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# GOD'S GREAT covenant

A Bible Course  
for Children

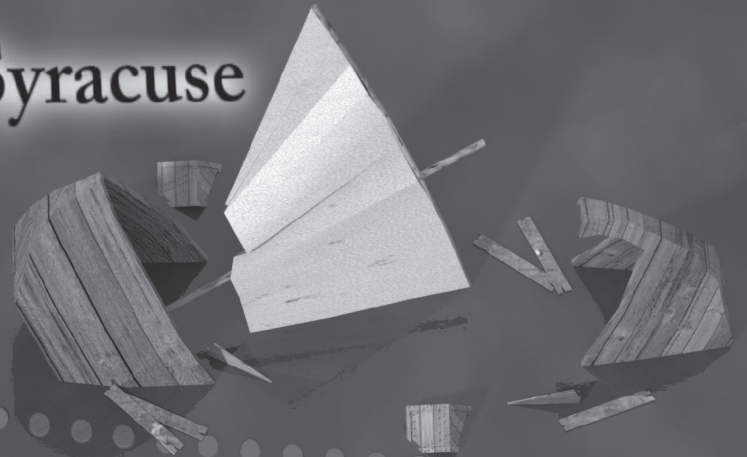
New  
Testament 2

Acts

★ Rhegium

★ Syracuse

MALTA



Claire A. Larsen

## Dedication

*This book is dedicated to my husband, David Larsen, who faithfully read every chapter, corrected my mistakes, and taught me more than I ever needed to know about the history of the first-century world.  
Thank you for your love and patience as I wrote this and all the earlier books.*



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# Introduction

Everyone loves a story. You clutch the book tighter, and your eyes speed across the page as the plot thickens. The villain is creeping closer, and with danger all around him, there seems to be no escape for the hapless hero. There's nothing you can do to stop the inevitable peril awaiting him, but you read on and on, knowing something good must happen. You, of course, took a peek at the last page of the book, so you know how the book ends and that the hero escapes from the clutches of the evil villain.

What could be better than delving deep into an exciting adventure story? Here's what's better: being part of an exciting adventure story and knowing that what you do makes a difference in the outcome.

God tells us His story in the Bible. The Bible isn't just a history book detailing everything that has happened since the world began, or an almanac listing all the facts about everything, or a theology book explaining in a systematic way who God is and what He has done. In part, the Bible is all those things—historical events, important facts, and theological ideas—but it's much, much more. The Bible is a very personal story that God has written to the people He loves in a very intimate way.

Though God has always existed, the story He shares with us begins with His creation of the world and everything in it. God's story took a sad turn when His beautiful world became spoiled by sin. But God wasn't surprised; He had planned that part of the story, too. He's sovereign and nothing happens by accident.

The holy God is a covenant keeper. His entire story wraps around His promise to send a Savior who would bring His sinful people back to Him. As part of His covenant, God promised to dwell with, protect, and show mercy to those He loved. And God was faithful to His promise, generation after generation. Sadly, His wayward people were not so faithful.

The holy God is the King over all the earth.<sup>2</sup> Even when His people had a human king to rule them, God made it clear that He was the Great King, the only One deserving of worship and complete devotion. Good kings ruled, doing so under the authority of the Almighty God.



## Bible Basics

### What Is the Covenant?

The **covenant** is God's solemn promise to His people, saying, "I will be your God and you will be My people."<sup>1</sup> With this promise God commits to dwell with, protect, and show love and mercy to His people.

1. See Exodus 6:7.

2. See Isaiah 37:16.

Bad kings ruled, doing just as they pleased. They led the people away from God. All this was in preparation for God Himself to come as King in the person of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

Jesus Christ was different from all other kings. He didn't wear a kingly robe or sit on a throne or command a mighty army. This king looked like an ordinary man, and His followers were a bunch of ragtag fishermen, farmers, and tax collectors. He healed people, chased away demons, and obeyed God perfectly. This perfect King then died a horrible death so that the people He loved wouldn't have to die for their sin. He took away their guilt and gave them His righteousness.

Just before He went back to heaven, He said these words to His disciples: "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you into the world. Tell people about Me, make disciples for Me, and finish the work that I started on this earth."<sup>3</sup>

The story that began in Genesis and was fulfilled through Jesus' life as recorded in the Gospels continued in the book of Acts through the work of the apostles and those who came to believe in Jesus through them.

It is through the covenant and Jesus' Great Commission that you, too, become part of God's story. God's story is a living, continuing story. When you believe in Jesus, God weaves your story into the greater story of the gospel. You and I are related to Father Abraham and are blessed because of God's covenant promises to bless the world through him. You and I are in the line of the apostles. The apostles told people about Jesus, who told people who told people who told people, and many centuries later you were also told about Jesus. The adventures of Peter and Paul are like the adventures of people today who take the gospel to their neighbors nearby and to strangers at the ends of the earth.

And what happens when you and I and people in the farthest parts of the earth believe in Jesus Christ? Amazingly, we all become children of God.<sup>4</sup> All around the globe we have spiritual brothers and sisters of all races and nationalities, and together we form the family of God.

It's not always easy being a child of God. Some people will dislike us simply because we love Jesus, but as we experience difficult things because of our faith, we are sharing in the suffering that Jesus suffered for us. The Bible says that all God's children are heirs of His glorious kingdom, and as we suffer because of the name of Jesus, we will someday share in Christ's glory.<sup>5</sup>

God's written story ended with the last page of Revelation, but God has a continuing story. He's putting together a family and is building a kingdom, and you and I are part of that family and that kingdom. The gospel adventure lives on today through you and me.

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3. See John 20:21 and Matthew 28:19-20.

4. See John 1:12-13.

5. See Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:7.

# APologetics and the Truth Detectives

Questions, questions, questions. Have you ever had questions about God or the Bible? Have you ever wondered if God exists or if what the Bible says is true? If so, be assured you're not the only one to have such questions. Through the ages, biblical scholars, church leaders, ordinary people, and even atheists have asked questions and sought answers about God and the Bible.

Faith is a strange thing. By faith you believe that God exists and that He created everything in heaven and on earth. By faith you believe that the Bible is true and that Jesus Christ is both God and man. By faith you believe that Jesus died for your sins and that by believing in Him, you can have your sins forgiven.

What makes faith so strange is that you believe these things even though you've never seen them with your own eyes.<sup>1</sup> You weren't alive when God created the heavens and the earth, and you didn't live in ancient Palestine when Jesus walked upon the earth, healing people and teaching about the kingdom of God. How can you believe these things to be true if you weren't there to see them?

No one can prove that God is real or that He created the world. On the other hand, no one can prove that He's not real. What a person believes about the existence of God and who God is, he or she believes by faith.

## How Do You Have Faith?

Without God's help, no one can have faith in Him. Human hearts are stubborn and don't want to believe in God. Faith in God starts when the Holy Spirit takes a hard, unbelieving heart and makes it soft and able to believe in Him. The Holy Spirit changes sinful hearts and opens blind spiritual eyes so that a person can believe the truth about God as it is explained in the Bible. With the help of the Holy Spirit, you and I can have faith in things we haven't seen. God gives His people the gift of faith.<sup>2</sup>

With new spiritual eyes, you are able to live by faith. Yet walking by faith isn't easy, and sometimes you might have doubts or questions. Asking questions isn't wrong. In fact, it's helpful to ask questions because asking good questions and working hard to find the answers makes your faith stronger.



### **Greek SPEaks** Apologetics

The word "apologetics" comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which means "defense." Christian apologetics is the practice of gathering information in a logical, reasonable way to defend Christian beliefs.

1. See John 20:29; 2 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:8.

2. See Ephesians 2:8-9.

## How Do You Find the Answers to Your Questions?

One way to find answers to your spiritual questions is to employ Christian apologetics. Christian apologetics is the practice of gathering information in a logical, reasonable way to defend Christian beliefs. A person who defends the Christian faith to critics and unbelievers who do not believe the Bible is called an apologist. Did you know that every believer is an apologist? While there are some learned scholars who spend a lot of time making logical arguments about Christianity and defending the Bible, everyone who believes in Jesus should understand what he or she believes and should be able to defend his or her beliefs.

One thing that you need to understand is that even when you pursue answers using apologetics, not all questions, particularly some “why” questions, can be answered. Questions about things like why God seems so far away and why bad things happen when we’re trying to do what’s right aren’t easy to answer. Sometimes you have to shrug your shoulders and say, “God is bigger and wiser than I am. He has all the answers, but He hasn’t given *me* the answer to *that* question.” God’s thoughts and ways are higher than man’s ways, and when He doesn’t give an answer to a question, all His children still must believe that He is good and that He knows what He is doing.<sup>6</sup>

### Facts about Apologetics

1. Every believer should know how to defend his faith.<sup>3</sup>
2. Knowing how to defend your faith takes time, diligence, and study.<sup>4</sup>
3. When defending your faith, you should remember that the Holy Spirit will give you the right words to speak when you need them.<sup>5</sup>
4. Developing good apologetics will help you strengthen your faith, resist temptation, and tell others about Jesus.

Do you remember Job? He had many “why” questions. However, instead of answering Job’s questions, God asked questions of Job. God asked these questions to show Job how big, great, and powerful He is.<sup>7</sup> When God stopped asking questions, Job humbly said, “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.”<sup>8</sup>

Even though no one can answer all the “why” questions, the Bible gives you all the information you need to know about who God is, what He expects of you, and what it means to trust in Him.<sup>9</sup> It is possible, through clear thinking and good research, to build logical arguments that show that the Bible is true, that there are no contradictions in the Bible, and that an intelligent, reasonable person can accept the Bible as truth.

So, we’ve established that asking questions is *good*, but how do you ask *good* questions?

3. See 1 Peter 3:15.

4. See 2 Timothy 3:14-16.

5. See Matthew 10:19-20.

6. See Isaiah 55:9-11; Romans 11:33-36.

7. See Job 38-42.

8. Job 42:3.

9. See 2 Peter 1:3-4.

### Step 1:

*Ask good questions with the right attitude.* When you ask questions, have a humble attitude that says, “I’m confused. I don’t understand. Help me, Lord Jesus, to know what is right and true.” When you ask God to show you more about who He is, be sure that you ask in a respectful, reverent way, never forgetting that God is so much bigger and wiser than you are. Ask questions with a heart of faith. Be like the man who asked Jesus to heal his demon-possessed son and said, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.”<sup>10</sup> Ask the Holy Spirit to give you more faith and teach you what is true.<sup>11</sup> Never forget that the purpose for asking questions is to come to know the Almighty God better, not to satisfy your curiosity.

### Step 2:

*Use good research methods.* Good research begins by using the Bible to prove that the Bible is true. Does that seem strange? The Bible was written over a period of 1,600 years by 40 different authors. The fact that one part of the Bible agrees with another part of the Bible makes what the Bible says believable. For example, Jesus quoted the prophets,<sup>12</sup> Moses,<sup>13</sup> and the psalmists.<sup>14</sup> The Gospel writers and the writers of the epistles quoted verses from the Old Testament as well.<sup>15</sup> The New Testament cites numerous examples of how an event in Jesus’ life was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Jesus fulfilled more than 100 prophecies, and the odds of this happening is almost beyond a person’s ability to calculate.

If there appears to be a contradiction in the Bible, it’s important to look for a way to understand the “contradictory verses” in the context of the entire Bible. God never contradicts Himself, and He never changes His mind. That means that after comparing one passage to another, ideas that appear to contradict each other should somehow fit together, and what seemed to be a contradiction will make logical sense.

One more important thing: Knowing the meaning of the original Greek or Hebrew words can clear up some misunderstandings. Once you know the meaning of the Greek or Hebrew words from which our English translation comes, some verses make more sense, and seeming contradictions disappear. While not too many people understand Greek and Hebrew and can read the Bible in its original languages, there are commentaries and reference books that can help you understand what the original Greek and Hebrew words mean.

Keep in mind that sometimes no matter how hard you try, you can’t figure out what the Bible is really saying. Biblical scholars who spend their lives trying to understand the Bible

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10. See Mark 9:14-27.

11. See John 16:13.

12. See Matthew 10:35; 12:7, 17-21.

13. See Matthew 13:13; 22:37-39.

14. See Matthew 22:43-44.

15. See Matthew 8:17; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 4:18-19; Romans 14:11; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; James 2:8; 1 Peter 2:10-12.

16. See Matthew 2:6; 4:15-16; Mark 7:6-7; Luke 3:4-6; John 12:14-15.

don't have all the answers and learned, godly men and women don't always agree on what certain Bible passages mean.

So what are you to do? There are three important things to remember: 1) All scripture is God-breathed (which means it is inspired by God) and is useful for teaching and correcting you as you live each day for the Lord. Even if you can't understand a certain passage, you can be sure that it is God's Word.<sup>17</sup> 2) God is bigger and wiser than you and I are. You will never totally understand everything about God and scripture. You must accept that not all your questions will be resolved, and your understanding of God will always be incomplete.<sup>18</sup> 3) There are secret things and mysteries that God has not revealed to us. These things belong to God alone. But, in the Bible, God has made clear everything necessary for you to come to faith in Jesus and to live for Jesus by His grace each day.<sup>19</sup>

Doing good research also means using good resources. Resources may include books written by people who have asked the same questions that you have asked. After serious thought and research, these people have found the answers to their questions and have written down what they learned in books that you can read for yourself. Other resources could include a wise person such as a parent, a pastor, a grandparent, or a youth leader who can help you find the answers to your questions.

As part of your research, you could study archaeological discoveries and historical evidence that proves that the events and the people mentioned in the Bible were real.

### **Step 3:**

*Be prepared to think hard.* Good apologetics requires time, diligence, and serious thought. Some answers won't be found until you have read the Bible or commentaries that explain what the verses mean, thought about what you learned, and prayed about the question. A good apologist can't be lazy or have a sloppy mind. Clear, logical thinking is essential. You must give nothing but the best of your mind to the Lord when you are seeking His answers to your questions.

### **Step 4:**

*Remember to thank the Lord for the answers He gives you.* No one can understand spiritual truths without God's help. When your beliefs are confirmed by evidence inside and outside of the Bible, praise Him for the wisdom you received from Him.

Keep these four steps in mind and you will be a good apologist and a wise person.

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17. See 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21.

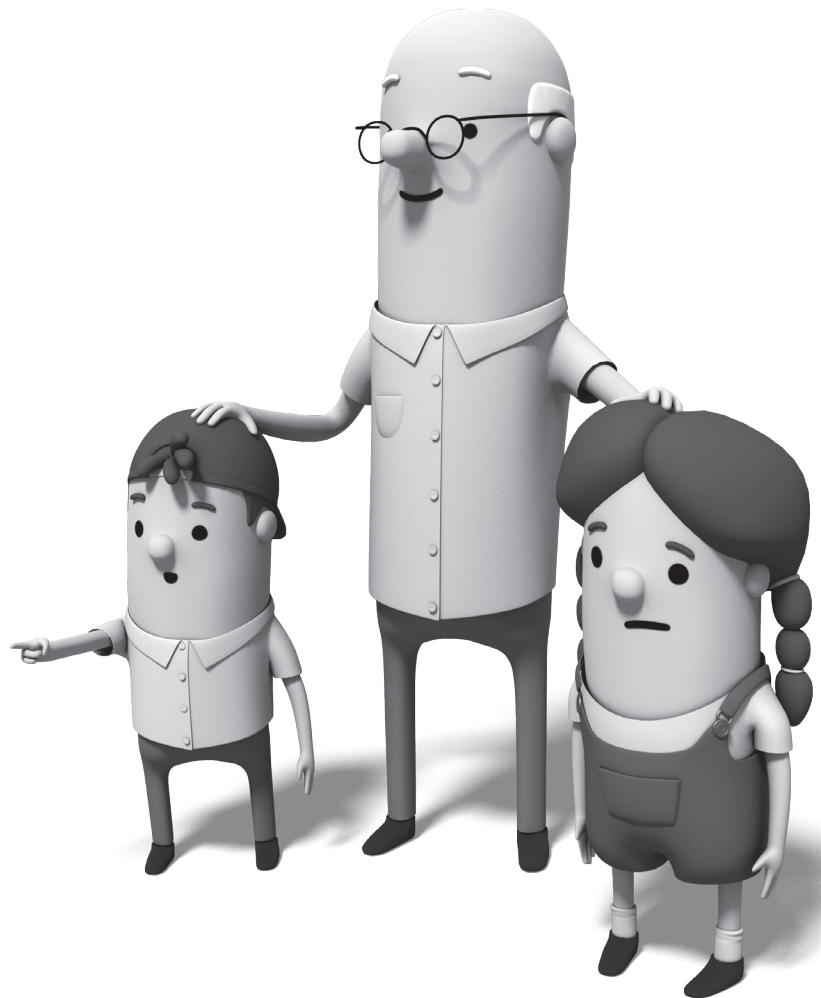
18. See Isaiah 55:8-11.

19. See Deuteronomy 29:29.

## Chloe and Oliver: The Truth Detectives

Let me introduce to you two young people who, like you, have had many good, but hard, questions. Chloe and Oliver, eleven-year-old twins, are believers in Jesus Christ, and along with their grandfather, called Grampy, they have been reading the book of Acts. They were amazed by the events of Pentecost and by the courage of the apostles to stand up for what they believed, even when it meant imprisonment and even death. But as they followed the adventures of Peter and Paul, they had serious questions. Is the Bible really true? Why is Jesus the only way for salvation?

Wearing their Truth Detectives caps, Chloe and Oliver dig deep into scripture and re-search history and archaeology to find the answers to their questions. Wise Grampy is always nearby, ready to give them information they might have missed and to help them organize their thoughts in a logical way. At the end of each unit of *God's Great Covenant, New Testament 2*, you can read one of their dialogues (conversations), which shows how they went from asking a question to discovering the answer.



# UNIT I

## The Gospel Adventure . . . The Mission

**THEME:** Our mission is to proclaim God's gospel to the world.

### UNIT KEY VERSE:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

We're going on an adventure together that begins on the cobbled streets of Jerusalem in the shadows of the great temple walls and moves up and down the Roman highways all the way to the imperial city of Rome. This adventure has a purpose, a mission so to speak, and all the men and women we will learn about had a strong determination to accomplish this mission despite many difficulties and obstacles along their way. So, what is a mission? A mission is a task that a person or group of people are charged to accomplish.

What does an adventurer need for his mission? To complete his mission, an adventurer needs a good map and an experienced guide. He must wear the proper clothes and have adequate protection from the dangers along the way. He must have the skills and knowledge to survive in a perilous and often unpredictable environment. Along the way the adventurer may encounter enemies who try to prevent him from accomplishing his task, so the journey requires endurance and perseverance until the adventurer reaches the final destination.

Our study of Acts will be a gospel adventure as we follow the story of Jesus' continuing ministry through His apostles. Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus gave His disciples a mission, saying, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."<sup>1</sup> Then, before the eyes of the disciples, Jesus rose up from the Mount of Olives into the sky. A cloud hid Jesus from their sight, and He was gone!<sup>2</sup> Jesus entrusted these faithful believers with the mission of spreading the gospel to the whole world.

Before we begin the story of the gospel's journey, we will examine the people involved in the story of Acts and the world which God had especially prepared to receive the message. Three men played key roles in this completion of God's story begun in Genesis. Luke, the doctor and historian, wrote the book of Acts. Peter, the impulsive fisherman turned bold apos-

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1. Acts 1:8.

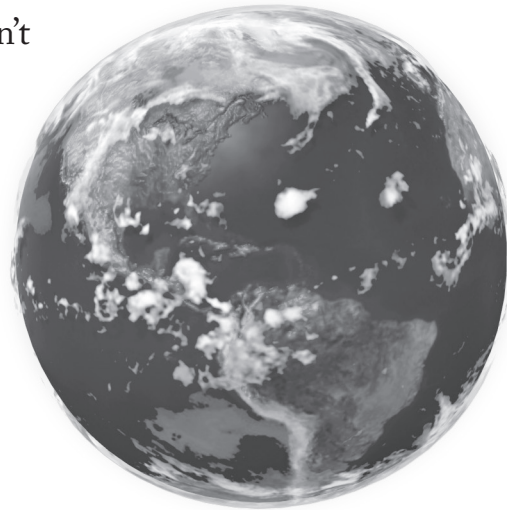
2. See Acts 1:9.

tle, preached faithfully in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria despite opposition and imprisonment. Paul, Pharisee and murderer transformed into passionate missionary, took the gospel into Gentile territory, suffering ridicule, misunderstanding, and persecution everywhere he went. Though the enemies of the gospel were strong and persistent, nothing stopped the spread of the message for very long.

God had prepared the first-century world for the gospel. There was no shortage of gods to worship. People had a choice of Roman, Greek, or even Egyptian gods, and if those weren't sufficient, one could always worship the Caesar himself. But some people were looking for something more—a personal God who also was strong and mighty.

The political world of the Roman Empire made it possible to travel great distances and, generally speaking, a traveler arrived at his destination safely. Good roads linked the small kingdoms and provinces to each other, and since most people spoke Greek, understanding each other wasn't difficult.

In unit I of *God's Great Covenant, New Testament 2* we will see that it wasn't an accident that the history and geography of the first century made it the perfect time and place for the spread of the gospel. We will see how God's story of redemption went from being primarily the story of God's covenant love for the Jewish people to being the message of hope for the whole world. We will also see how the covenant promises given to Abraham by the covenant-keeping God stretched to include the nations of the world.



# Unit I Memory Verse Passage

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## Romans 10:9-15

- 9** That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
- 10** For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.
- 11** As the scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”
- 12** For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,
- 13** for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
- 14** How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?
- 15** And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

## chapter 1

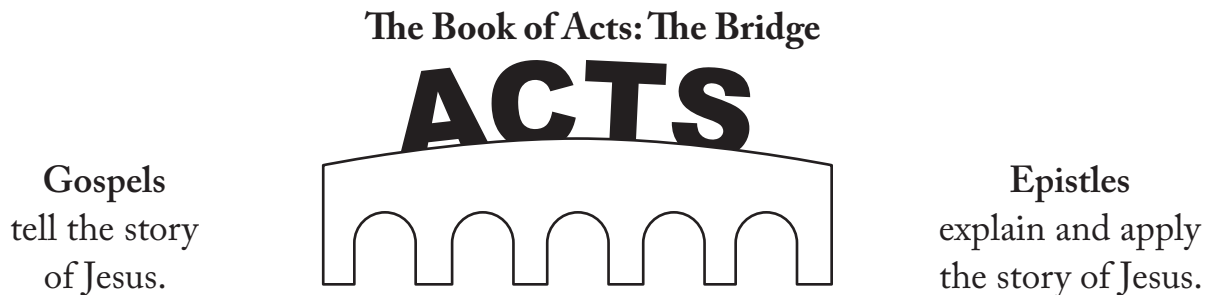
# The Book of Acts and Its Author

**WHO IS GOD?** The God who communicates His gospel

**LESSON THEME:** God used Luke to write an orderly account of Jesus' continuing ministry through the apostles.

**MEMORY PASSAGE:** Acts 1:8

## KEY FACTS:



Story of what Jesus continued to do and teach through the Holy Spirit

## OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

Where	Passage
The gospel adventure . . . in Jerusalem	Acts 1–7
The gospel adventure . . . in Judea and all Samaria	Acts 8–12
The gospel adventure . . . to the ends of the earth	Acts 13–20
The gospel adventure . . . back to Jerusalem and on to Rome	Acts 21–28

## THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT REVEALED:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

In the Garden of Eden, where sin began, the LORD God promised a Savior. In the Gospels, the LORD God fulfilled His promise—Jesus Christ died on the cross for His people's sin. In Acts the LORD God, through the apostles and the new believers, took the good news of a Savior into the world.

## The Book of Acts and Its Author

Did you ever play the “what if” game? What if it snows tomorrow and there’s no school? “Great,” you say, “I won’t have to take my history test.” What if the snow is two feet deep, and everyone is snowbound for days? “Oh no,” you exclaim, “my birthday party will be cancelled!”

Of course, there are bigger “what if” questions than these. What if your mother and father hadn’t married each other? What if you were an only child instead of being part of a big, noisy family? There are many “what if” questions, but one thing is certain: God is in control of the world and nothing happens by accident.



### Greek Speaks

The Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*) means “good news.” The word “gospel” comes from the Greek word *euangelion* and means “good message.” The New Testament writers used the word “gospel” to mean “the good news of Jesus’ salvation.” Jesus’ good news is that He died to take the punishment for your sin. By God’s grace you can be forgiven of your sin, and by that same grace you can live each day in a way that pleases Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Here’s a “what if” question: What if Luke hadn’t written the book of Acts? Without Acts we’d have many unanswered questions. We’d wonder what happened to the eleven disciples after Jesus went back to heaven. We’d scratch our heads and ask, “How could a few Jewish believers in Jerusalem take the gospel to Gentiles throughout Asia Minor, Greece, and all the way to Rome?”

The book of Acts is a bridge that connects the gospel story in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to the letters, or **epistles**, written by Paul and the other apostles. Without Acts the gospel story would stop abruptly at Jesus’ resurrection. Without Acts we would have the wisdom of the epistles but know little about the men who wrote them and the people who received them.

At the beginning of Acts, Luke wrote to the “most excellent” Theophilus, saying: “In my former book [the Gospel of Luke], Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, Luke tells the story of Jesus’ three years of ministry on earth in his Gospel, and then in Acts, Luke tells the story of all Jesus *continued* to do and teach through His faithful believers.

During His lifetime, Jesus preached the gospel throughout Palestine with these words: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”<sup>3</sup> In Acts the apostles and new disciples preached the gospel everywhere they went. Jews and Gentiles, slaves and kings, men and women—the apostles and disciples spoke to all who

1. See Ephesians 2:1-10.

2. Acts 1:1-2.

3. Mark 1:15 (NKJV).

would listen. As the gospel message went forth, the gospel messengers had many adventures: shipwrecks, miraculous escapes from prison, encounters with sorcerers—all this and more happened and is written about in the book of Acts.

Jesus Christ, the God-Man, fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies. Then, by His death and resurrection, He purchased salvation for all God's people and ushered in the new covenant. Acts further explains the new covenant and completes God's covenant story, which began in Genesis 3:15.

Before we begin the story of Acts, we must answer some important questions. In this chapter we'll answer two questions: 1) Who was Luke? and 2) Why did he write the book of Acts to Theophilus?

## Who Was Luke?

Most authorities, both ancient and present, agree that Luke wrote the book of Acts. Luke, the only Gentile writer of the New Testament, wrote more than 25 percent of the New Testament. Not only did he write more pages than any other writer, but he is the only writer who begins with Jesus' birth in his Gospel and continues the story all the way to Paul's imprisonment in Rome as recorded in Acts 28. So who was Luke and by what authority did he write these two books?

Luke, a Greek, was born in Antioch in Syria about the same time as Jesus and Paul. His name, "Luke," is a shorter form of the Latin name "Lucius." He was a highly educated man, well-schooled in both the Greek language and culture and the Hebrew scriptures. He had a large vocabulary, using Greek words no other biblical writer used. Luke was also an elegant writer, writing in classical Greek, while being able to switch when necessary to a simpler style of writing. He received a medical education, possibly at the University of Tarsus.

Luke was a historian. His Gospel is an orderly account of Jesus' life, with all the events in chronological order. He interviewed eyewitnesses to be certain of his facts, and he personally investigated the events. It's safe to assume that Luke wrote Acts with the same historical carefulness with which he wrote his Gospel.

Luke must have been a great traveler. Whether it was sailing on the sea as he did with Paul in Acts 27 or trekking through Asia Minor and Macedonia on Paul's missionary journeys, he knew the geography of the Roman world well.

Luke cared deeply about people. He had a pastor's heart and wanted people to know Jesus. As a doctor, he had compassion on the sick and handicapped. In his Gospel, Luke wrote about the



healings Jesus performed, and in Acts he wrote about those that Peter and Paul performed. In a culture in which women were unimportant, Luke included their stories in his books, writing more about women than any other New Testament writer. In Acts we read about Dorcas, Lydia, and Priscilla.<sup>4</sup> Even the slave girl in Philippi had an important place in his writing.<sup>5</sup>

No one knows when Luke became a believer in Jesus, but possibly he believed after listening to Paul preach in Antioch. He was one of Paul's closest friends and at times Paul's companion on his missionary trips. His medical training was a huge help to Paul when they traveled together.

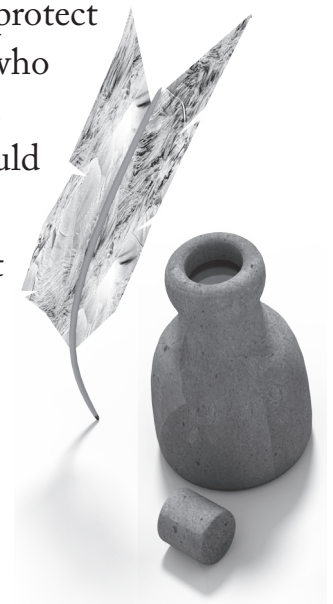
In Acts, Luke emphasized three things: the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the sovereign plan of God. He wanted everyone to know that it was the Holy Spirit who guided and gave power to the Church. He believed that a true church prayed because dependence upon God is necessary for a church to grow. In all his writing, Luke firmly believed that all events are part of God's redemptive plan. As you study Acts, look for passages that mention these three things.

## Who Was Theophilus and Why Did Luke Write to Him?

Luke wrote his Gospel so that Theophilus might have “an orderly account” of Jesus’ ministry and that he might “know the certainty of the things [he had] been taught.”<sup>6</sup> Although Luke never saw Jesus in person, the Holy Spirit helped him write an accurate and orderly account of Jesus’ life because he talked to eyewitnesses who had spent time with Jesus. Luke wrote his second book to Theophilus because he knew the gospel story wouldn't be complete without an account of Jesus’ continuing ministry through His disciples.

The name “Theophilus” comes from two Greek words that mean “lover of God” or “friend of God.” The title “most excellent” was given to men of high rank. So, who was Theophilus? No one knows for sure. Theophilus might have been a government official in the Roman imperial court. If this is true, Luke might have used the name to protect Theophilus's identity. Theophilus might have been a Gentile God-fearer who believed in Israel's God and had received this name after his baptism. The name “Theophilus” was a name used by both Jews and Gentiles, and it could have been his given name.

Luke wrote his books so that Theophilus would know for certain that Jesus Christ was the Savior promised in the Jewish scriptures. He wanted Theophilus to know that his faith was rooted in historical truth.



4. See Acts 9:32-42; 16:11-15; 18:18-28.

5. See Acts 16:16-19.

6. See Luke 1:1-4.

## Review Worksheets

### KEY FACTS:

#### ■ What Is the Story of Acts?

Remember: The book of Acts is a *bridge* between the Gospels and the epistles. Fill in the blanks to complete the following sentences.

1. The *Gospels* \_\_\_\_\_ the story of Jesus.
2. The *epistles* \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ the story of Jesus.
3. The book of Acts is divided into four sections. Draw a line to connect each section of the book to its theme.

#### The Gospel Adventure

Acts 1–7

The gospel goes to the ends of the earth.

Acts 8–12

The gospel begins in Jerusalem.

Acts 13–20

The gospel is spread to Judea and Samaria.

Acts 21–28

Paul goes back to Jerusalem and on to Rome.

### STORY FACTS:

#### ■ Who Was Luke and What Did He Do?

In the following sentences, cross out the incorrect words (or numbers).

1. Luke wrote more than ( 25 / 10 ) percent of all the New Testament, which is ( more / less ) than all the other New Testament writers.
2. Luke was born in ( Tarsus / Antioch ) and was ( well-educated / unschooled ) in the Greek language and Hebrew scriptures.
3. Luke had university training in ( law / medicine ).
4. Luke wrote more about ( children / women ) than any other New Testament writer.
5. Luke wrote his books using a ( chronological / topical ) style.



## ■ Luke's Emphasis

What three things did Luke emphasize in the book of Acts? Fill in the blanks.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## ■ Can You Decode These Words?

Decode the following words and use them to fill in the blanks.

**Code:** To decode the words, exchange each letter with the letter that comes before it in the alphabet. For example, A = Z, B = A . . . Z = Y)

H P T Q F M

U S B W F M F S

B D D V S B U F

U I F P Q I J M V T

I J T U P S J B O

H F O F T J T

E P D U P S

P S E F S M Z

1. The English word that means “good news” is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Luke was well known as these three things: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The name that means “lover of God” or “friend of God” is \_\_\_\_\_.
4. In his Gospel, Luke wrote an \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ account of Jesus’ ministry.
5. Acts completes the covenant story first mentioned in the book of \_\_\_\_\_.

## ■ What Is the Gospel?

To discover the definition of the word “gospel,” put the words in the box in order. Write the definition of “gospel” on the line provided.

grace    By    you    God's    forgiven    because    death    Jesus'  
 of    on    can    the    be    cross

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## UNPACK IT FURTHER: The Meaning of Covenant

God's covenant can be explained in a few words: "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:7). God promised to be the God of His people. A covenant is like a promise. A covenant, though, is stronger than a promise, because a covenant brings death to the covenant breaker. God has been and always will be faithful to keep His covenant. However, we are not faithful to God, and because of that, we deserve death. God, the Covenant Keeper, died in our place so that we could be part of God's people.

Look up the following Bible verses and, on the lines provided, answer the questions.

1. What does Psalm 145:13 tell us about God?

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2. According to Galatians 4:4-5, what did God, the Covenant Keeper, do for us, the covenant breakers?

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### Chapter 29 Quiz

**WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?**  
 Using the word bank, fill in the blanks with the correct word.

**Word Bank** nephew Claudius Lysias Ananias Tertullus Drusilla Pharisees

- The name of the lawyer who spoke for the Sanhedrin to Governor Felix was Tertullus.
- The name of the commander in Jerusalem who saved Paul from the angry Jews was Claudius Lysias.
- The sect of the Jews who believed in the resurrection was the Pharisees.
- Paul's nephew warned Paul of the plot to kill him devised by the forty men.
- The name of the high priest in Jerusalem was Ananias.
- The name of Felix's Jewish wife was Drusilla.

**WHAT'S TRUE AND WHAT'S NOT?**  
 Circle *T* if the statement is true and *F* if the statement is false.

- Paul believed he had done all his duty to God up to the day of the trial before the Sanhedrin. T F
- Paul insulted the high priest on purpose, calling him a whitewashed wall. T F
- The Lord appeared to Paul in prison at night to encourage him. T F
- The commander in Jerusalem believed all the accusations against Paul. T F
- Another name for the Christians was "people of the Way." T F
- At one point, the Sadducees said about Paul, "We find nothing wrong with him." T F

Chapter 29 Quiz 401

# Chapter 2

## Discovering the Message of Acts

**WHO IS GOD?** Jesus, the fulfillment of the covenant

**LESSON THEME:** Jesus Christ, the Savior, fulfilled God's promise of salvation.

**MEMORY PASSAGE:** Romans 10:9

### KEY FACTS:

#### LUKE'S WRITING TECHNIQUES

Summary Phrases	Passages	
“added to their number”	Acts 2:41	Acts 5:14
	Acts 2:47	Acts 6:7
Repeated Stories	Passages	
Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost (“you will be baptized with water”)	Acts 1:5	Acts 11:16
	Acts 2:1-41	Acts 15:8
Conversion of Cornelius (“the Gentiles hear from my lips”)	Acts 10:1-48	Acts 15:6-11
	Acts 11:4-17	
Conversion of Saul (Paul)	Acts 9:1-30	Acts 26:2-18
	Acts 22:1-16	

### THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT REVEALED:

And everyone who calls  
     on the name of the LORD will be saved;  
 for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem  
     there will be deliverance,  
     as the LORD has said,  
 among the survivors whom the LORD calls. (Joel 2:32)

The prophet Joel encourages people to call upon “the LORD [Yahweh],” the covenant God of Israel. When the Apostle Paul quotes the prophet Joel (see Romans 10:13) and pleads for us to call upon the name of the Lord, he is referring to Jesus Christ. In making this connection, Paul is saying that Jesus Christ is God, the same God who made the covenant with Israel and who is the one and only true God.<sup>1</sup>

1. See Jeremiah 10:10; John 1:14, 18; 1 Timothy 1:17.

## Discovering the Message of Acts

It's six o'clock in the evening. If I listen closely I'll hear the chimes of the Methodist church two blocks down the street playing a familiar hymn. Every morning at eight and every evening at six, the chimes ring out crisp and clear. If I continue down the street a few blocks, I can see the bell tower of a gray stone church that stretches skyward as the huge building guards the corner of Derry and Brookfield Streets.

Throughout the city in majestic cathedrals, modest brick chapels, and inconspicuous storefront churches with hand-painted signs, believers gather to worship. Whether the church has a handful of gray-haired faithfuls or a full auditorium of young, energetic worshippers, we ask the same question: Does the book of Acts have anything to say to churches today or is it just a story?

The book of Acts is more than just the story of what the early Church did. It speaks to the Christian Church today. The narrative in the book of Acts explains what the gospel is,<sup>2</sup> who is part of the Christian Church,<sup>3</sup> and how to present the gospel to unbelievers.<sup>4</sup> It gives principles about how God wants the gospel to go into the world and how the Church is to be in the world.

At the same time we must be careful not to assume that even though God's nature never changes, the ways that He works in history are always the same. One example of how God works differently at different times in history is how He uses miracles. Jesus performed many miracles to show His authority as the Son of God. The apostles performed miracles to show their authority and to start the Church. Throughout the story of the Bible, God worked amazing miracles whenever He gave new revelation to His people and did something important in His plan of redemption. God did miracles at the Exodus, at the birth of Jesus, throughout Jesus' ministry, and at Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. God also did frequent miracles through the apostles during the founding of the Church and the writing of the New Testament.<sup>5</sup> There are no apostles today, the Church has been established in the world, and scripture is complete so that even though God still does perform miracles today, He doesn't usually do the same kind of miracles as we read about in Acts.

Another way we need to be careful as we read the book of Acts is to not assume that everything the early Church did is something that all Christians today should do. One example of this is that in the beginning of Acts, the believers in Jerusalem sold their possessions and had everything in common.<sup>6</sup> Although there are times when Christians may consider doing this, the fact that the early Christians lived this way does not mean that Christians today should sell everything they own and live together in one place.

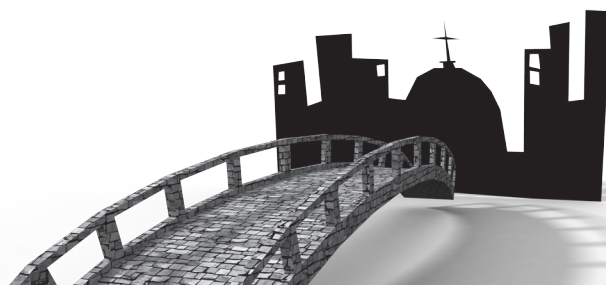
2. See Acts 4:12; 16:31.

3. See Acts 8:14-17, 36-38; 10:44-48.

4. See Acts 13:16-48; 17:22-31.

5. See, for example, Acts 2:3-12; 3:1-10; 5:12-16; and so on.

6. See Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37.



In order to understand the message of Acts for the Church today, we have to consider how the book of Acts fits into Luke's purpose for writing it and how it fits into the rest of scripture.

## What Was Luke's Purpose in Writing Acts?

Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts to a particular person for a particular purpose. He wanted the "most excellent Theophilus"<sup>7</sup> to have an accurate, orderly account of the ministry of Jesus Christ so that Theophilus would "know the certainty of the things [he had] been taught."<sup>8</sup>

The book of Acts is not a how-to book on how to run a church. So what is it? It's the true story of the *continuing* work of Jesus Christ in the world, accomplished through His apostles and disciples. Acts completes the redemptive story begun in Genesis and tells us how God's covenant promises given to Abraham are fulfilled at an actual time in history. Acts teaches us what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, it tells us why the Church is important, and it reminds us that God is with us as we take the gospel to the whole world. It's the end of the story while at the same time it's the beginning of the story.

## How Does Acts Fit with the Old Testament?

Peter, Stephen, and Paul were always preaching long sermons, and Luke included some of their sermons in the book of Acts. In these sermons they quoted the ancient prophets and the psalms, retold stories from the Pentateuch, and reminded their listeners of the unfaithfulness of their forefathers.<sup>9</sup> They showed how Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, and they didn't forget to emphasize how faithful the LORD God had been to His people. God's sovereign plan of redemption wove in and out of their speeches, tying the pieces together in a perfect, unified story.

These sermons teach us that the Old Testament and New Testament are not two different stories. There are not two different ways that God has worked throughout history. There are not two different paths of salvation. There are not two different ways that God related to His people. No, the story of the Bible is one story, and the two testaments boldly declare that there's only one covenant and only one God, who never changes.

## How Does Acts Fit with the New Testament?

As mentioned in chapter 1, Acts is the bridge between the Gospels, which tell the story of Jesus' ministry while He was on earth, and the epistles, which explain and apply Jesus' story. Acts tells us what happened to Peter and some of the other original disciples. It introduces us to Paul, who wrote

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7. Luke 1:3.

8. Luke 1:4.

9. Remember, you first learned about the Pentateuch in *God's Great Covenant, Old Testament 1*. It includes five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, which are also known as the Books of the Law.

thirteen of the epistles. Acts provides us with the historical background we need to understand the epistles. While a narrative such as the book of Acts can mention theological truths, it does so only in elementary ways. The letters of Paul, Peter, and other New Testament writers are necessary so that we can understand our Christian beliefs and know how to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

## What Should You Look for as You Read the Book of Acts?

Luke was well-educated in the Greek language and had great skill as a writer. In the book of Acts he uses three important techniques to tell the story.

1. **Summary phrases:** Luke often paused his stories to insert a summary phrase such as “the Lord added to their number daily”<sup>10</sup> or “so the word of God spread.”<sup>11</sup> These words are flashing lights that exclaim, “God is working in so many wonderful ways that I just can’t write about them all!” You, as the reader, soon begin to look for these phrases, and each time you read one you’re reminded that the Lord has not stopped working in the hearts of people.
2. **Repeated stories:** Luke writes about three events—the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Cornelius’s conversion, and Paul’s conversion—several times. As you encounter one of these stories for a second time, you might think to yourself, “I already heard that story,” but these events are so significant that Luke wants to make sure you remember them. Each time Luke wrote the story, he was writing it to a different audience and for a different purpose. Each retelling of the story gives us pieces of information not found in the other versions—significant facts God wanted us to know—and each retelling reminds us that the Holy Spirit is building His Church.
3. **Recorded sermons:** Luke wrote that “the word of God spread,”<sup>12</sup> and one of the ways it spread was through sermons. Luke spent more verses recording sermons than he did describing miracles. Luke believed that hearing the Word of God was vital for a person to repent of his sin and turn in faith to the Savior. Through these sermons to high-ranking Jewish officials, kings, governors, and ordinary people we learn all we need to know to put our faith in Jesus Christ.

The book of Acts opens with Jesus’ command, “Be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,”<sup>13</sup> and ends with the declaration, “Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the entire book of Acts, one theme is repeated: Jesus Christ who died, was buried, and rose again brings the good news of salvation by grace through faith. This gospel proclaimed in the first century still changes lives today, and the adventure that began at Pentecost still continues to this day.

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10. See Acts 2:47.

11. See Acts 6:7.

12. See Acts 6:7.

13. Acts 1:8.

14. Acts 28:28.

## KEY FACTS:

the story of Jesus.

Luke used three techniques in writing Acts. He often used \_\_\_\_\_ MASYURM

phrases such as the Lord “\_\_\_\_\_ DEDAD to their number

\_\_\_\_\_ LIYDA” and “so the word of God \_\_\_\_\_ DERSPA.”

Luke also repeated \_\_\_\_\_ OTRESSI or parts of the events to remind

his readers that the Holy Spirit was building his \_\_\_\_\_ HURCCH.

Luke recorded the \_\_\_\_\_ ONMERSS of \_\_\_\_\_ ETPRE, Paul, and

\_\_\_\_\_ HETSPNE because he believed that the word of God was important for

a person to \_\_\_\_\_ TREENP and to have \_\_\_\_\_ HAFTI in Jesus

Christ.

## ■ The Old Testament and the New Testament

List three ways in which the Old Testament and New Testament are *not* different.

1. They are not \_\_\_\_\_.
2. They are not \_\_\_\_\_.
3. They are not \_\_\_\_\_.

## WHYS & WHEREFORES:

### ■ What's True and What's Not?

Circle *T* if the statement is true and *F* if it is false.

1. The book of Acts is a how-to on how to run a church. T F
2. The Old Testament and the New Testament show us two different ways that God has worked in history and two different paths to salvation. T F
3. Peter and Paul often quoted from the prophets in their sermons. T F

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 4. The book of Acts tells the story of the continuing work of Jesus Christ.                                  | T | F |
| 5. The epistles help us understand our Christian beliefs and how to live as disciples.                       | T | F |
| 6. Luke was well-educated and had great skill in the Greek language.   | T | F |
| 7. Luke believed that hearing God's Word was vital for repentance and faith.                                 | T | F |
| 8. Luke wrote about each event in Acts only one time.  | T | F |
| 9. The purpose of the summary phrases Luke used is to remind us that God is working in the hearts of people. | T | F |
| 10. There are more verses in Acts about miracles than about sermons.   | T | F |

## UNPACK IT FURTHER: The Meaning of the Word of God

The Bible is called the “Word of God” because God used written words to tell us the story of redemption and His covenant love for us. The Bible tells us how God wrote the Bible and what the purpose of God's Word is.

1. How did God write the Old Testament and the New Testament (see 2 Peter 1:21)?

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2. What is the purpose of the Word of God (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17)?

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# chapter 3

## TWO MEN AND THE GOSPEL: PETER AND PAUL

**WHO IS GOD?** The God who transforms hearts

**LESSON THEME:** God picked two unlikely men to change the world.

**MEMORY PASSAGE:** Romans 10:10-11

### KEY FACTS:

#### SIMILARITIES IN PETER'S AND PAUL'S STORIES

Peter	Paul
Content of sermon in Jerusalem (2:22-26)	Content of sermon in Pisidian Antioch (13:26-41)
Lame man healed (3:1-10)	Lame man healed (14:8-11)
Filled with the Spirit (4:8)	Filled with the Spirit (13:9)
Extraordinary healings (5:15)	Extraordinary healings (19:12)
Laying on hands to receive the Spirit (8:17)	Laying on hands to receive the Spirit (19:6)
Conflict with magician (8:18-24)	Conflict with magician (13:6-11)
Tabitha (Dorcas) raised from the dead (9:36-41)	Eutychus raised from the dead (20:9-12)
Miraculous release from jail (12:6-11)	Miraculous release from jail (16:25-41)

### THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT REVEALED:

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:2-3)

The LORD God made a covenant with Abraham to bless him, and then through him to bless the whole world. The covenant was fulfilled first when Jesus came into the world to save His people and then when the message of the gospel spread forth out of Jerusalem to Samaria and to the far reaches of the whole world. The LORD God faithfully kept His promise and continues to keep it today.

## Two Men and the Gospel: Peter and Paul

The kids are bunched together, looking expectantly at you. Who will you choose to be on your team? You know that Matt has a powerful foot and is the fastest runner in the class. You also know that when Jake goes to kick the ball he misses it every time, and he never knows in what direction he should dribble the ball. What do you do? Do you pick the strongest, most athletic player or the one who doesn't know what he's doing?

When God has a mission to accomplish, He usually doesn't choose the person who seems to be the strongest or the wisest.<sup>1</sup> God chooses a person with flaws and weaknesses, and then, through a divine work of grace, the Holy Spirit changes that person's heart and gives him all the wisdom and strength he needs to do the job.

In Acts God used two men, Peter and Paul, to spread the gospel into the world. Peter had only a simple Jewish education and Paul was not particularly strong, but God changed their hearts and used them mightily to spread His good news. In the first twelve chapters of Acts, Peter, an impulsive fisherman, boldly proclaimed the gospel in Jerusalem and then in the regions of Judea and Samaria. In the last half of Acts God changed an arrogant, murder-seeking Jewish Pharisee into a humble, persecuted missionary. God chose these two men, and they became faithful servants of Jesus Christ.

### The Man Called Peter

Peter, one of the best known of Jesus' twelve disciples, was a man of strong opinions who often blurted out words without thinking. He and his brother, Andrew, came from the town of Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, where they had a fishing business with James and John, the sons of Zebedee.<sup>2</sup>

Peter's given name was Simon, a Hebrew name derived from the name "Simeon." (Simeon was one of the twelve sons of the Hebrew patriarch Jacob.) After Simon obeyed Jesus' call to be a "fisher of men,"<sup>3</sup> Jesus gave him the name "Peter," a Greek word meaning "little rock."<sup>4</sup> The Apostle Paul often called Peter by the name "Cephas," the Hebrew word for "rock."<sup>5</sup>

Like other Galilean Jews who were looking for the promised Messiah, Peter was intrigued when John the Baptist appeared out of nowhere, preaching in the Judean wilderness.<sup>6</sup> He became a disciple of John the Baptist, and then after meeting Jesus and listening to Him for

1. See 1 Corinthians 1:20-31.

2. See Luke 5:1-10; John 1:44.

3. See Matthew 4:18-22.

4. See Matthew 16:13-20.

5. See, for example, 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; 9:5 and so on.

6. See Matthew 3:1-2; Mark 1:1-8.

a time, Peter left John the Baptist to follow Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Peter's mother-in-law was one of the first people that Jesus healed.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout all four Gospels Peter appears over and over again. It was Peter who walked on the water to meet Jesus.<sup>9</sup> It was Peter who made the confession, "You are the Christ" in front of all the other disciples, and not long afterward he saw Jesus standing on a high mountain in all His splendid glory.<sup>10</sup> And it was Peter who denied Jesus three times. During Jesus' trial, when asked by a servant girl if he knew Jesus, bold Peter was not so bold, fearing that his life would be in danger if anyone thought he was a disciple of Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Peter later repented, and on an early morning after Jesus' resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples by the Sea of Galilee and reassured Peter of His love for him and asked Peter to "feed my sheep."<sup>12</sup>

Peter was changed by his encounter with Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee after Christ's resurrection. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter preached to the crowds in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost,<sup>13</sup> healed a beggar in the temple,<sup>14</sup> and spoke fearlessly to the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews.<sup>15</sup> He was even imprisoned because he refused to obey the Jewish leaders' demand to stop talking about Jesus.<sup>16</sup>

In Acts 1–12, the first part of Jesus' Great Commission takes place. In these chapters the story centers primarily around Peter as he preaches the gospel in Jerusalem and the surrounding area of Judea. Every day new converts believed as Peter and the other apostles preached the gospel to great crowds.<sup>17</sup> Soon persecution scattered the believers, and Peter, along with John, was sent to Samaria to encourage believers and lay hands on them.<sup>18</sup> Peter also had the privilege of being the first apostle to take the gospel to the Gentiles when he brought the gospel to the Roman centurion Cornelius.<sup>19</sup>

Peter served God for many years in Judea, but in Acts 12 the story shifts north to Antioch, where the Apostle Paul, servant of the Lord, began spreading the gospel to the Gentiles. However, the books of Acts is not the last time we hear of Peter. Toward the end of his life, Peter wrote two letters (1 Peter and 2 Peter) to the believers scattered throughout the Mediterranean Sea region.

## The Man Called Paul

How like God to choose a legalistic Pharisee intent on destroying Jesus' believers to be the man to take the gospel throughout the Roman Empire! The apostle Paul was this man, saved by grace and equipped by the Holy Spirit to be Christ's servant and messenger to the Gentiles.

7. See John 1:35-44.

8. See Mark 1:29-31.

9. See Matthew 14:22-36.

10. See Matthew 16:13-20, 17:1-2.

11. See Matthew 26:69-75.

12. See John 21:15-23.

13. See Acts 2:1-41.

14. See Acts 3:1-10.

15. See Acts 4:5-22.

16. See Acts 4:1-4; 5:17-42.

17. See Acts 6:7.

18. See Acts 8:1, 14-25.

19. See Acts 10:9-48.

Paul was a unique mixture of Greek culture and Jewish tradition. He was a Jew born in Tarsus, the principle city in the province of Cilicia in Asia Minor. In Paul's words Tarsus was "no ordinary city."<sup>20</sup> It was a large commercial city with a well-renowned university.

Even though Paul understood the Greek culture well and spoke and wrote the Greek language fluently, he was thoroughly Jewish as well, and had been taught in Jerusalem under the great rabbi Gamaliel. Under Gamaliel's teaching, Paul, whose Hebrew name was Saul, learned and accepted the strict teachings of the Pharisees. He memorized scripture and studied all the oral traditions such that he was "thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers,"<sup>21</sup> and was zealous to preserve these teachings as truth that came directly from God. As a Pharisee, he actually believed that he had kept the law so perfectly that he was "faultless."<sup>22</sup>

Paul had the privilege of being a Roman citizen. It is likely that his father or grandfather had earned the status of Roman citizenship through some type of service to the government, and this important distinction was passed on to Paul when he was born. Later it would be significant that Paul was a Roman citizen, not by purchasing citizenship, but by being born as a citizen.<sup>23</sup>

In a way, Paul lived in two worlds. When he was in Jerusalem and was part of the Jewish world, he was called by his Hebrew name, Saul. It was under the name "Saul" that he persecuted the believers in Jesus and acted as a zealous Pharisee. Later, when he was traveling throughout Asia Minor and the Greek peninsula as a missionary to the Gentiles, Paul went by his Roman name "Paul."

In the very early days of the Church in Jerusalem, the Pharisee Saul had an intense hatred for those who believed in Jesus. It was his belief that saying Jesus was the Messiah was blasphemous and destructive to the Jewish faith. He was so passionate about his belief that he delighted in the deaths of those who believed in Jesus Christ, and, with the approval of the Sanhedrin, he set out to kill them. He was present at the stoning of Stephen and was sitting nearby and watching approvingly as Stephen breathed his last breath.<sup>24</sup>

Eventually Saul went to Damascus carrying letters from the Sanhedrin to the local synagogue rulers. These letters gave him authority to capture more believers and take them to Jerusalem as prisoners. Along the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to Saul. In a dazzling light from heaven Jesus confronted Saul with the words, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Saul was blinded by the light and had to be led by his companions into the city. After three days Saul met with Ananias, who prayed with him so that Saul would be healed and filled with the Holy Spirit. Saul's eyes, physical and spiritual, were opened, and he got up and was baptized.<sup>25</sup>

After his conversion, Paul turned his life in an entirely different direction. Instead of persecuting believers, Paul became an apostle to the Gentiles. He traveled throughout the Ro-

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20. Acts 21:39.

21. Acts 22:3.

22. See Philippians 3:6.

23. See Acts 22:26-29.

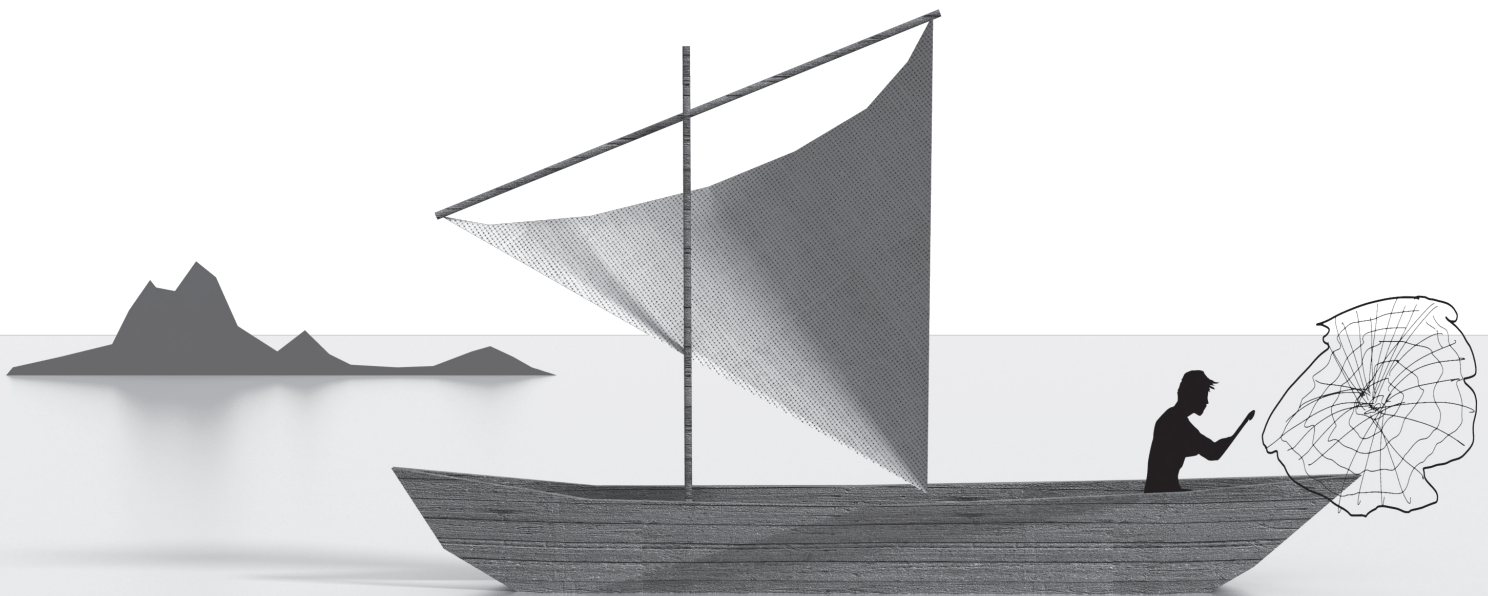
24. See Acts 8:1.

25. See Acts 9:1-20.

man Empire, preaching Christ and building churches. Instead of seeing himself as perfect in keeping the law, he called himself “the worst of sinners.”<sup>26</sup> And finally, instead of thinking that salvation came by obeying God’s commands, Paul proclaimed boldly that “it is by grace you have been saved, through faith . . . not by works, so that no one can boast.”<sup>27</sup>

In Acts, Luke wrote the account of Paul’s three recorded missionary journeys and of his trip to Rome for trial. In the rest of the New Testament we have thirteen letters that Paul wrote to churches or to individuals. In those letters he explained important doctrines of the Christian faith, and he detailed the manner in which we as Christ’s servants and the children of God should live to the glory of God our Father. All of us today can learn from Paul’s letters.

The book of Acts could be called the story of the Holy Spirit working through Peter and Paul, and this is the story we will be studying.



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26. 1 Timothy 1:16.

27. Ephesians 2:8-9.

## Review Worksheets

### STORY FACTS:

#### ■ What Goes with What?

Match each word with its description by writing the correct number on the blank provided.

_____ Cephas	1. Well-known rabbi who taught Paul
_____ Peter	2. Man who prayed with Paul and healed his blindness
_____ Gamaliel	3. Hometown of Peter
_____ Tarsus	4. Hebrew name meaning “rock”
_____ Damascus	5. Greek name meaning “little rock”
_____ Saul	6. Town where Saul went to arrest believers
_____ Bethsaida	7. City where Paul was born
_____ Ananias	8. Hebrew name of the Apostle Paul

#### ■ Peter or Paul: Who Are You?

If the phrase describes Peter write “Peter” in the blank. If the phrase describes Paul write “Paul.”

_____ A Roman citizen	_____ Jewish scholar
_____ Bold and impulsive	_____ Pharisee
_____ Present at Stephen’s stoning	_____ Denied Jesus three times
_____ Persecuted believers	_____ Greek scholar
_____ One of the twelve disciples	_____ Brother of Andrew
_____ Preached in Jerusalem	_____ Fisherman
_____ Jesus said to him, “I am the one you are persecuting.”	_____ Jesus said to him, “I will make you a fisher of men.”
_____ Took the gospel to Judea and Samaria	_____ Took the gospel to the far reaches of the Roman Empire
_____ Wrote thirteen letters to churches	_____ Wrote two letters to believers scattered throughout Asia Minor
_____ Said that he was the “worst of sinners”	_____ Confessed of Jesus “You are the Christ” before Jesus’ disciples

## ■ Name Two

Fill in the blanks with the correct answers.

1. Name two things from the Gospels that show that Peter had faith in Jesus.

a. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Name two things recorded in the book of Acts that show Peter was a changed man after his encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

a. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Name two things from Paul's life that prepared him well to serve Jesus.

a. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Name two ways in which Paul served Jesus.

a. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Name two ways in which Peter and Paul are similar in how they served Jesus Christ.

a. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## UNPACK IT FURTHER: God's Choosing of Those Who Serve Him

All through the Bible we have examples of God choosing people who think they are not able to do what He asks them to do. Read the following Bible passages to see some examples of these people and write their names in the blanks provided.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Exodus 3:5-12; 4:10-13

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Judges 6:11-15

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Jeremiah 1:4-8

4. \_\_\_\_\_ Judges 4:1-10

Sometimes those whom God called were obedient and sometimes they were reluctant. All of these people thought they were too weak to do what God was asking. How is God asking you to serve Him? How do you feel ill-equipped to do what He wants you to do? Read 1 Corinthians 1:20-31 and think about what kind of people God chooses to serve Him.

## chapter 4

The Religious/Social World  
of the First-Century Church**WHO IS GOD?** The personal God**LESSON THEME:** God is the God who understands ordinary people and frees them from sin.**MEMORY PASSAGE:** Romans 10:12-13**KEY FACTS:**

## IMPORTANT WORDS TO REMEMBER

Word	Meaning
patrician	wealthy Roman citizen of high social standing
plebeian	Roman citizen who was an ordinary person
<i>insula</i>	an apartment-like dwelling with workshops and shops on the lower level and living space on the second floor
<i>doma</i>	wealthier person's dwelling which consisted of a rectangular, walled structure with rooms along the inside walls and a courtyard or two in the center
<i>popina</i>	shop in an <i>insula</i> where a person could buy hot food and beverages
<i>apparitores</i>	middle-class people who worked as scribes, heralds, or messengers for local government officials
<i>Augustales</i>	middle-class people who used to be slaves and now worked for wealthy manufacturing or shipping companies
<i>tablinum</i>	an office in the <i>doma</i> of a craftsman or wealthy person

**THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT REVEALED:**

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners. (Isaiah 61:1)

The verses from Isaiah 61 describe the people of the New Testament world. Many people lived in poverty, many were slaves, many were brokenhearted because of their harsh lives. All were captives of sin. The message of the gospel is that the Savior came to these people, bringing the good news of forgiveness of sin and fulfilling the words that the prophet had spoken so many years earlier.

## The Religious/Social World of the First-Century Church

Imagine that you're a Christian living in one of the provincial cities of the Roman Empire. Maybe you came from a Greek family in Ephesus who became believers after hearing Paul preach about Jesus. Or maybe you're a Hellenistic Jew living in Corinth after having been banished from Rome by Emperor Claudius. (A Hellenistic Jew was a Jewish person who was born a Jew but lived outside Palestine and spoke Greek instead of Aramaic.)<sup>1</sup> You had listened to Paul and were persuaded that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah prophesied about by the Old Testament prophets. Or maybe you're a slave working in the household of a wealthy Roman senator. You're fascinated to hear about being free in Christ because every day you have no choices. You have to do what your owner tells you to do.

The Christian Church of the first century was a peculiar assortment of merchants and craftsmen, Jews and Gentiles, free people and slaves, the educated and the unschooled. How was it possible for such different people to get along with each other in one church? How could Jews who had been taught the Old Testament Scriptures be friends with Greeks who had once worshipped pagan gods such as Zeus and Artemis? It only makes sense when we remember that the Holy Spirit was working in the believers' hearts.

In this chapter you will learn a little about what the religious world was like in the first century. This information is helpful because when you can imagine what the world of the early Church was like, you can understand the book of Acts better.

### Who Was in the Church?

The people in the New Testament Church were mostly city people. Most of Paul's ministry took place in cities, even though only a fifth of the Roman Empire's population lived in cities. At the time of the early Church, Rome was the largest city that the world had ever known. There were other large cities, such as Ephesus, Corinth, Antioch, and Alexandria, though they were not as huge as Rome.

In the world of the Roman Empire everyone had his or her own place in society, and the first thing to consider in knowing your place was whether you were a slave or a free person. One out of every five people was a slave (that's about 20 percent of the population), and for those who lived in Italy and Greece, the number was as high as 30 percent. Imagine you're standing in line at the grocery store. There's a person in front of you and a person behind. If you lived in Rome during the first century, one of the three of you likely would have been a slave.

Slaves couldn't own property, get married, or have children. Slaves had no rights and were the property of their owners. Slaves on the farms had harsh lives, while the lot of the city slaves, depend-

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1. See Acts 18:2.

ing on who owned them and what skills they had, was sometimes a little easier. Punishment for disobedience was severe, including instant death, but in some households a hardworking, obedient slave could buy his or her freedom. In the church congregations there were many who were slaves.

If you were a free person, you were either a Roman citizen or not a Roman citizen. This was a huge distinction. A Roman citizen had certain privileges and legal rights that a non-citizen did not have. A Roman citizen had the right to vote, run for public office, and make legal contracts. When accused of a crime, a Roman citizen had the right of a fair trial, and if found guilty, he could appeal his case to a higher court, all the way up to the emperor.<sup>2</sup> Punishment for a Roman citizen could not include being whipped or tortured, and unless accused of treason, no Roman citizen could be given the death penalty or could be sentenced to die on a cross.<sup>3</sup> Only a Roman citizen could serve as a Roman legionnaire, but a non-citizen could serve as an auxiliary soldier. After successfully serving his military time, an auxiliary soldier could become a Roman citizen. Being born as a Roman citizen had a greater status than earning citizenship later in life.<sup>4</sup> If you were a Roman citizen, you were either a patrician (those who had high social standing and were wealthy) or a plebeian (ordinary people).

So, in the empire there was a small group of wealthy, powerful Roman citizens and a large part of the population that was very poor, working for a penny a day for the food they ate and sleeping either in makeshift shacks leaning against the side of a building or huddled outside on the narrow streets.

In between the very wealthy and the very poor were the middle class, which was made up of three types of people and which included approximately one-third of the population. First, there were the craftsmen (potters, carpenters, metalworkers, tentmakers, etc.) and the merchants. Usually these men and their families lived in an *insula*. An *insula* was an apartment-like dwelling with workshops and shops on the lower level and living space on the second floor.

A successful craftsman might have several rooms for his family to live in, but poorer families often all crowded into one room. Furnishings could be as few as a couple of bedrolls, a lamp or two to lessen the darkness, an earthen jar for storage, and a flat plate for each person. Because house fires were so common, people didn't cook inside the *insula*. Instead they walked to a nearby *popina* to buy hot food and drink for dinner.

The *insula* buildings were built of mud bricks, stucco, or wood with mud or brick floors. They had a central courtyard with a community well in the center and a common latrine (that's a type of toilet). Life in the *insulae* was crowded, noisy, and smelly.

A more successful craftsman or merchant might have lived in a *doma*, a rectangular, walled structure with rooms along the inside walls and a courtyard or two in the center. His workshop

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2. See Acts 25:8-12.

3. See Acts 16:35-40; 22:22-29.

4. See Acts 22:22-29.



## Latin Lives On

Have you noticed that sometimes the word *insula* is spelled with an *a* and other times it is spelled with an *ae*? The word *insula* is a Latin word, and when it's singular, which means we're talking about just one apartment-like dwelling, the word ends in an *a*. When the word is plural, which means we're talking about more than one apartment-like dwelling, it ends in an *ae*. The same rule applies to the Latin words *doma* and *popina*.

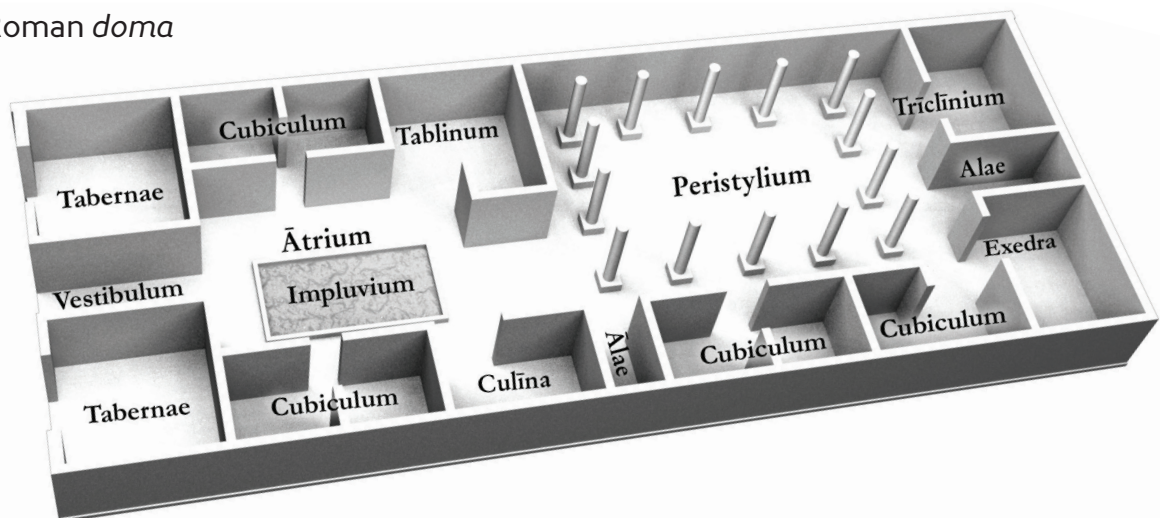
would have been attached to the side of the house. Inside the wall at the front of the *doma* was the *tablinum* (office), where business took place. The *domae* were decorated with colorful murals, wall hangings, and curtains. Rooms would be furnished with beds, tables, and basic necessities.

The second type of middle-class men were the *apparitores*, a Latin word meaning “servant.” These were men who could read and write and thus were able to work as scribes, heralds, or messengers for the civil magistrates of local government. Though these men would never be wealthy, they could advance in their positions and were financially well off.

The third type of middle-class men were the *Augustales*, former slaves who had been freed by their masters. These freedmen enjoyed the support of wealthy families for whom they had been slaves and had responsible jobs

in shipping and manufacturing businesses owned by the families. The *Augustales* also could be part of a group of former trusted slaves called the *collegium*. Serving on the *collegium* was a one-year public-service position in which the members organized religious community events and planned the annual birthday celebration for the Caesar. It was through this connection with the imperial cult of the caesar that these freed men received their name. The *Augustales* could become quite wealthy, but their social status prevented them from ever serving as a local magistrate or from having much influence in society.

Floor plan of a Roman *doma*



### Key:

**Tabernae:** shop  
**Vestibulum:** court  
**Cubiculum:** bedroom  
**Atrium:** hall, atrium

**Impluvium:** basin for collecting rainwater  
**Tablinum:** record room, archives  
**Culina:** kitchen

**Peristylum:** a court surrounded by columns  
**Alae:** storage space (literally, “wing”) **Triclinium:** dining room  
**Exedra:** conversation room

So, what does all of this tell us about the makeup of the churches that Paul established? It tells us that the churches were a strange mixture of people from the middle of society. Almost none of the wealthy patricians and very few of the poorest of the poor became part of the churches, but a number of people who lived as slaves in households did become part of the church.

In the church were believing Hellenistic Jews who had left Palestine years before and had made a permanent home in provinces of the Roman Empire such as Syria, Asia, Galatia, Cilicia, Macedonia, and Archaia. Most of these Jews were craftsmen of some type. For instance, Paul and his friends Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers. The Gentiles in the congregation were people from the middle class, some struggling to make a living and others more comfortably well off, but few considered destitute.

Then there was Paul. With his education and his role as church planter, he could have received financial support from the churches or from a wealthy patron who viewed him as a philosopher worthy of being taken under his care. But Paul did neither. He supported himself as a tentmaker, even though working with his hands put him in a lower social class.



### Latin Lives On

#### What Is a *Domus*?

The Latin word *domus* means “house.” The English word “domicile” meaning “the place where one lives” comes from the Latin word *domus*.

## What Was Their World Like?

The Roman Empire wasn't a Christian world, but it was a religious one. One book described the empire as “a supermarket of faith.” Come and take your pick of which gods you want to worship! In the provincial cities, shrines stood on every street corner, temples to favorite deities sat high atop hills overlooking the city, and families put images of local gods on shelves or in cubbyholes in their homes.

The Romans had an entire family of gods, and the Greeks had a different set that closely resembled the Roman gods. When the Romans conquered a city, they invited the gods of the enemy city to become part of their family of gods. Many people throughout the empire liked the mystery and glamour of the Egyptian goddess Isis so much that, other than the fast-growing cult of Caesar worship, the worship of Isis was the most popular religion.

The pagan Romans didn't have a book or a set of laws to guide their lives and worship as the Christians did, but they did make regular animal sacrifices on the temple steps. These sacrifices were part of community-wide religious festivals that included a day off from work, free food, and entertainment. Everyone was expected to take part in the festivals, and if they didn't? Well, they were just expected to! But it was impossible for Christians to join in these celebrations! The purpose of these community-wide events was to celebrate the goodness of the pagan gods, and believers in Jesus couldn't participate in events that included the worship of any deity other than Jesus Christ. Because of this, the believers often faced suspicion and rejection from their neighbors.

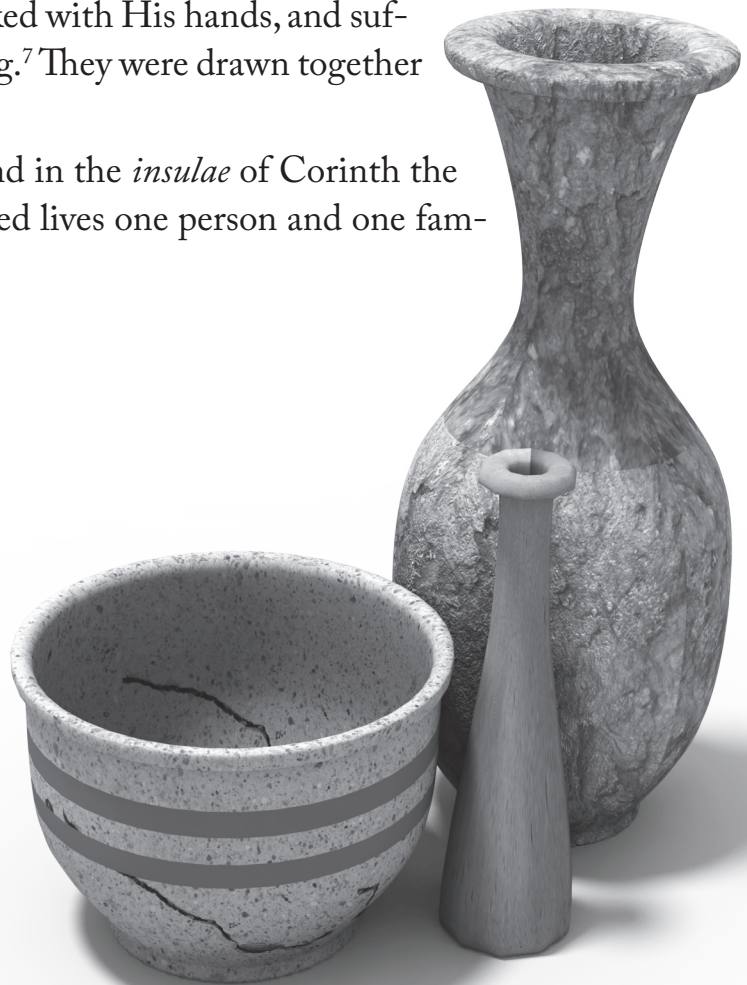
This was the culture in which the Christian believers lived. Not participating in the community's religious celebrations, not eating meat offered to idols,<sup>5</sup> refusing to worship the emperor, and removing household gods from their homes—these were some of the choices that Christians had to make. These choices often resulted in losing customers at their workshops, being investigated by local authorities, and being persecuted by fearful and suspicious neighbors.

## How Did They Worship?

In the crowded cities, as people met at workshops to conduct business or at the *popinae* to eat a meal, Christians talked about Jesus. At this time, Christians didn't have church buildings where they could meet. Instead, they gathered in homes—small groups meeting in an upper room in an *insula*, or a larger group meeting in a *domus* owned by a wealthier church member. When they met, they shared a simple meal, sang hymns of praise, and listened as men such as Paul, Timothy, or Apollos instructed them in the way of the Lord.

The message of the gospel was attractive to the ordinary person. Christianity spoke about a personal God who loves people and gives grace.<sup>6</sup> It was a religion of freedom from sin's bondage because of the sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God. They liked the fact that Jesus Christ was a real person who had lived an ordinary life, worked with His hands, and suffered in all the ways that they were suffering.<sup>7</sup> They were drawn together by the love of the people who loved Jesus.

So from the backstreets of Ephesus and in the *insulae* of Corinth the young Church grew, and the gospel changed lives one person and one family at a time.



5. See Acts 15:29.

6. See John 1:1-14; Ephesians 1:4-8; 2:6-7; Philippians 2:5-8.

7. See Matthew 13:53-55; Mark 6:1-3; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9.

## Review Worksheets

### KEY FACTS & STORY FACTS:

#### ■ Who Am I?

Using the words from the word bank, identify what kind of person is speaking and put the correct word in the blank.

#### Word Bank

*Augustale**Isis**apparitore**plebeian**Hellenistic Jew**patrician*

I am a Roman citizen who is just an ordinary person.

I am a middle-class free person who works for the owner of a shipping company.

I am a Jew who speaks Greek and lives outside of Palestine.

I am a wealthy and prominent Roman citizen.

I can read and write and work as a scribe for a local official.

I am an Egyptian goddess that many people in the Roman provinces worshipped.

#### ■ What's the Correct Answer?

Circle the correct word(s).

1. The largest city in the Roman Empire was ( Corinth / Rome ).
2. At the time of the Roman Empire, ( 30 percent / 20 percent ) of people in Italy and Greece were slaves.
3. The apartment-like house in which middle-class people lived was a(n) ( doma / insula ).
4. People in the New Testament Church were mostly ( city / country ) people.
5. People who lived in the *insula* bought hot food from the ( *popina* / *tablinum* ).

6. Most of the people in the first-century churches were ( wealthy / middle class ).
7. Whether or not a person was a Roman citizen was a ( small / huge ) distinction.

### ■ What Was It Like to Be a Slave?

Put an *X* in the blank next to the phrases that describe what it was like to be a slave in the Roman Empire.

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| _____ Couldn't get married                           | _____ Couldn't have children |
| _____ Easy life in the city                          | _____ Could buy his freedom  |
| _____ Severe punishment for disobedience, even death | _____ Could own property     |
| _____ Could be a member of a Christian church        |                              |

## WHYS & WHEREFORES:

### ■ What's the Reason?

Circle the correct answer.

1. Most people didn't cook in their rooms in the *insula* because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. people were afraid of fires from cooking food
  - b. food at the *popina* was cheaper
2. Christians in the empire were persecuted by suspicious neighbors because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. they didn't participate in the community-wide religious festivals
  - b. they talked to people on the street corners
3. The message of the gospel was attractive to ordinary people because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Christianity spoke about a personal God who loved people and showed grace
  - b. Christianity promised that God would bless them by making them wealthier

## UNPACK IT FURTHER: The Meaning of Freedom in Jesus Christ

What does the Bible say about freedom? Read Romans 6:16-18 and 1 Peter 2:16-17 and then fill in the following blanks.

1. Before Jesus Christ we all were \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. After Jesus Christ we all are \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.
3. How are we supposed to live as free people in Jesus Christ?

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# Chapter 5

## The Political World of the First-Century Church (Part I)

**WHO IS GOD?** God, the planner of all history

**LESSON THEME:** God prepared the Mediterranean world with a common language and good roads so the gospel could go forth from Jerusalem.

**MEMORY PASSAGE:** Romans 10:14

### KEY FACTS:

#### FIVE ROMAN EMPERORS

Emperor	Dates	Important Facts	Bible Events
Caesar Augustus	27 BC–AD 14	• decreed census be taken throughout the empire	• ruler at Jesus' birth
Tiberius	AD 14–37	• capable ruler • peace throughout empire	• ruler during Jesus' ministry and crucifixion
Gaius Caligula	AD 37–41	• thought he was a god • tried to erect a statue of himself in temple in Jerusalem	• ruler during early years of Jerusalem church
Claudius	AD 41–54	• expanded the empire • banned Jews from Rome	• ruler during Paul's first two missionary journeys
Nero	AD 54–68	• thought he was a god • blamed Christians for the fire in Rome and persecuted them	• ruler during Paul's third missionary journey, his time in prison in Rome, and eventually his death

### THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT REVEALED:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come for me  
one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
from ancient times.” (Micah 5:2)

**THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT REVEALED CONT.**

The prophecy of Micah, written hundreds of years before Jesus was born, was fulfilled when a pagan emperor decreed that a census be taken of everyone in the empire (see Luke 2:1-7). It was that census that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem in Judea, where Jesus the Messiah was born, thus fulfilling Micah's prophesy. Even the actions of rulers who have no desire to worship the true God are governed by the sovereign plan of Almighty God.

## The Political World of the First-Century Church (Part I)

In the first century AD, the *Pax Romana* covered the Mediterranean world like a warm blanket. Emperor Caesar Augustus and his Roman armies had conquered the Mediterranean world, and now that all the nations surrounding the Mediterranean Sea were under one government, an odd kind of peace settled upon the land.

### What Was the *Pax Romana* and Why Is It Important?

The *Pax Romana* was a time of unity and peace in the Roman Empire. After centuries of wars and conflicts, borders between provinces were safe to cross, people traveled freely, and nations were busy trading with each other. Though the conquered nations could never forget that ultimate power over the entire Mediterranean Sea area rested with the Roman emperor, and though they knew that any political restlessness would be quickly squashed, all benefitted from how the *Pax Romana* changed the world.

A traveler moving throughout the Roman world would encounter many different cultures, but the Greek language and the good roads pulled the empire together. Greek was the commercial language, so everyone conducting business or writing important letters understood each other. Also, most common people were able to speak Greek, even if it wasn't their native language. The Romans had built a network of paved roads connecting all parts of the empire together. While the paved roads did make travel easier in some ways, it was still difficult and dangerous. Not only was travel hard, but the inns had bad food and cheap wine. Whenever possible, people stayed in the homes of family and friends.



#### Latin Lives On

*Pax Romana* means the "peace of Rome." *Pax* is the Latin word meaning "peace." The *Pax Romana* was the period of peace during the reign of the Roman Empire when warring was essentially over and a general peace within the empire settled over the land.

The Mediterranean Sea, also called “our sea” by the Romans who ruled it, sat in the middle of the empire, with nations forming a large circle around it. When the winds were strong, journeying by sea was quicker than traveling by road, but no less dangerous. Violent winds and raiding pirates made traveling 10–15 miles a day on foot preferable to sailing as a passenger on a heavily laden cargo ship.

The Roman highway system and the Greek language, benefits of the *Pax Romana*, made it possible for the gospel to spread easily from Jerusalem into Judea and throughout the known world. It was just the right time in history. The sovereign God had planned it perfectly.



### Additional Information

See appendix E for some additional information about Roman roads.

In the world of Roman political rule, the influence of Greek philosophy, culture, religion, and language was strong. This influence was called Hellenism. These Greek beliefs explained how the universe came about and claimed that man could gain favor with, and possibly salvation from, the gods through his own reason and efforts.

Obviously, these Greek beliefs didn’t agree with the Jewish scriptures. The Jewish people of Palestine and later the early Christian Church tried hard to keep their beliefs pure from the parts of Hellenism that were destructive to the Christian faith. Sometimes conflicts arose between believers with a Greek background (called Hellenists) and believers who came from a Hebrew background. One good effect of Hellenism, however, was that sometimes New Testament writers used Greek ideas to explain difficult Christian doctrines, and this made understanding the gospel easier for those with a Greek background. Another important benefit was that the New Testament writers wrote their books in the Greek language. Since most first-century people could speak Greek and most literate people could read Greek, writing the books in Greek made it possible for people of different backgrounds, Jew and Gentile, to read and understand what the New Testament writers wrote.

## Who Was Ruling in the Roman Empire?

The highest ruler of the Roman Empire was the emperor. Although there was a political body called the Senate, by the time of Emperor Caesar Augustus’s rule, the emperor held all the real power over the empire. During the time of the New Testament, five different Roman emperors ruled the empire.

**Caesar Augustus (27 BC–AD 14):** Emperor Caesar Augustus was emperor when Jesus was born. It was his decree ordering that a census be taken of everyone in the empire that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem and fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah would be born in the small town of Bethlehem of Judea.<sup>1</sup>

1. See Micah 5:2.

**Tiberius (AD 14–37):** The ministry of Jesus took place while Tiberius was emperor. Tiberius came to power at a time of peace. Although he was reluctant to become emperor, he was a capable ruler. He spent money wisely, though some Romans thought he was too stingy, and he made sure that the borders of the empire were safe from enemies.

The Roman Senate and the people didn't like Tiberius. As time went by, he began to avoid people. Eventually he left Rome to live alone on the island of Capri and ruled the empire from a distance. When he died in AD 37, many Romans cheered.

**Gaius Caligula (AD 37–41):** Gaius, a grandson of Tiberius, was nicknamed “Caligula” (meaning “little boot”). Though Gaius was his first name, he was more popularly known as Emperor Caligula. He became emperor at the age of twenty-five and, even though he only ruled for four years, he was one of the most ruthless emperors that ever ruled the Roman Empire. This mentally unstable ruler believed he was the Roman god Jupiter and accepted sacrifices as though he was a god. When a few Greeks erected an altar to Caligula at Jamnia in Judea, the Jews protested to the emperor. Angered by the Jews' protest, Caligula decided to put a statue of himself in the temple at Jerusalem. Both Agrippa I, the king of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, and Petronius, the Roman governor of Syria, knew this was a bad idea and tried to stop Caligula. They knew that the Jews would react and might revolt. If the Jews rioted over the statue, something worse, such as an all-out war between the Jews and Rome, could start. These reasonable rulers tried to change Caligula's mind, but they were unsuccessful in doing so. Interestingly, before Caligula could build his statue, he was assassinated by a group of senators and praetorian guards (the soldiers who acted as the personal bodyguards of the emperor). The Apostle Paul began his ministry while Caligula was emperor.

**Claudius (AD 41–54):** Claudius, the uncle of Caligula, was a most unlikely choice to be emperor. He wasn't attractive, walked with a limp, and stuttered, but he was intelligent and was an excellent ruler. He expanded the empire to include Britain, gave King Agrippa I a



### A Bit of History

#### What Is Hellenism?

1. The word “Hellenism” comes from the Greek name for the nation of Greece, *Hellas*.
2. It describes the Greek culture, which was heavily influenced by Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Aristotle, and many others.
3. It proposed that salvation came through human reason.
4. It proposed that the human body was evil and temporary, and the human soul was good and eternal.

#### Who Were the Hellenistic Christians?

The Hellenistic Christians were a group of Christians whose language and culture was Greek rather than Hebrew. When Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, preached or wrote letters to the Hellenistic Christians, he used ideas familiar to them to present the gospel.

greater territory to rule in Palestine, and increased trade to the outer regions of the empire.

The Apostle Paul made his first two missionary journeys during Claudius's reign. When the Jews in Rome created a disturbance, Claudius banished all Jews from Rome. Paul's friends, Aquila and Priscilla, left Rome at that time and moved to Corinth. Claudius was eventually poisoned by his wife Agrippina because she wanted her son Nero to be the emperor.

**Nero (AD 54–68):** At first Nero ruled well. Then in AD 59 he murdered his mother and soon became a tyrant who caused terror in the empire. Like Caligula before him, he believed he was a god. Though the Senate opposed him, the ordinary people loved him because he provided great entertainments for them.

In AD 64 a huge fire burned down much of Rome. Afterward, Nero built a luxurious palace and many new buildings throughout Rome. When people became suspicious that Nero had set the fire on purpose, he blamed the Christians for the fire. That started a terrible persecution during which time Christians were burned alive and mauled by wild animals. Then Rome had a financial crisis, and rebellions broke out throughout the empire. Nero fled from Rome and killed himself before he could be executed by the Senate, which had condemned him to death. The Apostle Paul made his third missionary journey, wrote his many epistles, and was put to death in Rome during the reign of Nero.

Does it seem strange to call this period of history the *Pax Romana* when so many people lived under the control of a government that had absolute control and was often cruel in the way it treated people? If you were not a Roman citizen and lived under Roman rule, life could be difficult for you. Yet during the centuries of Roman rule, the people of the Mediterranean world were protected from the threat of war from outside nations. People could travel freely from place to place, and the common Greek language made it possible for people from one end of the empire to the other to understand each other. The sovereign God had planned it all perfectly. It was the right time and the right place with the right people chosen by God Himself to take His gospel message away from Jerusalem to faraway places.



### Latin Lives On

The word "Senate" comes from the Latin word *senex* meaning "old man." Generally speaking, the members of the Roman Senate were older aristocratic men who had political power and wealth.



## Review Worksheets

### KEY FACTS & STORY FACTS:

#### ■ Who Was Ruling Rome?

Using the word bank, write the name of the emperor in the blank before the description.  
(Hint: You'll use each name more than once.)

#### Word Bank

Tiberius

Caesar Augustus

Claudius

Nero

Caligula

1. \_\_\_\_\_ He was assassinated by senators and praetorian guards.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ He was a capable ruler but the Roman people didn't like him.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ He banned all Jews from the city of Rome.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ His name means "little boot."
5. \_\_\_\_\_ He ordered the census that fulfilled Micah's prophecy.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ He ruled during the years of Jesus' earthly ministry.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ He was unattractive, stuttered, and walked with a limp.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ He ruled during Paul's first two missionary journeys.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ He blamed the Christians for the great fire in Rome.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ He murdered his own mother.

### STORY FACTS:

#### ■ What Are the Facts?

1. Using the word bank, fill in the blanks with the correct answers.

#### Word Bank

statue

senex

our sea

roads

census

emperor

Greek

Capri

peace

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ meaning of the word *pax*
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ what Caligula wanted to put in the temple
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Latin word meaning "old man"
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ commercial language of the Roman Empire
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Romans sometimes called the Mediterranean Sea this
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ who had all the power in the Roman Empire

- g. \_\_\_\_\_ island where Tiberius died all alone
- h. \_\_\_\_\_ Caesar Augustus decreed this
- i. \_\_\_\_\_ connected all parts of the Roman Empire
2. What two things during the *Pax Romana* enabled the gospel to go into the world?
- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_

## WHYS & WHEREFORES:

### ■ What's the Reason?

Circle the correct answers.

- The world was different during the *Pax Romana* because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - nations were free from tyranny and could rule themselves
  - there were no wars and people could travel freely and trade with each other
- One good effect of Hellenism on the spread of the gospel was \_\_\_\_\_.
  - New Testament writers could use Greek ideas to explain Christian doctrines
  - Hellenism and Christianity had similar views on how to gain salvation
- King Agrippa I and Petronius tried to stop Caligula from erecting a statue in the temple in Jerusalem because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - they were afraid that the Jews would react and revolt
  - it was so costly to build that the Roman people might get angry and riot
- Emperor Nero killed himself because he \_\_\_\_\_.
  - knew the Senate had condemned him and was planning to execute him
  - regretted blaming the Christians for the fire in Rome and persecuting them
- Claudius's wife Agrippina poisoned him because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - she was angry that he had banished the Jews from Rome
  - she wanted her son Nero to be the emperor

## UNPACK IT FURTHER: The Meaning of God's Sovereignty

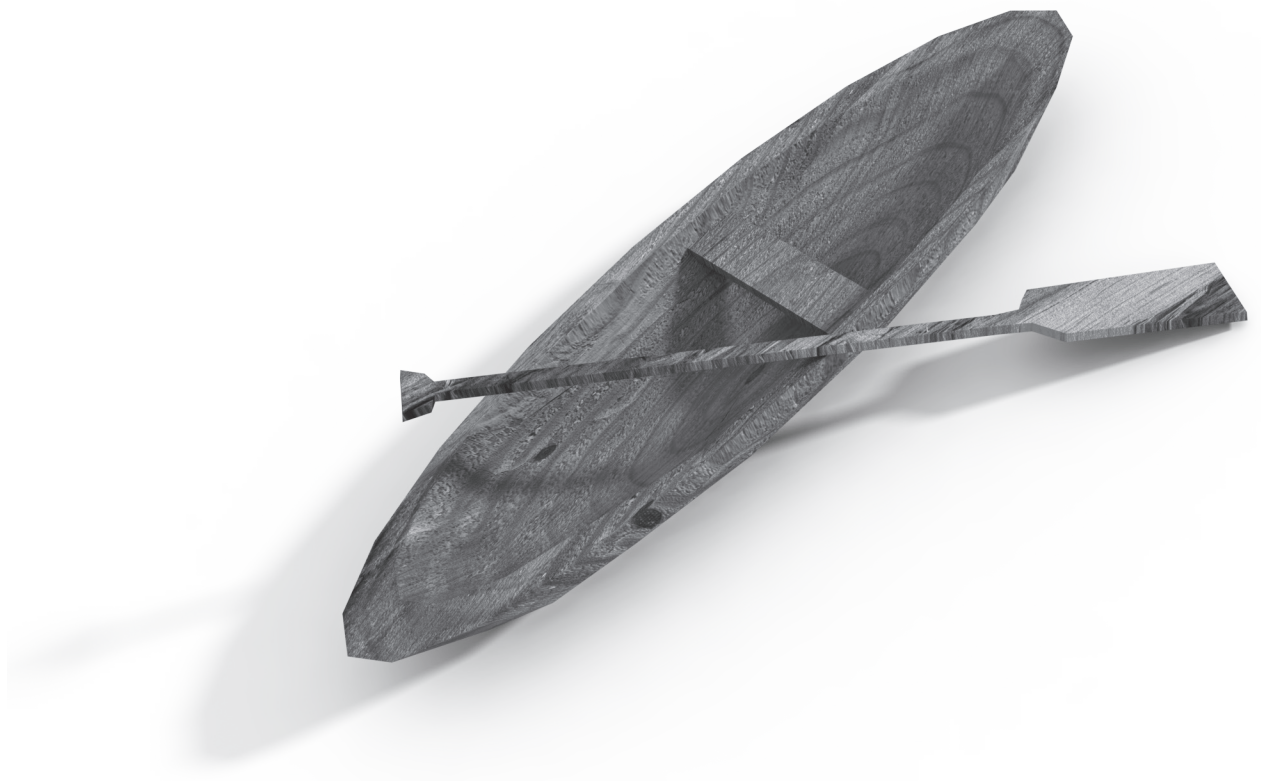
God's sovereignty means that God has absolute power and control over all the nations of the world. Though the kings of earth think they rule supreme, everything they do and everything that happens to them comes from the hand of Almighty God.

Read the following verses and then in the blanks write the name of the nation (or people group) over which God



showed His absolute power and control. Discuss how God demonstrated His power in each of the situations.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Exodus 14:23-28
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Joshua 10:1-15
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Judges 7:19-25
4. \_\_\_\_\_ 2 Chronicles 32:9-23
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Isaiah 10:5-12
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Daniel 4:28-35



Chapters 6 & 7 skipped in sample.

# UNIT I

## Memory Passage Worksheet

### *The Gospel Adventure . . . The Mission*

#### Part 1: Acts 1:8

Fill in the blanks with the correct answer.

1. In Acts 1:8, what did Jesus say would happen when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples?

“You will receive \_\_\_\_\_ when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my \_\_\_\_\_.”

2. According to Acts 1:8, where will the gospel go?

It will go from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and eventually to the \_\_\_\_\_.

#### Part 2: Romans 10:9-15

##### ■ Romans 10:9-10: How We Are Saved

Unscramble the following words and write them in the blanks provided. Then in the passage that follows, fill in the blanks with the correct unscrambled words. (Hint: Words can be used more than one time.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
DAISRE

\_\_\_\_\_  
ERHAT

\_\_\_\_\_  
DIJESFUTI

\_\_\_\_\_  
DORL

\_\_\_\_\_  
HOTMU

\_\_\_\_\_  
FONSECS

\_\_\_\_\_  
EADD

\_\_\_\_\_  
EVADS

\_\_\_\_\_  
VEELIBE

\_\_\_\_\_  
SEJUS

“If you \_\_\_\_\_ with your \_\_\_\_\_,  
 ‘\_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_,’ and  
 \_\_\_\_\_ in your \_\_\_\_\_ that God  
 \_\_\_\_\_ him from the \_\_\_\_\_, you  
 will be saved. For it is with your heart that you \_\_\_\_\_  
 and are \_\_\_\_\_, and it is with your mouth that you  
 \_\_\_\_\_ and are \_\_\_\_\_.”

## ■ Verses 11-13: What Scripture Says

1. Verses 11 and 13 are quotes from the Old Testament. Draw arrows to connect the words in the correct order.

### *Verse 11*

put
be
trusts

Anyone
shame
will

him
to
who
never
in

### *Verse 13*

who
be
Everyone

will
calls
saved

the
the
name
Lord
on

2. Verse 12 says that there are two ways that Jews and Gentiles are alike. What are they?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_

## ■ Verses 14-15: Four Important Questions

1. In Romans 10:14-15 four important questions are asked. These questions tell us that five things must happen for a person to be saved. Put the following verbs (action words) in the correct order (1-5).

\_\_\_\_\_ Preach

\_\_\_\_\_ Call

\_\_\_\_\_ Believe

\_\_\_\_\_ Be sent

\_\_\_\_\_ Hear

2. The Lord thinks well of those who take the gospel to people who have never heard about Jesus. What does God say about them? Decode the message to find out.

**Code:** A = Z, B = A, C = B, D = C ... Z = Y

_____	_____	_____
IPX	CFBVUJGVM	BSF
_____	_____	_____
UIF	GFFU	PG
_____	_____	_____
UIPTF	XIP	CSJOH
_____	_____	_____!
HPPE	OFXT	

# UNIT I

## Devotional Guide

***“I am your God, and you are My people.”***

The covenant is God’s promise to be the God of His people. He promises to be with them at all times, to protect them, to provide what they need, to forgive their sin, and to love them with an everlasting love. He is faithful to keep this promise even when His people do not faithfully love and obey Him.

What does the covenant mean to you? Read the following short stories and think about how knowing that the LORD God is your God would make a difference in each situation.

### **STORY 1:**

Your father has been out of work for many months. Finally, he was offered a good job in a city 200 miles away. Dad is all excited about his new job because it is exactly the kind of work that he has wanted to do for years. Mom is excited because now they can buy a larger house in a good neighborhood for less money. Your younger brother is excited because he always likes to try new things and meet new people. You are not excited. You don’t want to change schools and be the new student in the classroom. You will miss all your friends, and despite what Mom says, you know you won’t see them again. After years of playing on township soccer teams, you were finally chosen to be on the traveling soccer team this season. Who knows if this new neighborhood even has soccer teams? Life for you is going to be completely upended. Nothing will ever be the same again.

### **■ Ponder It**

Read Isaiah 43:1-2, Psalm 100:5, and Hebrews 13:8 and use them to answer the following questions.

1. In a situation like this, what difference would it make that you belong to God?

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2. What are some ways that God would show His faithfulness to you in a situation like this?

## ■ Pray about It

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# STORY 2:

Taylor has been your best friend for as long as you can remember. The two of you have been in the same classes in school, have explored every inch of the woods behind your house together, groaned over difficult math problems, and shared secrets that no one else knows. This summer a new family moved into the neighborhood with a child the same age as you and Taylor. This girl wants only one best friend, and that friend is Taylor. Now Taylor spends every afternoon at the new girl’s house, swimming in her backyard pool and doing math problems together with her. You are angry, resentful, and lonely.

## ■ Ponder It

Read Psalm 55:12-14, 16-17, 22; Psalm 3; 145:13-14; Hebrews 13:5-6; and 1 Peter 5:7 and use them to answer the following questions.

1. What does the Bible say about the faithfulness of people?

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2. What does the Bible say about God’s faithfulness to us?

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■ **Pray about It**

Friends may desert us, but the Lord never leaves us. He is always with us. Write a short prayer thanking the Lord for His constant presence and loving-kindness.

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**Bonus Activity**

Write a short story of a time that was difficult for you, but during which time the Lord showed Himself to be faithful.

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# TRUTH DETECTIVES

## Unit 1 Dialogue

### WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

**OLIVER:** Hey, Chloe, have you seen Grampy?

**CHLOE:** He said he'd meet us here in the park. Let's sit at this table under the tree.

**OLIVER:** I'm so glad we have Grampy. Conner's grandfather died last year. I can't imagine what it would be like if Grampy died. I'd miss him so much.

**CHLOE:** Me, too. I'm glad Grampy likes spending time with us. He never treats us like we're a bother to him, and he never gets impatient with our questions.

**OLIVER:** And I have lots of questions about everything.

*(Grampy walks up to the children.)*

**GRAMPY:** Hey, there are my favorite eleven-year-olds.

**CHLOE:** Hi, Grampy!

**OLIVER:** Hey!

**CHLOE:** Tell us again, Grampy, how you got your name. It fits you, but how'd you get it?

**GRAMPY:** Well, it all started when your older brother Luke was small. He'd toddle around the house singing silly songs about Mommy, Daddy, and Granny. With everyone else's name ending in an *ee* sound, he started calling me Grampy. I liked the name and it stuck. Now you call me Grampy, too.

**CHLOE:** It's funny how families give each other names. Daddy always calls me Pixie, and he calls you Li'l Dude, Oliver.

**OLIVER:** I used to call Luke by the name "Wuke" because I couldn't pronounce the letter *L*.

**GRAMPY:** You know, we have other names, too, because of our faith in Jesus. Can you think of any?

**OLIVER:** Pastor Bob calls us believers in Jesus, so Believer must be one of our names.

**CHLOE:** But many people believe in Jesus. They believe He was a good man or a wise teacher. That doesn't make them a true believer in Jesus, does it, Grampy?

**GRAMPY:** That's right, Chloe. Being a Believer is more than believing that Jesus was a good man. A true Believer believes that Jesus was both man and God and that He died on the cross and rose again so that sinful people like you and me could be forgiven of our sin. Being a Believer means that we've asked Jesus to forgive us and now we're trying to obey Him because we love Him.

**OLIVER:** It's like we're part of His family.

**GRAMPY:** Exactly.

**CHLOE:** Doesn't the Bible say that we're called Christians?

**GRAMPY:** Yes, that's another one of our names. The origin of that word is very interesting. When you look at the word "Christians," you see that it's made up of two parts: *Christ* and *-ians*. That *-ians* on the end there is called a suffix, which just means it's something added to the end of a word. The Greek suffix *-ianos*, which is where we get the *-ians* from, originally applied to slaves. So the name "Christian" means "slave of Christ."

**CHLOE:** Oh, I don't know if I want to be a slave!

**GRAMPY:** Well, I know what you mean, but if I were to be a slave to anyone, I would certainly want it to be to Jesus. Did you know that the Apostle Paul often called himself a slave or servant of Christ and the Church?<sup>1</sup>

**CHLOE:** Well, I guess you're right. But what does it mean to be a servant or slave of Christ?

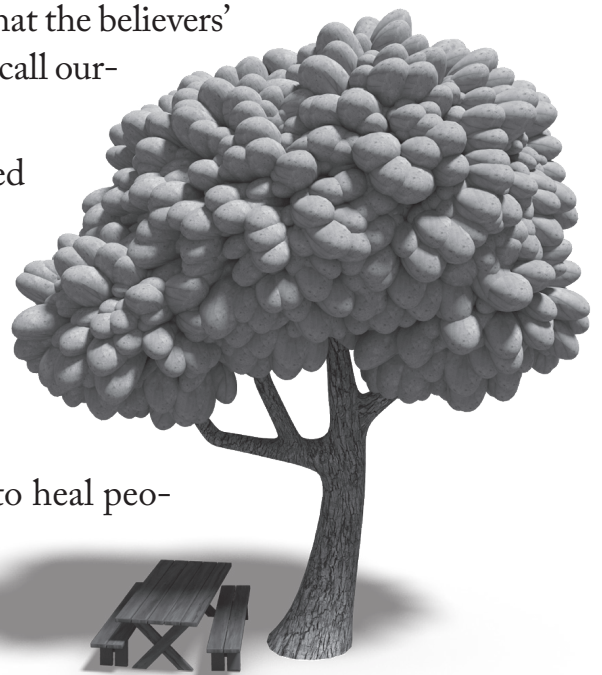
**GRAMPY:** We're Jesus' slaves because He redeemed us from the slavery of sin to become His servants—servants of righteousness. The Greek *-ianos* ending on words means not only "slave" but also "one who accepts a person's teaching and follows him." As Christians, we accept Jesus' teachings, and we follow Him. Believers were first called Christians in the Gentile city of Antioch because the people in that city recognized that the believers' behavior, speech, and beliefs were like Christ's. If we call ourselves Christians, we should live like Jesus lived.

**OLIVER:** But I thought the followers of Jesus were called "disciples."

**GRAMPY:** That's a third name for believers in Jesus.  
We are His disciples.

**CHLOE:** I thought Jesus had only twelve disciples.

**OLIVER:** No, Jesus had many disciples. Don't you remember how Jesus sent out seventy-two disciples to heal people and preach the gospel?<sup>2</sup>



1. See Romans 1:1; 6:15-18; Colossians 1:24-25.

2. See Luke 10:1-4.

**GRAMPY:** You're both right. Jesus picked twelve men to be His closest followers. They traveled with Him for three years, watching him do miracles and listening to Him teach. The Bible calls these men the twelve disciples or the Twelve.<sup>3</sup> But He had other disciples, too. Can you name any of them?

**OLIVER:** Mary Magdalene was His disciple, and there were other women who were His disciples, too.

**GRAMPY:** That's right. Jesus had many disciples. In Acts 1 there were 120 disciples who were waiting and praying before the day of Pentecost. The idea of being a disciple is an ancient one. Famous philosophers, especially the Greeks, had disciples. The word "disciple" comes from the Greek word *mathetes* or the Latin word *discipulus*, both of which mean "student" or "learner." A teacher and his disciple had a close relationship. They spent much time together, and after a while the disciple would begin to think and act like his teacher.

**CHLOE:** I see. If we are Jesus' disciples, then we don't just believe in Him, but we learn to think and act like Him.

**GRAMPY:** Yes. Jesus says that His words are to remain in us.<sup>4</sup> That's how we begin to look like Him. But it's not easy to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus warned people to think seriously before deciding to follow Him.<sup>5</sup>

**OLIVER:** Pastor Bob says that being Jesus' disciple means that we might have to suffer like Jesus did. Some Christians are killed because they follow Jesus.

**GRAMPY:** Yes, they are. Sadly, in many countries, Christian churches are burned to the ground, pastors are put in prison, and Christians are killed. It's not easy to be a Christian there. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."<sup>6</sup> When we are Jesus' disciples, we must do what He wants us to do, not what we want to do. That's "denying yourself."

**OLIVER:** Well, I guess we have a lot of names: Believer, Christian, and Disciple. Did we forget any?

**GRAMPY:** One other name is very important. Sometimes a Christian will say he is a "Berean." Do you know what that name means?

**CHLOE:** That's a strange name!

**GRAMPY:** Let me explain. When the Apostle Paul preached in the town of Berea, many people believed in Jesus, and they took their faith seriously. After Paul preached, they would open up the scriptures and examine them carefully. They asked questions like, "Was Paul correct in what he said?" and "Was Jesus really the Messiah about whom the prophets had prophesied?"

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3. See Matthew 10:1; 11:1; 20:17; Mark 10:32; and so on.

4. See John 15:7-8.

5. See Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-35.

6. Matthew 16:24.

They felt they had to check it out. Only after they concluded that Paul's words agreed with the rest of scripture did they accept Paul's words.<sup>7</sup> So, people today who examine scripture thoroughly to check out what they hear or read may say they are acting like the Bereans did.

**OLIVER:** It's a good thing to check out what you hear at church to make sure it agrees with the Bible, don't you think, Grampy?

**CHLOE:** But it takes so much time.

**GRAMPY:** Yes, it takes time, but we must guard our hearts and minds from error, and knowing what God says in the Bible is the only way to do that.

**CHLOE:** I guess you're right.

**GRAMPY:** It doesn't have to be such hard work, though. It can be a game—a detective's game.

**CHLOE:** That's a great idea! If studying the Bible were like solving a mystery, it wouldn't seem so hard to do.

**OLIVER:** But how's the Bible a mystery?

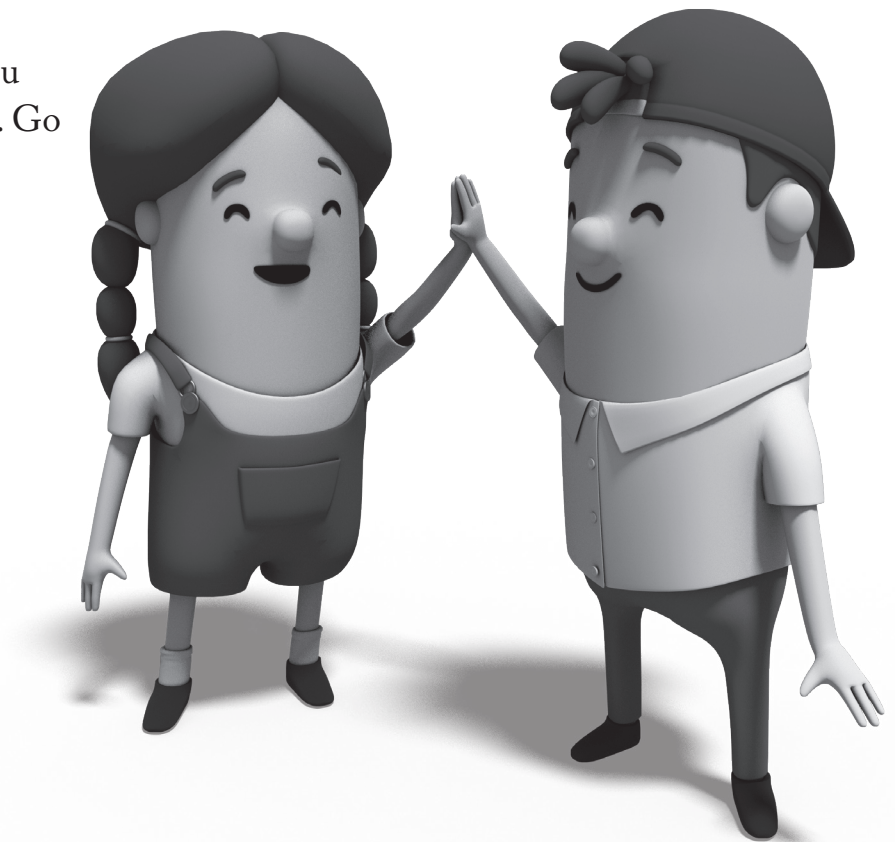
**CHLOE:** Here's a mystery question: Why is Jesus the only way to heaven?

**GRAMPY:** Good question! Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life."<sup>8</sup> Why don't you research this question and see what you learn?

**OLIVER:** We can call ourselves the Truth Detectives. We're looking for God's truth in God's Word.

**CHLOE:** Right. Let's do it!

**GRAMPY:** OK, Truth Detectives, you have a week to find the answer. Go for it!



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7. See Acts 17:10-12.

8. John 14:6.