

new testament



THE

NEW INTERNATIONAL READER'S VERSION

BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

for kids

READ THE STORY OF JESUS, HIS CHURCH, AND HIS RETURN

new testament

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL READER'S VERSION
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

for kids

 ZONDER**kidz**

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introduction to the New Testament

The New Testament is a collection of books written many years ago. Together, they tell the story of Jesus and the very first people who followed him. The New Testament is also part of a much bigger collection known as “the Bible.”

Long ago, the Bible tells us, God created the world. Everything he made was good. But creation turned its back on God. Suddenly, the whole world was held captive by sin and death.

So God set out to rescue us—to save us from sin and death and make things right. The story came to a climax two thousand years ago, when Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, came to earth.

As you read these stories and letters from the New Testament, you’ll hear about how Jesus came to rescue us. You’ll hear how his very first followers lived—and sometimes died—for him.

But don’t just read these stories. You’re invited to become part of the story. Because it’s not over. God is still at work. And you have a part to play.



DAY 1 LUKE-ACTS, PART I

introduction to Luke-Acts, part I

The story you're about to read was written by a doctor named Luke. Luke wanted his friend Theophilus to know about Jesus, so he wrote a book. Two books, actually: the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

In the first book, God keeps a promise he made to the people of Israel (who were called Jews) by sending Jesus, their long-awaited King.

But Jesus also invites non-Jewish people called Gentiles to follow him, because Jesus loves everyone. This was very good news, especially for Theophilus, who might have been a Gentile himself.

Luke worked hard to make sure he got his facts right. He wanted Theophilus to know he could bet his life on this story. So Luke used many reliable sources. Can you guess what some of them might've been?

Well, there were letters and speeches; songs and travel journals; notes from when people went to court; testimonies from eyewitnesses who knew Jesus; and more.

As you read, remember: this is not just any story. This is the true story of Jesus.



Many people have attempted to write about the things that have taken place among us. Reports of these things were handed down to us. There were people who saw these things for themselves from the beginning. They saw them and then passed the word on. With this in mind, I myself have carefully looked into everything from the beginning. So I also decided to write down an orderly

report of exactly what happened. I am doing this for you, most excellent Theophilus. I want you to know that the things you have been taught are true.



In the sixth month after Elizabeth had become pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. He was sent to a virgin. The girl was engaged to a man named Joseph. He came from the family line of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel greeted her and said, "The Lord has blessed you in a special way. He is with you."

Mary was very upset because of his words. She wondered what kind of greeting this could be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. God is very pleased with you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king like his father David of long ago. The Son of the Most High God will rule forever over his people. They are from the family line of Jacob. That kingdom will never end."

"How can this happen?" Mary asked the angel. "I am a virgin."

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come to you. The power of the Most High God will cover you. So the holy one that is born will be called the Son of God. Your relative Elizabeth will have a child even though she is old. People thought she could not have children. But she has been pregnant for six months now. That's because what God says will always come true."

"I serve the Lord," Mary answered. "May it happen to me just as you said it would." Then the angel left her.



In those days, Caesar Augustus made a law. It required that a list be made of everyone in the whole Roman world. It was the first time a list was made of the people while Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone went to their own town to be listed.

So Joseph went also. He went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea. That is where Bethlehem, the town of David, was.

Joseph went there because he belonged to the family line of David. He went there with Mary to be listed. Mary was engaged to him. She was expecting a baby. While Joseph and Mary were there, the time came for the child to be born. She gave birth to her first baby. It was a boy. She wrapped him in large strips of cloth. Then she placed him in a manger. That's because there was no guest room where they could stay.

There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby. It was night, and they were taking care of their sheep. An angel of the Lord appeared to them. And the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. It will bring great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. Here is how you will know I am telling you the truth. You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a large group of angels from heaven also appeared. They were praising God. They said,

"May glory be given to God in the highest heaven!

And may peace be given to those he is pleased with on earth!"

The angels left and went into heaven. Then the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem. Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby. The baby was lying in the manger. After the shepherds had seen him, they told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart. She thought about them over and over. The shepherds returned. They gave glory and praise to God. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told.

When the child was eight days old, he was circumcised. At the same time he was named Jesus. This was the name the angel had given him before his mother became pregnant.

Joseph and Mary did everything the Law of the Lord required.

Then they returned to Galilee. They went to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong. He was very wise. He was blessed by God's grace.



Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. When Jesus was 12 years old, they went up to the feast as usual. After the feast was over, his parents left to go back home. The boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But they were not aware of it. They thought he was somewhere in their group. So they traveled on for a day. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends. They did not find him. So they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courtyard. He was sitting with the teachers. He was listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at how much he understood. They also were amazed at his answers. When his parents saw him, they were amazed. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been worried about you. We have been looking for you everywhere."

"Why were you looking for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he meant by that.

Then he went back to Nazareth with them, and he obeyed them. But his mother kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart. Jesus became wiser and stronger. He also became more and more pleasing to God and to people.



Tiberius Caesar had been ruling for 15 years. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea. Herod was the ruler of Galilee. His brother Philip was the ruler of Iturea and Traconitis. Lysanias was ruler of Abilene. Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. At that time God's word came to John, son of Zechariah, in the desert. He went into all the countryside around the Jordan River. There he preached that people should be baptized and turn away from their sins.

Then God would forgive them. Here is what is written in the book of Isaiah the prophet. It says,

“A messenger is calling out in the desert,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord.

Make straight paths for him.

Every valley will be filled in.

Every mountain and hill will be made level.

The crooked roads will become straight.

The rough ways will become smooth.

And all people will see God’s salvation.’”

John spoke to the crowds coming to be baptized by him. He said, “You are like a nest of poisonous snakes! Who warned you to escape the coming of God’s anger? Live in a way that shows you have turned away from your sins. And don’t start saying to yourselves, ‘Abraham is our father.’ I tell you, God can raise up children for Abraham even from these stones. The ax is already lying at the roots of the trees. All the trees that don’t produce good fruit will be cut down. They will be thrown into the fire.”

“Then what should we do?” the crowd asked.

John answered, “Anyone who has extra clothes should share with the one who has none. And anyone who has extra food should do the same.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

“Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” John told them.

Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”

John replied, “Don’t force people to give you money. Don’t bring false charges against people. Be happy with your pay.”

The people were waiting. They were expecting something. They were all wondering in their hearts if John might be the Messiah. John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I am will come. I’m not good enough to untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His pitchfork is in his hand to toss the straw away from his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his barn. But he

will burn up the husks with fire that can't be put out." John said many other things to warn the people. He also announced the good news to them.

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened. The Holy Spirit came to rest on him in the form of a dove. A voice came from heaven. It said, "You are my Son, and I love you. I am very pleased with you."

Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his special work for God and others. It was thought that he was the son of Joseph.



Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan River. The Spirit led him into the desert. There the devil tempted him for 40 days. Jesus ate nothing during that time. At the end of the 40 days, he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written, 'Man must not live only on bread.'"

Then the devil led Jesus up to a high place. In an instant, he showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. He said to Jesus, "I will give you all their authority and glory. It has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God. He is the only one you should serve.'"

Then the devil led Jesus to Jerusalem. He had Jesus stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. It is written,

"The Lord will command his angels to take good care of you. They will lift you up in their hands.

Then you won't trip over a stone.'"

Jesus answered, "Scripture says, 'Do not test the Lord your God.'"

When the devil finished all this tempting, he left Jesus until a better time.

remember what you read

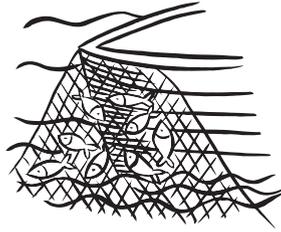
1. What is something you noticed for the first time?

2. What questions did you have?

3. Was there anything that bothered you?

4. What did you learn about loving God?

5. What did you learn about loving others?



DAY 2

LUKE-ACTS, PART 2

introduction to Luke-Acts, part 2

Jesus is all grown up. His job? Telling others that God's kingdom has come to earth. But he doesn't just talk about it. He shows it by doing all sorts of amazing things.

As you read, see if you notice what kind of people Jesus likes to hang out with. Does he stick to the popular crowd, or does he spend most of his time with outsiders—the poor, the sick, the hungry?



Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit. News about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. On the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue as he usually did. He stood up to read. And the scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. Jesus unrolled it and found the right place. There it is written,

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me.

He has anointed me

to announce the good news to poor people.

He has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners.

He has sent me so that the blind will see again.

He wants me to set free those who are treated badly.

And he has sent me to announce the year when he will set his people free.”

Then Jesus rolled up the scroll. He gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were staring at him. He began by saying to them, “Today this passage of Scripture is coming true as you listen.”



One day Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee. The people crowded around him and listened to the word of God. Jesus saw two boats at the edge of the water. They had been left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into the boat that belonged to Simon. Jesus asked him to go out a little way from shore. Then he sat down in the boat and taught the people.

When he finished speaking, he turned to Simon. Jesus said, “Go out into deep water. Let down the nets so you can catch some fish.”

Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

When they had done so, they caught a large number of fish. There were so many that their nets began to break. So they motioned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees. “Go away from me, Lord!” he said. “I am a sinful man!” He and everyone with him were amazed at the number of fish they had caught. So were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who worked with Simon.

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid. From now on you will fish for people.” So they pulled their boats up on shore. Then they left everything and followed him.

On one of those days, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray. He spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called for his disciples to come to him. He chose 12 of them and made them apostles. Here are their names.

Simon, whom Jesus named Peter, and his brother Andrew
James
John
Philip

Bartholomew
Matthew
Thomas
James, son of Alphaeus
Simon who was called the Zealot
Judas, son of James
and Judas Iscariot who would later hand Jesus over to his
enemies



Jesus went down the mountain with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there. A large number of other people were there too. They came from all over Judea, including Jerusalem. They also came from the coastland around Tyre and Sidon. They had all come to hear Jesus and to be healed of their sicknesses. People who were troubled by evil spirits were made well. Everyone tried to touch Jesus. Power was coming from him and healing them all.

Jesus looked at his disciples. He said to them,

“Blessed are you who are needy.

God’s kingdom belongs to you.

Blessed are you who are hungry now.

You will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who are sad now.

You will laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you,

when they have nothing to do with you

and say bad things about you,

and when they treat your name as something evil.

They do all this because you are followers of the Son of
Man.

“The prophets of long ago were treated the same way. When these things happen to you, be glad and jump for joy. You will receive many blessings in heaven.

“But here is what I tell you who are listening. Love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who call down curses on you. And pray for those who treat you badly. Suppose someone slaps you on one cheek. Let them slap you on the other cheek as well. Suppose someone takes your coat. Don't stop them from taking your shirt as well. Give to everyone who asks you. And if anyone takes what belongs to you, don't ask to get it back. Do to others as you want them to do to you.

“Suppose you love those who love you. Should anyone praise you for that? Even sinners love those who love them. And suppose you do good to those who are good to you. Should anyone praise you for that? Even sinners do that. And suppose you lend money to those who can pay you back. Should anyone praise you for that? Even a sinner lends to sinners, expecting them to pay everything back. But love your enemies. Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then you will receive a lot in return. And you will be children of the Most High God. He is kind to people who are evil and are not thankful. So have mercy, just as your Father has mercy.

“If you do not judge other people, then you will not be judged. If you do not find others guilty, then you will not be found guilty. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good amount will be poured into your lap. It will be pressed down, shaken together, and running over. The same amount you give will be measured out to you.”

“You look at the bit of sawdust in your friend's eye. But you pay no attention to the piece of wood in your own eye. How can you say to your friend, ‘Let me take the bit of sawdust out of your eye’? How can you say this while there is a piece of wood in your own eye? You pretender! First take the piece of wood out of your own eye. Then you will be able to see clearly to take the bit of sawdust out of your friend's eye.

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and still don't do what I say? Some people come and listen to me and do what I say. I will show you what they are like. They are like a man who builds a house. He digs down deep and sets it on solid rock. When a flood comes, the river rushes against the house. But the water can't shake it. The house is well built. But here is what happens when people

listen to my words and do not obey them. They are like a man who builds a house on soft ground instead of solid rock. The moment the river rushes against that house, it falls down. It is completely destroyed.”



Jesus finished saying all these things to the people who were listening. Then he entered Capernaum. There the servant of a Roman commander was sick and about to die. His master thought highly of him. The commander heard about Jesus. So he sent some elders of the Jews to him. He told them to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant. They came to Jesus and begged him, “This man deserves to have you do this. He loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” So Jesus went with them.

When Jesus came near the house, the Roman commander sent friends to him. He told them to say, “Lord, don’t trouble yourself. I am not good enough to have you come into my house. That is why I did not even think I was fit to come to you. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. I myself am a man who is under authority. And I have soldiers who obey my orders. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes. I tell that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at the commander. Jesus turned to the crowd that was following him. He said, “I tell you, even in Israel I have not found anyone whose faith is so strong.” Then the men who had been sent to Jesus returned to the house. They found that the servant was healed.



One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s go over to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and left. As they sailed, Jesus fell asleep. A storm came down on the lake. It was so bad that the boat was about to sink. They were in great danger.

The disciples went and woke Jesus up. They said, “Master! Master! We’re going to drown!”

He got up and ordered the wind and the huge waves to stop. The storm quieted down. It was completely calm. “Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples.

They were amazed and full of fear. They asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the waves, and they obey him.”

When Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him. They were all expecting him. Then a man named Jairus came. He was a synagogue leader. He fell at Jesus’ feet and begged Jesus to come to his house. His only daughter was dying. She was about 12 years old. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him.

A woman was there who had a sickness that made her bleed. Her sickness had lasted for 12 years. No one could heal her. She came up behind Jesus and touched the edge of his clothes. Right away her bleeding stopped.

“Who touched me?” Jesus asked.

Everyone said they didn’t do it. Then Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pushing against you.”

But Jesus said, “Someone touched me. I know that power has gone out from me.”

The woman realized that people would notice her. Shaking with fear, she came and fell at his feet. In front of everyone, she told why she had touched him. She also told how she had been healed in an instant. Then he said to her, “Dear woman, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus. Jairus was the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” the messenger said. “Don’t bother the teacher anymore.”

Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid. Just believe. She will be healed.”

When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let everyone go in with him. He took only Peter, John and James, and the child’s father and mother. During this time, all the people were crying and sobbing loudly over the child. “Stop crying!” Jesus said. “She is not dead. She is sleeping.”

They laughed at him. They knew she was dead. But he took her

by the hand and said, “My child, get up!” Her spirit returned, and right away she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were amazed. But Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

remember what you read

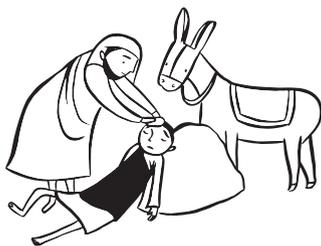
1. What is something you noticed for the first time?

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DAY 3
LUKE-ACTS, PART 3

introduction to Luke-Acts, part 3

In our last reading of Luke's story, Jesus stayed close to home—a place called Galilee. In today's reading, he sets out for Jerusalem, the city where Jewish people worshiped God.

Along the way, Jesus teaches his followers many important things. See how many of them you can remember after reading.



Jesus called together the 12 disciples. He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to heal sicknesses. Then he sent them out to announce God's kingdom and to heal those who were sick. He told them, "Don't take anything for the journey. Do not take a walking stick or a bag. Do not take any bread, money or extra clothes. When you are invited into a house, stay there until you leave town. Some people may not welcome you. If they don't, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet. This will be a witness against the people living there." So the 12 disciples left. They went from village to village. They announced the good news and healed people everywhere.

The disciples returned. They told Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him. They went off by themselves to a town called Bethsaida. But the crowds learned about it and followed Jesus. He welcomed them and spoke to them about God's kingdom. He also healed those who needed to be healed.

Late in the afternoon the 12 disciples came to him. They said, "Send the crowd away. They can go to the nearby villages and

countryside. There they can find food and a place to stay. There is nothing here.”

Jesus replied, “You give them something to eat.”

The disciples answered, “We have only five loaves of bread and two fish. We would have to go and buy food for all this crowd.” About 5,000 men were there.

But Jesus said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about 50 each.” The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish. He looked up to heaven and gave thanks. He broke them into pieces. Then he gave them to the disciples to give to the people. All of them ate and were satisfied. The disciples picked up 12 baskets of leftover pieces.



The time grew near for Jesus to be taken up to heaven. So he made up his mind to go to Jerusalem. He sent messengers on ahead. They went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him. But the people there did not welcome Jesus. That was because he was heading for Jerusalem. The disciples James and John saw this. They asked, “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?” But Jesus turned and commanded them not to do it. Then Jesus and his disciples went on to another village.

One day an authority on the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to receive eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” Jesus replied. “How do you understand it?”

He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your strength and with all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do that, and you will live.”

But the man wanted to make himself look good. So he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Robbers attacked him. They stripped off his clothes and beat him.

Then they went away, leaving him almost dead. A priest happened to be going down that same road. When he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. A Levite also came by. When he saw the man, he passed by on the other side too. But a Samaritan came to the place where the man was. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him. He went to him, poured olive oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey. He brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins. He gave them to the owner of the inn. ‘Take care of him,’ he said. ‘When I return, I will pay you back for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of the three do you think was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by robbers?”

The authority on the law replied, “The one who felt sorry for him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do as he did.”



Jesus and his disciples went on their way. Jesus came to a village where a woman named Martha lived. She welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary. Mary sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was busy with all the things that had to be done. She came to Jesus and said, “Lord, my sister has left me to do the work by myself. Don’t you care? Tell her to help me!”

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered. “You are worried and upset about many things. But few things are needed. Really, only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better. And it will not be taken away from her.”



One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples spoke to him. “Lord,” he said, “teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

Jesus said to them, “When you pray, this is what you should say.

“‘Father,
may your name be honored.
May your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
Keep us from falling into sin when we are tempted.’”

Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend. You go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread. A friend of mine on a journey has come to stay with me. I have no food to give him.’ And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked. My children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, that person will not get up. And he won’t give you bread just because he is your friend. But because you keep bothering him, he will surely get up. He will give you as much as you need.

“So here is what I say to you. Ask, and it will be given to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks will receive. The one who searches will find. And the door will be opened to the one who knocks.”



Then Jesus spoke to his disciples. He said, “I tell you, do not worry. Don’t worry about your life and what you will eat. And don’t worry about your body and what you will wear. There is more to life than eating. There are more important things for the body than clothes. Think about the ravens. They don’t plant or gather crops. They don’t have any barns at all. But God feeds them. You are worth much more than birds! Can you add even one hour to your life by worrying? You can’t do that very little thing. So why worry about the rest?

“Think about how the wild flowers grow. They don’t work or make clothing. But here is what I tell you. Not even Solomon in his royal robes was dressed like one of those flowers. If that is how God dresses the wild grass, how much better will he dress you!

After all, the grass is here only today. Tomorrow it is thrown into the fire. Your faith is so small! Don't spend time thinking about what you will eat or drink. Don't worry about it. People who are ungodly run after all those things. Your Father knows that you need them. But put God's kingdom first. Then those other things will also be given to you.

"Little flock, do not be afraid. Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell what you own. Give to those who are poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out. Store up riches in heaven that will never be used up. There, no thief can come near it. There, no moth can destroy it. Your heart will be where your riches are.

Then Jesus asked, "What is God's kingdom like? What can I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed. Someone took the seed and planted it in a garden. It grew and became a tree. The birds sat in its branches."

Again he asked, "What can I compare God's kingdom to? It is like yeast that a woman used. She mixed it into 60 pounds of flour. The yeast worked its way all through the dough."



Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching the people. He was on his way to Jerusalem.

One Sabbath day, Jesus went to eat in the house of a well-known Pharisee. While he was there, he was being carefully watched. In front of him was a man whose body was badly swollen. Jesus turned to the Pharisees and the authorities on the law. He asked them, "Is it breaking the Law to heal on the Sabbath day?" But they remained silent. So Jesus took hold of the man and healed him. Then he sent him away.

He asked them another question. He said, "Suppose one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day. Wouldn't you pull it out right away?" And they had nothing to say.

Then Jesus spoke to his host. "Suppose you give a lunch or a dinner," he said. "Do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, or your relatives, or your rich neighbors. If you do, they may invite

you to eat with them. So you will be paid back. But when you give a banquet, invite those who are poor. Also invite those who can't see or walk. Then you will be blessed. Your guests can't pay you back. But you will be paid back when those who are right with God rise from the dead."

One of the people at the table with Jesus heard him say those things. So he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in God's kingdom."

Jesus replied, "A certain man was preparing a great banquet. He invited many guests. Then the day of the banquet arrived. He sent his servant to those who had been invited. The servant told them, 'Come. Everything is ready now.'

"But they all had the same idea. They began to make excuses. The first one said, 'I have just bought a field. I have to go and see it. Please excuse me.'

"Another said, 'I have just bought five pairs of oxen. I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

"Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

"The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry. He ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the town. Bring in those who are poor. Also bring those who can't see or walk.'

"'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done. But there is still room.'

"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads. Go out to the country lanes. Make the people come in. I want my house to be full. I tell you, not one of those people who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

remember what you read

1. What is something you noticed for the first time?

2. What questions did you have?

3. Was there anything that bothered you?

4. What did you learn about loving God?

5. What did you learn about loving others?



DAY 4

LUKE-ACTS, PART 4

introduction to Luke-Acts, part 4

Not everyone is happy about Jesus. The religious leaders were supposed to point people to God. But instead, they grew powerful and greedy. They actually kept people away from God.

Jesus is all about setting people free — which is the last thing some of the leaders want. Will they be able to get along? Or are things about to get very ugly?



The tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were whispering among themselves. They said, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Then Jesus told them a story. He said, “Suppose one of you has 100 sheep and loses one of them. Won’t he leave the 99 in the open country? Won’t he go and look for the one lost sheep until he finds it? When he finds it, he will joyfully put it on his shoulders and go home. Then he will call his friends and neighbors together. He will say, ‘Be joyful with me. I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you, it will be the same in heaven. There will be great joy when one sinner turns away from sin. Yes, there will be more joy than for 99 godly people who do not need to turn away from their sins.

Jesus continued, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger son spoke to his father. He said, ‘Father, give me my share of the family property.’ So the father divided his property between his two sons.

“Not long after that, the younger son packed up all he had. Then he left for a country far away. There he wasted his money on wild living. He spent everything he had. Then the whole country ran low on food. So the son didn’t have what he needed. He went to work for someone who lived in that country. That person sent the son to the fields to feed the pigs. The son wanted to fill his stomach with the food the pigs were eating. But no one gave him anything.

“Then he began to think clearly again. He said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough food! But here I am dying from hunger! I will get up and go back to my father. I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven. And I have sinned against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”’ So he got up and went to his father.

“While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him. He was filled with tender love for his son. He ran to him. He threw his arms around him and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattest calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

“The older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants. He asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come home,’ the servant replied. ‘Your father has killed the fattest calf. He has done this because your brother is back safe and sound.’

“The older brother became angry. He refused to go in. So his father went out and begged him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve worked like a slave for you. I have always obeyed your orders. You never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But this son of yours wasted your money with some prostitutes. Now he comes home. And for him you kill the fattest calf!’

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me. Everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad. This brother of yours was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.’”



Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. He traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men met him. They had a skin disease. They were standing close by. And they called out in a loud voice, “Jesus! Master! Have pity on us!”

Jesus saw them and said, “Go. Show yourselves to the priests.” While they were on the way, they were healed.

When one of them saw that he was healed, he came back. He praised God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, “Weren’t all ten healed? Where are the other nine? Didn’t anyone else return and give praise to God except this outsider?” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up and go. Your faith has healed you.”



Once the Pharisees asked Jesus when God’s kingdom would come. He replied, “The coming of God’s kingdom is not something you can see. People will not say, ‘Here it is.’ Or, ‘There it is.’ That’s because God’s kingdom is among you.”



People were also bringing babies to Jesus. They wanted him to place his hands on the babies. When the disciples saw this, they told the people to stop. But Jesus asked the children to come to him. “Let the little children come to me,” he said. “Don’t keep them away. God’s kingdom belongs to people like them. What I’m about to tell you is true. Anyone who will not receive God’s kingdom like a little child will never enter it.”



A certain ruler asked Jesus a question. “Good teacher,” he said, “what must I do to receive eternal life?”

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good except God. You know what the commandments say. ‘Do not commit adultery. Do not commit murder. Do not steal. Do not be a false witness. Honor your father and mother.’”

“I have obeyed all those commandments since I was a boy,” the ruler said.

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You are still missing one thing. Sell everything you have. Give the money to those who are poor. You will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.”

When the ruler heard this, he became very sad. He was very rich. Jesus looked at him. Then he said, “How hard it is for rich people to enter God’s kingdom! Is it hard for a camel to go through the eye of a needle? It is even harder for someone who is rich to enter God’s kingdom!”

Those who heard this asked, “Then who can be saved?”

Jesus replied, “Things that are impossible with people are possible with God.”

Peter said to him, “We have left everything we had in order to follow you!”

“What I’m about to tell you is true,” Jesus said to them. “Has anyone left home or wife or husband or brothers or sisters or parents or children for God’s kingdom? They will receive many times as much in this world. In the world to come they will receive eternal life.”



Jesus took the 12 disciples to one side. He told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem. Everything that the prophets wrote about the Son of Man will come true. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will make fun of him. They will laugh at him and spit on him. They will whip him and kill him. On the third day, he will rise from the dead!”

The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them. So they didn't know what Jesus was talking about.



Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man named Zacchaeus lived there. He was a chief tax collector and was very rich. Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was. But he was a short man. He could not see Jesus because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree. He wanted to see Jesus, who was coming that way.

Jesus reached the spot where Zacchaeus was. He looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay at your house today." So Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this. They began to whisper among themselves. They said, "Jesus has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

But Zacchaeus stood up. He said, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of what I own to those who are poor. And if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay it back. I will pay back four times the amount I took."

Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to your house. You are a member of Abraham's family line. The Son of Man came to look for the lost and save them."



After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead. He was going up to Jerusalem. He approached Bethphage and Bethany. The hill there was called the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent out two of his disciples. He said to them, "Go to the village ahead of you. As soon as you get there, you will find a donkey's colt tied up. No one has ever ridden it. Untie it and bring it here. Someone may ask you, 'Why are you untying it?' If so, say, 'The Lord needs it.'"

Those who were sent ahead went and found the young donkey. It was there just as Jesus had told them. They were untying the

colt when its owners came. The owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

Then the disciples brought the colt to Jesus. They threw their coats on the young donkey and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their coats on the road.

Jesus came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives. There the whole crowd of disciples began to praise God with joy. In loud voices they praised him for all the miracles they had seen. They shouted,

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“May there be peace and glory in the highest heaven!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd spoke to Jesus. “Teacher,” they said, “tell your disciples to stop!”

“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

He approached Jerusalem. When he saw the city, he began to weep. He said, “I wish you had known today what would bring you peace! But now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come when your enemies will arrive. They will build a wall of dirt up against your city. They will surround you and close you in on every side. You didn’t recognize the time when God came to you. So your enemies will smash you to the ground. They will destroy you and all the people inside your walls. They will not leave one stone on top of another.”

Then Jesus entered the temple courtyard. He began to drive out those who were selling there. He told them, “It is written that the Lord said, ‘My house will be a house where people can pray.’ But you have made it a ‘den for robbers.’”

Every day Jesus was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests and the teachers of the law were trying to kill him. So were the leaders among the people. But they couldn’t find any way to do it. All the people were paying close attention to his words.

remember what you read

1. What is something you noticed for the first time?

2. What questions did you have?

3. Was there anything that bothered you?

4. What did you learn about loving God?

5. What did you learn about loving others?



DAY 5

LUKE-ACTS, PART 5

introduction to Luke-Acts, part 5

In the final reading from Luke's story, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem. The religious leaders have had enough. They're ready to put a stop to him—for good.

So they come up with a plan to have Jesus killed. The question is, who gets the last laugh?



The Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was near. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for a way to get rid of Jesus. They were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, who was called Iscariot. Judas was one of the 12 disciples. He went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard. He talked with them about how he could hand Jesus over to them. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. Judas accepted their offer. He watched for the right time to hand Jesus over to them. He wanted to do it when no crowd was around.



Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives. His disciples followed him. When they reached the place, Jesus spoke. "Pray that you won't fall into sin when you are tempted," he said to them. Then he went a short distance away from them. There he got down on his knees and prayed. He said, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup of suffering away from me. But do what you

want, not what I want.” An angel from heaven appeared to Jesus and gave him strength. Because he was very sad and troubled, he prayed even harder. His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

After that, he got up from prayer and went back to the disciples. He found them sleeping. They were worn out because they were very sad. “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up! Pray that you won’t fall into sin when you are tempted.”

While Jesus was still speaking, a crowd came up. The man named Judas was leading them. He was one of the 12 disciples. Judas approached Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you handing over the Son of Man with a kiss?”

Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen. So they said, “Lord, should we use our swords against them?” One of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

But Jesus answered, “Stop this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.

Then Jesus spoke to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders. They had all come for him. “Am I leading a band of armed men against you?” he asked. “Do you have to come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courtyard. And you didn’t lay a hand on me. But this is your hour. This is when darkness rules.”



Then the men arrested Jesus and led him away. They took him into the high priest’s house. Peter followed from far away. Some people there started a fire in the middle of the courtyard. Then they sat down together. Peter sat down with them. A female servant saw him sitting there in the firelight. She looked closely at him. Then she said, “This man was with Jesus.”

But Peter said he had not been with him. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said.

A little later someone else saw Peter. “You also are one of them,” he said.

“No,” Peter replied. “I’m not!”

About an hour later, another person spoke up. “This fellow must have been with Jesus,” he said. “He is from Galilee.”

Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked right at Peter. Then Peter remembered what the Lord had spoken to him. “The rooster will crow today,” Jesus had said. “Before it does, you will say three times that you don’t know me.” Peter went outside. He broke down and cried.



At dawn the elders of the people met together. These included the chief priests and the teachers of the law. Jesus was led to them. “If you are the Messiah,” they said, “tell us.”

Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me. And if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.”

They all asked, “Are you the Son of God then?”

He replied, “You say that I am.”

Then they said, “Why do we need any more witnesses? We have heard it from his own lips.”

Then the whole group got up and led Jesus off to Pilate. They began to bring charges against Jesus. They said, “We have found this man misleading our people. He is against paying taxes to Caesar. And he claims to be Messiah, a king.”

Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people. He said to them, “You brought me this man. You said he was turning the people against the authorities. I have questioned him in front of you. I have found no basis for your charges against him. Herod hasn’t either. So he sent Jesus back to us. As you can see, Jesus has done nothing that is worthy of death. So I will just have him whipped and let him go.”

But the whole crowd shouted, “Kill this man! But let Barabbas go!” Barabbas had been thrown into prison. He had taken part in a struggle in the city against the authorities. He had also committed murder.

Pilate wanted to let Jesus go. So he made an appeal to the crowd again. But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Pilate spoke to them for the third time. “Why?” he asked. “What wrong has this man done? I have found no reason to have him put to death. So I will just have him whipped and let him go.”

But with loud shouts they kept calling for Jesus to be crucified. The people’s shouts won out. So Pilate decided to give them what they wanted. He set free the man they asked for. The man had been thrown in prison for murder and for fighting against the authorities. Pilate handed Jesus over to them so they could carry out their plans.



Two other men were also led out with Jesus to be killed. Both of them had broken the law. The soldiers brought them to the place called the Skull. There they nailed Jesus to the cross. He hung between the two criminals. One was on his right and one was on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.” The soldiers divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood there watching. The rulers even made fun of Jesus. They said, “He saved others. Let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

The soldiers also came up and poked fun at him. They offered him wine vinegar. They said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

A written sign had been placed above him. It read,

THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

One of the criminals hanging there made fun of Jesus. He said, “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself! Save us!”

But the other criminal scolded him. “Don’t you have any respect for God?” he said. “Remember, you are under the same sentence of death. We are being punished fairly. We are getting just what our actions call for. But this man hasn’t done anything wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him, “What I’m about to tell you is true. Today you will be with me in paradise.”

It was now about noon. Then darkness covered the whole land until three o'clock. The sun had stopped shining. The temple curtain was torn in two. Jesus called out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my life." After he said this, he took his last breath.

The Roman commander saw what had happened. He praised God and said, "Jesus was surely a man who did what was right." The people had gathered to watch this sight. When they saw what happened, they felt very sad. Then they went away. But all those who knew Jesus stood not very far away, watching these things. They included the women who had followed him from Galilee.



It was very early in the morning on the first day of the week. The women took the spices they had prepared. Then they went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from it. When they entered the tomb, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. They were wondering about this. Suddenly two men in clothes as bright as lightning stood beside them. The women were terrified. They bowed down with their faces to the ground. Then the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? Jesus is not here! He has risen! Remember how he told you he would rise. It was while he was still with you in Galilee. He said, 'The Son of Man must be handed over to sinful people. He must be nailed to a cross. On the third day he will rise from the dead.'" Then the women remembered Jesus' words.

They came back from the tomb. They told all these things to the 11 apostles and to all the others. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them were the ones who told the apostles. But the apostles did not believe the women. Their words didn't make any sense to them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb. He bent over and saw the strips of linen lying by themselves. Then he went away, wondering what had happened.

The disciples were still talking about this when Jesus himself suddenly stood among them. He said, "May you have peace!"

They were surprised and terrified. They thought they were see-

ing a ghost. Jesus said to them, “Why are you troubled? Why do you have doubts in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It’s really me! Touch me and see. A ghost does not have a body or bones. But you can see that I do.”

After he said that, he showed them his hands and feet. But they still did not believe it. They were amazed and filled with joy. So Jesus asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of cooked fish. He took it and ate it in front of them.

Jesus said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must come true.”

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written. The Messiah will suffer. He will rise from the dead on the third day. His followers will preach in his name. They will tell others to turn away from their sins and be forgiven. People from every nation will hear it, beginning at Jerusalem. You have seen these things with your own eyes. I am going to send you what my Father has promised. But for now, stay in the city. Stay there until you have received power from heaven.”

Jesus led his disciples out to the area near Bethany. Then he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them. He was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him. With great joy, they returned to Jerusalem. Every day they went to the temple, praising God.

remember what you read

1. What is something you noticed for the first time?

2. What questions did you have?

3. Was there anything that bothered you?

4. What did you learn about loving God?

5. What did you learn about loving others?



DAY 6

LUKE-ACTS, PART 6

introduction to Luke-Acts, part 6

Luke, the doctor who shared the story of Jesus, wrote another book for his friend Theophilus. This one is called the book of Acts. Why? Well, because it records the acts or activities of those who helped spread the message of Jesus.

After Jesus rose from the dead and went up to heaven, more and more people began following him. It started in the city of Jerusalem, but then it spread all over the Roman Empire.

Near the beginning of Acts, God's Holy Spirit comes to the disciples in Jerusalem, and the church is born. Then followers of Jesus spread to the area around Jerusalem. They start reaching out to non-Jewish people called Gentiles.

Then followers of Jesus take the good news even farther—all the way to the Roman province of Asia. They keep going until they reach Europe.

Finally, they reach the capital city, Rome—the most powerful city in the world. And so God's invitation is extended to people all over.

After reading the story of Acts, go online with a parent and find a map showing the Roman Empire during the first century AD. See if you can locate some of the places you hear about in this story. You could even print the map and draw a circle around Jerusalem—then bigger circles around Palestine, the province of Asia, and Europe—so you can see for yourself just how far the good news about Jesus spread in a few years' time.



The apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives. It is just over half a mile from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Here is a list of those who were there.

Peter, John, James and Andrew,
Philip and Thomas,
Bartholomew and Matthew,
James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas son of
James

They all came together regularly to pray. The women joined them too. So did Jesus' mother Mary and his brothers.

When the day of Pentecost came, all the believers gathered in one place. Suddenly a sound came from heaven. It was like a strong wind blowing. It filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw something that looked like fire in the shape of tongues. The flames separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to speak in languages they had not known before. The Spirit gave them the ability to do this.

Godly Jews from every country in the world were staying in Jerusalem. A crowd came together when they heard the sound. They were bewildered because each of them heard their own language being spoken. The crowd was really amazed. They asked, "Aren't all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then why do we each hear them speaking in our own native language? We are Parthians, Medes and Elamites. We live in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia. We are from Pontus, Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia. Others of us are from Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene. Still others are visitors from Rome. Some of the visitors are Jews. Others have accepted the Jewish faith. Also, Cretans and Arabs are here. We hear all these people speaking about God's wonders in our own languages!" They were amazed and bewildered. They asked one another, "What does this mean?"

But some people in the crowd made fun of the believers. "They've had too much wine!" they said.

Then Peter stood up with the 11 apostles. In a loud voice he spoke

to the crowd. “My fellow Jews,” he said, “let me explain this to you. All of you who live in Jerusalem, listen carefully to what I say. You think these people are drunk. But they aren’t. It’s only nine o’clock in the morning! No, here is what the prophet Joel meant. He said,

“In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Holy Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy.

Your young men will see visions.

Your old men will have dreams.

In those days, I will pour out my Spirit on my servants.

I will pour out my Spirit on both men and women.

When I do, they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heavens above.

I will show signs on the earth below.

There will be blood and fire and clouds of smoke.

The sun will become dark.

The moon will turn red like blood.

This will happen before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

Everyone who calls

on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

“Fellow Israelites, listen to this! Jesus of Nazareth was a man who had God’s approval. God did miracles, wonders and signs among you through Jesus. You yourselves know this. Long ago God planned that Jesus would be handed over to you. With the help of evil people, you put Jesus to death. You nailed him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead. He set him free from the suffering of death. It wasn’t possible for death to keep its hold on Jesus.

When the people heard this, it had a deep effect on them. They said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”

Peter replied, “All of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then your sins will be forgiven. You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children. It is also for all who are far away. It is for all whom the Lord our God will choose.”

Peter said many other things to warn them. He begged them, “Save yourselves from these evil people.” Those who accepted his message were baptized. About 3,000 people joined the believers that day.



The believers studied what the apostles taught. They shared their lives together. They ate and prayed together. Everyone was amazed at what God was doing. They were amazed when the apostles performed many wonders and signs. All the believers were together. They shared everything they had. They sold property and other things they owned. They gave to anyone who needed something. Every day they met together in the temple courtyard. They ate meals together in their homes. Their hearts were glad and sincere. They praised God. They were respected by all the people. Every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.



One day Peter and John were going up to the temple. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. It was the time for prayer. A man unable to walk was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful. He had been that way since he was born. Every day someone put him near the gate. There he would beg from people going into the temple courtyards. He saw that Peter and John were about to enter. So he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, and so did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man watched them closely. He expected to get something from them.

Peter said, “I don't have any silver or gold. But I'll give you what I do have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk.” Then Peter took him by the right hand and helped him up. At once the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. He went with Peter and John into the temple courtyards. He walked and jumped and praised God. All the people saw him walking and praising God. They recognized him as the

same man who used to sit and beg at the temple gate called Beautiful. They were filled with wonder. They were amazed at what had happened to him.

The man was holding on to Peter and John. All the people were amazed. They came running to them at the place called Solomon's Porch. When Peter saw this, he said, "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us? It's not as if we've made this man walk by our own power or godliness. The God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has done this. God has brought glory to Jesus, who serves him. But you handed Jesus over to be killed. Pilate had decided to let him go. But you spoke against Jesus when he was in Pilate's court. You spoke against the Holy and Blameless One. You asked for a murderer to be set free instead. You killed the one who gives life. But God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. This man whom you see and know was made strong because of faith in Jesus' name. Faith in Jesus has healed him completely. You can see it with your own eyes.



All the believers were agreed in heart and mind. They didn't claim that anything they had was their own. Instead, they shared everything they owned. With great power the apostles continued their teaching. They were telling people that the Lord Jesus had risen from the dead. And God's grace was working powerfully in all of them. So there were no needy persons among them. From time to time, those who owned land or houses sold them. They brought the money from the sales. They put it down at the apostles' feet. It was then given out to anyone who needed it.

A man named Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, also sold some land. He kept part of the money for himself. Sapphira knew he had kept it. He brought the rest of it and put it down at the apostles' feet.

Then Peter said, "Ananias, why did you let Satan fill your heart? He made you lie to the Holy Spirit. You have kept some of the money you received for the land. Didn't the land belong to you before it was sold? After it was sold, you could have used the money as you

wished. What made you think of doing such a thing? You haven't lied just to people. You've also lied to God."

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. All who heard what had happened were filled with fear. Some young men came and wrapped up his body. They carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later, the wife of Ananias came in. She didn't know what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me. Is this the price you and Ananias sold the land for?"

"Yes," she said. "That's the price."

Peter asked her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! You can hear the steps of the men who buried your husband. They are at the door. They will carry you out also."

At that moment she fell down at Peter's feet and died. Then the young men came in. They saw that Sapphira was dead. So they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. The whole church and all who heard about these things were filled with fear.

The apostles did many signs and wonders among the people. All the believers used to meet together at Solomon's Porch. No outsider dared to join them. But the people thought highly of them. More and more men and women believed in the Lord. They joined the other believers. So people brought those who were sick into the streets. They placed them on beds and mats. They hoped that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he walked by. Crowds even gathered from the towns around Jerusalem. They brought their sick people. They also brought those who were suffering because of evil spirits. All of them were healed.



In those days the number of believers was growing. The Greek Jews complained about the non-Greek Jews. They said that the widows of the Greek Jews were not being taken care of. They weren't getting their fair share of food each day. So the 12 apostles gathered all the believers together. They said, "It wouldn't be right for us to give up teaching God's word. And we'd have to stop teaching to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven of your men. They must be known as men who are wise and full of the

Holy Spirit. We will turn this important work over to them. Then we can give our attention to prayer and to teaching God's word."

This plan pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen. He was full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon and Parmenas were chosen too. The group also chose Nicolas from Antioch. He had accepted the Jewish faith. The group brought them to the apostles. Then the apostles prayed and placed their hands on them.

So God's word spread. The number of believers in Jerusalem grew quickly. Also, a large number of priests began to obey Jesus' teachings.

remember what you read

1. What is something you noticed for the first time?

2. What questions did you have?

3. Was there anything that bothered you?

4. What did you learn about loving God?

5. What did you learn about loving others?



DAY 7

LUKE-ACTS, PART 7

introduction to Luke-Acts, part 7

The early church got off to an amazing start. Every day, more and more people were becoming followers of Jesus. The entire city of Jerusalem was buzzing with excitement.

Then some powerful people started attacking the church. Believers ran for their lives. But notice what happens when they spread out from Jerusalem. And be sure to pay special attention to a man named Saul, one of the church's most powerful enemies.



Stephen was full of God's grace and power. He did great wonders and signs among the people. But members of the group called the Synagogue of the Freedmen began to oppose him. Some of them were Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria. Others were Jews from Cilicia and Asia Minor. They all began to argue with Stephen. But he was too wise for them. That's because the Holy Spirit gave Stephen wisdom whenever he spoke.

Then in secret they talked some men into lying about Stephen. They said, "We heard Stephen speak evil things against Moses and against God."

So the people were stirred up. The elders and the teachers of the law were stirred up too. They arrested Stephen and brought him to the Sanhedrin. They found witnesses who were willing to tell lies. These liars said, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place. He also speaks against the law. We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place. He says Jesus will change the practices that Moses handed down to us."

All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked right at Stephen. They saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

He looked up to heaven and saw God's glory. He saw Jesus standing at God's right hand. "Look!" he said. "I see heaven open. The Son of Man is standing at God's right hand."

When the Sanhedrin heard this, they covered their ears. They yelled at the top of their voices. They all rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city. They began to throw stones at him to kill him. The people who had brought false charges against Stephen took off their coats. They placed them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While the members of the Sanhedrin were throwing stones at Stephen, he prayed. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," he said. Then he fell on his knees. He cried out, "Lord! Don't hold this sin against them!" When he had said this, he died.

And Saul had agreed with the Sanhedrin that Stephen should die.

On that day the church in Jerusalem began to be attacked and treated badly. All except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly Jews buried Stephen. They mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. He went from house to house. He dragged away men and women and put them in prison.



Meanwhile, Saul continued to oppose the Lord's followers. He said they would be put to death. He went to the high priest. He asked the priest for letters to the synagogues in Damascus. He wanted to find men and women who belonged to the Way of Jesus. The letters would allow him to take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. On his journey, Saul approached Damascus. Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground. He heard a voice speak to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you opposing me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus," he replied. "I am the one you are opposing. Now get up and go into the city. There you will be told what you must do."

The men traveling with Saul stood there. They weren't able to speak. They had heard the sound. But they didn't see anyone. Saul got up from the ground. He opened his eyes, but he couldn't see. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind. He didn't eat or drink anything.

In Damascus there was a believer named Ananias. The Lord called out to him in a vision. "Ananias!" he said.

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street. Ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying. In a vision Saul has seen a man come and place his hands on him. That man's name is Ananias. In the vision, Ananias placed his hands on Saul so he could see again."

"Lord," Ananias answered, "I've heard many reports about this man. They say he has done great harm to your holy people in Jerusalem. Now he has come here to arrest all those who worship you. The chief priests have given him authority to do this."

But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! I have chosen this man to work for me. He will announce my name to the Gentiles and to their kings. He will also announce my name to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for me."

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. He placed his hands on Saul. "Brother Saul," he said, "you saw the Lord Jesus. He appeared to you on the road as you were coming here. He has sent me so that you will be able to see again. You will be filled with the Holy Spirit." Right away something like scales fell from Saul's eyes. And he could see again. He got up and was baptized. After eating some food, he got his strength back.

Saul spent several days with the believers in Damascus. Right away he began to preach in the synagogues. He taught that Jesus is the Son of God. All who heard him were amazed. They asked, "Isn't he the man who caused great trouble in Jerusalem? Didn't he make trouble for those who worship Jesus? Hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" But Saul grew more and more powerful. The Jews living in Damascus couldn't believe what was happening. Saul proved to them that Jesus is the Messiah.

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. The church was strengthened and grew larger. That's because they worshiped the Lord and the Holy Spirit helped them.



A man named Cornelius lived in Caesarea. He was a Roman commander in the Italian Regiment. Cornelius and all his family were faithful and worshiped God. He gave freely to people who were in need. He prayed to God regularly. One day about three o'clock in the afternoon he had a vision. He saw clearly an angel of God. The angel came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Cornelius was afraid. He stared at the angel. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to poor people are like an offering to God. So he has remembered you. Now send men to Joppa. Have them bring back a man named Simon. He is also called Peter. He is staying with another Simon, a man who works with leather. His house is by the sea."

The angel who spoke to him left. Then Cornelius called two of his servants. He also called a godly soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened. Then he sent them to Joppa.

The men sent by Cornelius found Simon's house. Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The next day Peter went with the three men. Some of the believers from Joppa went along. The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them. He had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him. As a sign of respect, he fell at Peter's feet. But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said. "I am only a man myself."

As he was talking with Cornelius, Peter went inside. There he found a large group of people. He said to them, "You know that it is against our law for a Jew to enter a Gentile home. A Jew shouldn't have any close contact with a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not say anyone is not pure and 'clean.' So when you sent for me, I came without asking any questions.

“I now realize how true it is that God treats everyone the same,” he said. “He accepts people from every nation. He accepts anyone who has respect for him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel. It is the good news of peace through Jesus Christ. He is Lord of all. You know what has happened all through the area of Judea. It started in Galilee after John preached about baptism. You know how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Jesus went around doing good. He healed all who were under the devil’s power. God was with him.

“We are witnesses of everything he did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by nailing him to a cross. But on the third day God raised him from the dead. God allowed Jesus to be seen. But he wasn’t seen by all the people. He was seen only by us. We are witnesses whom God had already chosen. We ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people. He told us to tell people that he is the one appointed by God to judge the living and the dead. All the prophets tell about him. They say that all who believe in him have their sins forgiven through his name.”

The apostles and the believers all through Judea heard that Gentiles had also received God’s word. They said, “So then, God has allowed even Gentiles to turn away from their sins. He did this so that they could live.”



About this time, King Herod arrested some people who belonged to the church. He planned to make them suffer greatly. He had James killed with a sword. James was John’s brother. Herod saw that the death of James pleased some Jews. So he arrested Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After Herod arrested Peter, he put him in prison. Peter was placed under guard. He was watched by four groups of four soldiers each. Herod planned to put Peter on public trial. It would take place after the Passover Feast.

So Peter was kept in prison. But the church prayed hard to God for him.

It was the night before Herod was going to bring him to trial. Peter was sleeping between two soldiers. Two chains held him there. Lookouts stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared. A light shone in the prison cell. The angel struck Peter on his side. Peter woke up. “Quick!” the angel said. “Get up!” The chains fell off Peter’s wrists.

Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” Peter did so. “Put on your coat,” the angel told him. “Follow me.” Peter followed him out of the prison. But he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening. He thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards. Then they came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself. They went through it. They walked the length of one street. Suddenly the angel left Peter.

When Peter understood what had happened, he went to Mary’s house. Mary was the mother of John Mark. Many people had gathered in her home. They were praying there. Peter knocked at the outer entrance. A servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. She recognized Peter’s voice. She was so excited that she ran back without opening the door. “Peter is at the door!” she exclaimed.

Peter kept on knocking. When they opened the door and saw him, they were amazed. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet. He explained how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,” he said. Then he went to another place.

But God’s word continued to spread and many people believed the message.

remember what you read

1. What is something you noticed for the first time?

2. What questions did you have?

3. Was there anything that bothered you?

4. What did you learn about loving God?

5. What did you learn about loving others?



DAY 8

LUKE-ACTS, PART 8

introduction to Luke-Acts, part 8

In our last reading of Acts, Saul got a new job. He's not putting Christians in jail anymore; he's telling people about Jesus!

In today's reading, Saul gets a new name, too. He and his friend Barnabas travel around, sharing the good news with everyone they meet, Jews and non-Jews. They say that Jesus loves everyone, no matter where they come from or what they look like.

But there are some people who don't like this idea. See what happens when an argument breaks out over who to include in the church.

As you read, you might also notice that Luke, the writer of Acts, starts saying "we" a lot. That's because partway through this reading, Luke joins up with Paul as one of his traveling companions.



Barnabas and Saul were sent on their way by the Holy Spirit. They went down to Seleucia. From there they sailed to Cyprus. They arrived at Salamis. There they preached God's word in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia. There John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath day they entered the synagogue and sat down. The Law and the Prophets were read aloud. Then the leaders of the synagogue sent word to Paul and his companions. They said, "Brothers, do you have any words of instruction for the people? If you do, please speak."

Paul stood up and motioned with his hand. Then he said, “Fellow Israelites, and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! The God of Israel chose our people who lived long ago. He blessed them greatly while they were in Egypt. With his mighty power he led them out of that country. He put up with their behavior for about 40 years in the desert. And he destroyed seven nations in Canaan. Then he gave the land to his people as their rightful share. All this took about 450 years.

“After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. Then the people asked for a king. He gave them Saul, son of Kish. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. He ruled for 40 years. God removed him and made David their king. Here is God’s witness about him. ‘David, son of Jesse, is a man dear to my heart,’ he said. ‘David will do everything I want him to do.’

“From this man’s family line God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus. This is what he had promised. Before Jesus came, John preached that we should turn away from our sins and be baptized. He preached this to all Israel. John was coming to the end of his work. ‘Who do you suppose I am?’ he said. ‘I am not the one you are looking for. But there is someone coming after me. I am not good enough to untie his sandals.’

“Listen, fellow children of Abraham! Listen, you Gentiles who worship God! This message of salvation has been sent to us. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus. By finding him guilty, they made the prophets’ words come true. These are read every Sabbath day. The people and their rulers had no reason at all for sentencing Jesus to death. But they asked Pilate to have him killed. They did everything that had been written about Jesus. Then they took him down from the cross. They laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead. For many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. Now they are telling our people about Jesus.

“We are telling you the good news. What God promised our people long ago he has done for us, their children. He has raised up Jesus. This is what is written in the second Psalm. It says,

“‘You are my son.

Today I have become your father.’

On the next Sabbath day, almost the whole city gathered. They gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they became very jealous. They began to disagree with what Paul was saying. They said evil things against him.

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly. “We had to speak God’s word to you first,” they said. “But you don’t accept it. You don’t think you are good enough for eternal life. So now we are turning to the Gentiles. This is what the Lord has commanded us to do. He said,

“‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles.
You will bring salvation to the whole earth.’”

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad. They honored the word of the Lord. All who were appointed for eternal life believed.



Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch. Here is what they were teaching the believers. “Moses commanded you to be circumcised,” they said. “If you aren’t, you can’t be saved.” But Paul and Barnabas didn’t agree with this. They argued strongly with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed to go up to Jerusalem. Some other believers were chosen to go with them. They were told to ask the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way. They traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria. There they told how the Gentiles had turned to God. This news made all the believers very glad. When they arrived in Jerusalem, the church welcomed them. The apostles and elders welcomed them too. Then Paul and Barnabas reported everything God had done through them.

Some of the believers were Pharisees. They stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised. They must obey the law of Moses.”

The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After they had talked it over, Peter got up and spoke to them. “Brothers,” he said, “you know that some time ago God chose me. He appointed me to take the good news to the Gentiles. He wanted them to hear

the good news and believe. God knows the human heart. By giving the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, he showed that he accepted them. He did the same for them as he had done for us. God showed that there is no difference between us and them. That's because he made their hearts pure because of their faith. Now then, why are you trying to test God? You test him when you put a heavy load on the shoulders of Gentiles. Our people of long ago couldn't carry that load. We can't either. No! We believe we are saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus. The Gentiles are saved in the same way."

Everyone became quiet as they listened to Barnabas and Paul. They were telling about the signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

Then the apostles, the elders and the whole church decided what to do. They would choose some of their own men who were leaders among the believers. They would send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. So they chose Judas Barsabbas and Silas. They were leaders among the believers.

So the men were sent down to Antioch. Judas and Silas were prophets. They said many things to give strength and hope to the believers.



Some time later Paul spoke to Barnabas. "Let's go back to all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord," he said. "Let's visit the believers and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them. But Paul didn't think it was wise to take him. Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia. He hadn't continued with them in their work. Barnabas and Paul strongly disagreed with each other. So they went their separate ways. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas. The believers asked the Lord to give his grace to Paul and Silas as they went. Paul traveled through Syria and Cilicia. He gave strength to the churches there.

Paul came to Derbe. Then he went on to Lystra. A believer named Timothy lived there. His mother was Jewish and a believer. His father was a Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium said good

things about Timothy. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey. So he circumcised Timothy because of the Jews who lived in that area. They all knew that Timothy's father was a Greek. Paul and his companions traveled from town to town. They reported what the apostles and elders in Jerusalem had decided. The people were supposed to obey what was in the report. So the churches were made strong in the faith. The number of believers grew every day.



Paul and his companions traveled all through the area of Phrygia and Galatia. The Holy Spirit had kept them from preaching the word in Asia Minor. They came to the border of Mysia. From there they tried to enter Bithynia. But the Spirit of Jesus would not let them. So they passed by Mysia. Then they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision. He saw a man from Macedonia standing and begging him. "Come over to Macedonia!" the man said. "Help us!" After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia. We decided that God had called us to preach the good news there.

At Troas we got into a boat. We sailed straight for Samothrace. The next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony. It is an important city in that part of Macedonia. We stayed there several days.

One day we were going to the place of prayer. On the way we were met by a female slave. She had a spirit that helped her tell people what was going to happen. She earned a lot of money for her owners by doing this. She followed Paul and the rest of us around. She shouted, "These men serve the Most High God. They are telling you how to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became upset. Turning around, he spoke to the spirit that was in her. "In the name of Jesus Christ," he said, "I command you to come out of her!" At that very moment the spirit left the woman.

Her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone. So they grabbed Paul and Silas. They dragged them into the

market place to face the authorities. They brought them to the judges. “These men are Jews,” her owners said. “They are making trouble in our city. They are suggesting practices that are against Roman law. These are practices we can’t accept or take part in.”

The crowd joined the attack against Paul and Silas. The judges ordered that Paul and Silas be stripped and beaten with rods. They were whipped without mercy. Then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put Paul and Silas deep inside the prison. He fastened their feet so they couldn’t get away.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying. They were also singing hymns to God. The other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a powerful earthquake. It shook the prison from top to bottom. All at once the prison doors flew open. Everyone’s chains came loose. The jailer woke up. He saw that the prison doors were open. He pulled out his sword and was going to kill himself. He thought the prisoners had escaped. “Don’t harm yourself!” Paul shouted. “We are all here!”

The jailer called out for some lights. He rushed in, shaking with fear. He fell down in front of Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out. He asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus. Then you and everyone living in your house will be saved.” They spoke the word of the Lord to him. They also spoke to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night, the jailer took Paul and Silas and washed their wounds. Right away he and everyone who lived with him were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house. He set a meal in front of them. He and everyone who lived with him were filled with joy. They had become believers in God.

remember what you read

1. What is something you noticed for the first time?

2. What questions did you have?

3. Was there anything that bothered you?

4. What did you learn about loving God?

5. What did you learn about loving others?



DAY 9

LUKE-ACTS, PART 9

introduction to Luke-Acts, part 9

Paul spent two years in the city of Ephesus, telling people about Jesus. But he had even bigger plans. He wanted to take the good news to Rome, the capital city of the mighty Roman Empire.



Paul took the road to Ephesus. When he arrived, he found some believers there.

Paul entered the synagogue. There he spoke boldly for three months. He gave good reasons for believing the truth about God's kingdom. But some of them wouldn't listen. They refused to believe. In public they said evil things about the Way of Jesus. So Paul left them. He took the believers with him. Each day he talked with people in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years. So all the Jews and Greeks who lived in Asia Minor heard the word of the Lord.

God did amazing miracles through Paul. Even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to those who were sick. When this happened, their sicknesses were healed and evil spirits left them.

Some Jews went around driving out evil spirits. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus to set free those who were controlled by demons. They said, "In Jesus' name I command you to come out. He is the Jesus that Paul is preaching about." Seven sons of Sceva were doing this. Sceva was a Jewish chief priest. One day the evil spirit answered them, "I know Jesus. And I know about Paul.

But who are you?” Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on Sceva’s sons. He overpowered them all. He gave them a terrible beating. They ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

The Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus heard about this. They were all overcome with fear. They held the name of the Lord Jesus in high honor. Many who believed now came and openly admitted what they had done. A number of those who had practiced evil magic brought their scrolls together. They set them on fire out in the open. They added up the value of the scrolls. The scrolls were worth more than someone could earn in two lifetimes. The word of the Lord spread everywhere. It became more and more powerful.



After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem. He went through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been to Jerusalem,” he said, “I must visit Rome also.” He sent Timothy and Erastus, two of his helpers, to Macedonia. But he stayed a little longer in Asia Minor.

At that time many people became very upset about the Way of Jesus. There was a man named Demetrius who made things out of silver. He made silver models of the temple of the goddess Artemis. He brought in a lot of business for the other skilled workers there. One day he called them together. He also called others who were in the same kind of business. “My friends,” he said, “you know that we make good money from our work. You have seen and heard what this fellow Paul is doing. He has talked to large numbers of people here in Ephesus. Almost everywhere in Asia Minor he has led people away from our gods. He says that the gods made by human hands are not gods at all. Our work is in danger of losing its good name. People’s faith in the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be weakened. Now she is worshiped all over Asia Minor and the whole world. But soon she will be robbed of her greatness.”

When they heard this, they became very angry. They began shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Soon people were

making trouble in the whole city. They all rushed into the theater. They dragged Gaius and Aristarchus along with them. These two men had come with Paul from Macedonia. Paul wanted to appear in front of the crowd. But the believers wouldn't let him. Some of the officials in Asia Minor were friends of Paul. They sent him a message, begging him not to go into the theater.

The crowd didn't know what was going on. Some were shouting one thing and some another. Most of the people didn't even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front. They tried to tell him what to say. But he motioned for them to be quiet. He was about to give the people reasons for his actions. But then they realized that he was a Jew. So they all shouted the same thing for about two hours. "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" they yelled.

The city clerk quieted the crowd down. "People of Ephesus!" he said. "The city of Ephesus guards the temple of the great Artemis. The whole world knows this. They know that Ephesus guards her statue, which fell from heaven. These facts can't be questioned. So calm down. Don't do anything foolish. These men haven't robbed any temples. They haven't said evil things against our female god. But you have brought them here anyhow. Demetrius and the other skilled workers may feel they have been wronged by someone. Let them bring charges. The courts are open. We have our governors. Is there anything else you want to bring up? Settle it in a court of law. As it is, we are in danger of being charged with a crime. We could be charged with causing all this trouble today. There is no reason for it. So we wouldn't be able to explain what has happened." After he said this, he sent the people away.



All the trouble came to an end. Then Paul sent for the believers. After encouraging them, he said goodbye. He then left for Macedonia. He traveled through that area, speaking many words of hope to the people. Finally he arrived in Greece. There he stayed for three months. He was just about to sail for Syria. But some Jews were making plans against him. So he decided to go back through

Macedonia. Sopater, son of Pyrrhus, from Berea went with him. Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, and Timothy went too. Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia Minor also went with him. These men went on ahead. They waited for us at Troas. But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Five days later we joined the others at Troas. We stayed there for seven days.

On the first day of the week we met to break bread and eat together. Paul spoke to the people. He kept on talking until midnight because he planned to leave the next day. There were many lamps in the room upstairs where we were meeting. A young man named Eutychus was sitting in a window. He sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. Sound asleep, Eutychus fell from the third floor. When they picked him up from the ground, he was dead. Paul went down and threw himself on the young man. He put his arms around him. “Don’t be alarmed,” he told them. “He’s alive!” Then Paul went upstairs again. He broke bread and ate with them. He kept on talking until daylight. Then he left. The people took the young man home. They were greatly comforted because he was alive.



We went on ahead to the ship. We sailed for Assos. There we were going to take Paul on board. He had planned it this way because he wanted to go to Assos by land. So he met us there. We took him on board and went on to Mitylene. The next day we sailed from there. We arrived near Chios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos. We arrived at Miletus the next day. Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus. He didn’t want to spend time in Asia Minor. He was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem. If he could, he wanted to be there by the day of Pentecost.

From Miletus, Paul sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus. When they arrived, he spoke to them. “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you,” he said. “From the first day I came into Asia Minor, I served the Lord with tears and without pride. I served him when I was greatly tested. I was tested by the evil

plans of the Jews who disagreed with me. You know that nothing has kept me from preaching whatever would help you. I have taught you in public and from house to house. I have told both Jews and Greeks that they must turn away from their sins to God. They must have faith in our Lord Jesus.

“Now I am going to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit compels me. I don’t know what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Spirit warns me. He tells me that I will face prison and suffering. But my life means nothing to me. My only goal is to finish the race. I want to complete the work the Lord Jesus has given me. He wants me to tell others about the good news of God’s grace.

“I have spent time with you preaching about the kingdom. I know that none of you will ever see me again. So I tell you today that I am not guilty if any of you don’t believe. I haven’t let anyone keep me from telling you everything God wants you to do. Keep watch over yourselves. Keep watch over all the believers. The Holy Spirit has made you leaders over them. Be shepherds of God’s church. He bought it with his own blood. I know that after I leave, wild wolves will come in among you. They won’t spare any of the sheep. Even men from your own people will rise up and twist the truth. They want to get the believers to follow them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning you. Night and day I warned each of you with tears.

Paul finished speaking. Then he got down on his knees with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they hugged and kissed him. Paul had said that they would never see him again. That’s what hurt them the most. Then they went with him to the ship.

remember what you read

1. What is something you noticed for the first time?

2. What questions did you have?

3. Was there anything that bothered you?

4. What did you learn about loving God?

5. What did you learn about loving others?



DAY 10
LUKE-ACTS, PART 10

introduction to Luke-Acts, part 10

Paul had lots of enemies who wanted him dead. In today's reading, they hatch their plan to put a stop to him once and for all. Pay attention to what happens when Paul is arrested, and notice how he uses the situation to realize his dream of preaching in Rome.



When we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters gave us a warm welcome. The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James. All the elders were there. Paul greeted them. Then he reported everything God had done among the Gentiles through his work.

Some Jews from Asia Minor saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and grabbed Paul. "Fellow Israelites, help us!" they shouted. "This is the man who teaches everyone in all places against our people. He speaks against our law and against this holy place. Besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple. He has made this holy place 'unclean.'" They said this because they had seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul. They thought Paul had brought him into the temple.

The whole city was stirred up. People came running from all directions. They grabbed Paul and dragged him out of the temple. Right away the temple gates were shut. The people were trying to kill Paul. But news reached the commander of the Roman troops. He heard that people were making trouble in the whole city of

Jerusalem. Right away he took some officers and soldiers with him. They ran down to the crowd. The people causing the trouble saw the commander and his soldiers. So they stopped beating Paul.

The commander came up and arrested Paul. He ordered him to be held with two chains. Then he asked who Paul was and what he had done. Some in the crowd shouted one thing, some another. But the commander couldn't get the facts because of all the noise. But then the mob became so wild that he had to be carried by the soldiers. The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Get rid of him!"

They shouted and threw off their coats. They threw dust into the air. So the commanding officer ordered that Paul be taken into the fort. He gave orders for Paul to be whipped and questioned. He wanted to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. A commander was standing there as they stretched Paul out to be whipped. Paul said to him, "Does the law allow you to whip a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"

When the commander heard this, he went to the commanding officer and reported it. "What are you going to do?" the commander asked. "This man is a Roman citizen."

Right away those who were about to question him left. Even the officer was alarmed. He realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

The commanding officer wanted to find out exactly what the Jews had against Paul. So the next day he let Paul out of prison. He ordered a meeting of the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin. Then he brought Paul and had him stand in front of them.

The people arguing were getting out of control. The commanding officer was afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them. So he ordered the soldiers to go down and take him away from them by force. The officer had told them to bring Paul into the fort.

The next night the Lord stood near Paul. He said, "Be brave! You have told people about me in Jerusalem. You must do the same in Rome."



The next morning some Jews gathered secretly to make plans against Paul. They made a promise to themselves. They promised that they would not eat or drink anything until they killed him. More than 40 men took part in this plan. They went to the chief priests and the elders. They said, “We have made a special promise to God. We will not eat anything until we have killed Paul. Now then, you and the Sanhedrin must make an appeal to the commanding officer. Ask him to bring Paul to you. Pretend you want more facts about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”

But Paul’s nephew heard about this plan. So he went into the fort and told Paul.

Then Paul called one of the commanders. He said to him, “Take this young man to the commanding officer. He has something to tell him.” So the commander took Paul’s nephew to the officer.

The commander said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me. He asked me to bring this young man to you. The young man has something to tell you.”

The commanding officer took the young man by the hand. He spoke to him in private. “What do you want to tell me?” the officer asked.

He said, “Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul to the Sanhedrin tomorrow. They will pretend they want more facts about him. Don’t give in to them. More than 40 of them are waiting in hiding to attack him. They have promised that they will not eat or drink anything until they have killed him. They are ready now. All they need is for you to bring Paul to the Sanhedrin.”

The commanding officer let the young man go. But he gave him a warning. “Don’t tell anyone you have reported this to me,” he said.

Then the commanding officer called for two of his commanders. He ordered them, “Gather a company of 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 men armed with spears. Get them ready to go to Caesarea at nine o’clock tonight. Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix.”



Two years passed. Porcius Festus took the place of Felix. But Felix wanted to do the Jews a favor. So he left Paul in prison.

Three days after Festus arrived, he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. There the chief priests and the Jewish leaders came to Festus. They brought their charges against Paul. They tried very hard to get Festus to have Paul taken to Jerusalem. They asked for this as a favor. They were planning to hide and attack Paul along the way. They wanted to kill him. Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea. Soon I'll be going there myself. Let some of your leaders come with me. If the man has done anything wrong, they can bring charges against him there."

Festus spent eight or ten days in Jerusalem with them. Then he went down to Caesarea. The next day he called the court together. He ordered Paul to be brought to him. When Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many strong charges against him. But they couldn't prove that these charges were true.

Then Paul spoke up for himself. He said, "I've done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple. I've done nothing wrong against Caesar."

But Festus wanted to do the Jews a favor. So he said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem? Are you willing to go on trial there? Are you willing to face these charges in my court?"

Paul answered, "I'm already standing in Caesar's court. This is where I should go on trial. I haven't done anything wrong to the Jews. You yourself know that very well. If I am guilty of anything worthy of death, I'm willing to die. But the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true. No one has the right to hand me over to them. I make my appeal to Caesar!"

Festus talked it over with the members of his court. Then he said, "You have made an appeal to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"



It was decided that we would sail for Italy. Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a Roman commander named

Julius. He belonged to the Imperial Guard. We boarded a ship from Adramyttium. It was about to sail for ports along the coast of Asia Minor. We headed out to sea. Aristarchus was with us. He was a Macedonian from Thessalonica.

A gentle south wind began to blow. The ship's crew thought they saw their chance to leave safely. So they pulled up the anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. Before very long, a wind blew down from the island. It had the force of a hurricane. It was called the Northeaster. The ship was caught by the storm. We could not keep it sailing into the wind. So we gave up and were driven along by the wind. We passed the calmer side of a small island called Cauda. We almost lost the lifeboat that was tied to the side of the ship. So the men lifted the lifeboat on board. Then they tied ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. They were afraid it would get stuck on the sandbars of Syrtis. So they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. We took a very bad beating from the storm. The next day the crew began to throw the ship's contents overboard. On the third day, they even threw the ship's tools and supplies overboard with their own hands. The sun and stars didn't appear for many days. The storm was terrible. So we gave up all hope of being saved.

The men had not eaten for a long time. Paul stood up in front of them. "Men," he said, "you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete. Then you would have avoided this harm and loss. Now I beg you to be brave. Not one of you will die. Only the ship will be destroyed. I belong to God and serve him. Last night his angel stood beside me. The angel said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must go on trial in front of Caesar. God has shown his grace by sparing the lives of all those sailing with you.' Men, continue to be brave. I have faith in God. It will happen just as he told me. But we must run the ship onto the beach of some island."

When daylight came, they saw a bay with a sandy beach. They didn't recognize the place. But they decided to run the ship onto the beach if they could. So they cut the anchors loose and left them in the sea. At the same time, they untied the ropes that held the rudders. They lifted the sail at the front of the ship to the wind. Then they headed for the beach. But the ship hit a sandbar. So the

front of it got stuck and wouldn't move. The back of the ship was broken to pieces by the pounding of the waves.

The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners. They wanted to keep them from swimming away and escaping. But the commander wanted to save Paul's life. So he kept the soldiers from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and swim to land. The rest were supposed to get there on boards or other pieces of the ship. That is how everyone reached land safely.

When we were safe on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. The people of the island were unusually kind. It was raining and cold. So they built a fire and welcomed all of us. When we were ready to sail, they gave us the supplies we needed.

After three months we headed out to sea. When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself. But a soldier guarded him.

For two whole years Paul stayed there in a house he rented. He welcomed all who came to see him. He preached boldly about God's kingdom. He taught people about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one could keep him from teaching and preaching about these things.

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