At that time, Saul tried to stop people from believing in Jesus. He put some believers in jail, and killed others. Many other believers left their homes in Jerusalem and went to other places to live. They

to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God’ (5:39). Wise words!

The court ordered the apostles to be whipped.

Then they ordered the apostles to stop speaking in the name of Jesus (5:40). They let the apostles go free, but the apostles continued to teach in the Temple (5:42). They were full of joy and also went from house to house ‘telling the Good News that Jesus is the Christ’.

In many countries of the world, the Christian church has grown during times of persecution. Today many believers are in prison. Many are tortured because of their faith. Some die and go to heaven. But God also brings survival and revival with miracles of healing and deliverance.



### Talk about:

1. Why did God judge Ananias and Sapphira?
2. What does God say about telling lies (Ephesians 4:25)?
3. How does this story show us that as Christians, our faith should make us different from other people?
4. Why were the apostles very brave (5:29–32)?
5. How did the apostles behave when they were persecuted (5:41,42)?



### Acts 6:1–15

## PREPARING THE CHURCH TO GROW

More and more people were joining the church (6:1). Soon they needed to choose extra leaders. They needed people to help in sharing the food. They needed more helpers and leaders to help the church to continue to grow.

The apostles asked the believers to choose seven men. Notice how they chose them:

- They saw that this work of serving others was important work.
- They chose men who were wise and full of the Holy Spirit (6:3).
- They chose them to do this work so that the apostles could be free to do their work.
- The apostles laid their hands on the seven men they chose and prayed with them and for them (6:6).

This was a very different way to choose leaders than the way used to choose Mathias in Acts 1:26.



### Choosing the right church leaders

How does your church choose its leaders and workers? What kind of people do you choose?

- Are they people who are honest, show God’s wisdom, and who fear God?
- Are they people who know the Lord Jesus personally?
- Are they people who behave well and full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3)?

Notice that the apostles asked all the believers to help choose these workers. This pleased everyone (6:5).

What happened when they prepared in this way for the church to grow?

1. It was a happy church (6:5).
2. God's message, the Good News of Jesus, continued to spread (6:7).
3. The numbers of believers in Jerusalem continued to grow (6:7).



### Talk about:

1. What did the believers do to prepare the church to grow (6:1,5,6)?
2. What did the church leaders do to prepare the church to grow (6:2-4,6)?
3. What was the result of a happy, well organised church (6:7)?

## THE WORK AND WITNESS OF STEPHEN

God still uses ordinary people to do wonderful things. When we preach the Good News, through the Holy Spirit, God calls and saves sinners. He delivers them from the grip of sins that hold them fast. God does 'signs and wonders', and He does them through anyone He chooses. He uses anyone He wants to use (Hebrews 2:4).



### The joy of preaching the Gospel

The apostles found much joy in telling others about Jesus. The Gospel is the message of Good News about Jesus Christ and His salvation. Paul says that 'the Good News shows how God makes people right with Himself' (Romans 1:17).

We are saved through the sacrifice of Jesus. He was punished in our place. He saves us from death and gives us a new life. We don't deserve this. No one can earn God's forgiveness or His salvation. We are saved by God's grace alone – His loving kindness and mercy. 'God loved the world so much that He gave [sacrificed] His one and only Son' (John 3:16). We are saved when we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who died in our place (Ephesians 2:4,5,8,9).

- The Good News is God's answer or cure for sin.
- The Good News is God's message that He loves us.
- The Good News is the story of God's sacrifice.
- The Good News is about Jesus taking our punishment.
- The Good News means being saved from punishment.
- The Good News tells of God forgiving us.
- The Good News is God's way to bring us back to Him.
- The Good News brings peace with God.
- The Good News sets us free from past sin.
- The Good News brings a holy way of living.
- The Good News brings hope of eternal life.

The Gospel is the Good News of what God did for us. Our lives are totally changed. We are born again. This is why there is much joy in telling others the Good News about Jesus. God blesses the preaching of His truth by calling people to Himself and to His Son. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Stephen was an ordinary man, but 'full of faith and the Holy Spirit' (6:5,8). He helped to share out the money so that poor people could buy food. God also used him to do miracles. Everywhere Stephen went he told people about Jesus Christ and His power to save them from their sins. Some Jewish leaders believed and began to follow the teachings of Jesus (6:7).

But some of the Jews from Africa and Asia did not like this. Stephen's talk made them angry, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit of God who spoke through him (6:10). So they went out and paid some men to tell lies about Stephen in court (6:11,13).

'We have heard him speak words against God's Law and this Temple', they said.

Stephen was speaking *for* God, but they said he was speaking *against* God. 'Blasphemy' means speaking evil things against God (6:11).

So the crowds and the Jewish leaders began to get angry (6:12).



### Acts 7:1-60

## STEPHEN SPEAKS TO THE JEWISH LEADERS

The High Priest ruled over the Court of the Jews. He asked Stephen, 'Are these things true?' (7:1) Stephen answered him this way. He spoke about the history of the Jews; how God made promises to Abraham and Moses. God gave laws to help the nation of Israel to know Him and to live to please Him. Stephen said that the Jews did not listen to the Spirit of God. When God sent prophets they killed them. (7:51:52). They did not obey God's Law, but worshipped Molech, the idol of Ammon, and they worshipped the stars in the sky. Because of this, God let the Jews go as slaves to Babylon. (7:43). But God has a purpose for Israel today.

